



State answers call for help with new projects

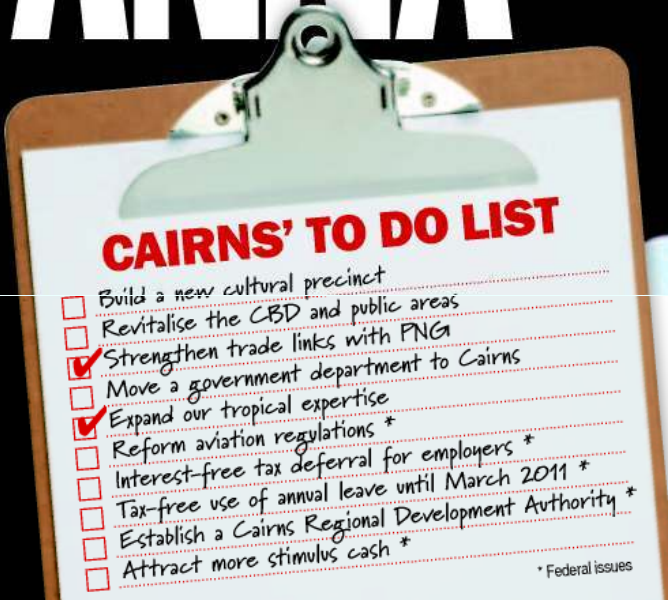
IT'S A START, ANNA

Responding: Premier Anna Bligh was in Cairns yesterday to announce new funding measures.

Picture: JAKE NOWAKOWSKI



Brad Ryan
 ryanb@tcp.newsltd.com.au



A MILLION-DOLLAR boat training simulator, a business push into Papua New Guinea and a boost to tropical science research are the “first steps” toward guarding Cairns from future tourism slumps.

Premier Anna Bligh yesterday unveiled a package of projects, largely aimed at diversifying the region’s economy to escape the volatility of the tourism market, in what she said was the “first response” to Cairns’ call for help.

She also hinted at Government support for the \$230 million waterfront arts centre planned for Trinity Inlet, but told Mayor Val Schier she first wanted to see the project’s feasibility study, which is nearing completion.

The Cairns Economic Future Plan announced yesterday includes \$2.5 million for training equipment at Portsmith’s to-be-built Great Barrier Reef International Marine College.

About \$1 million of that will be spent on a watercraft simulator for training on small boats, barges, catamarans and tourists charters. Such training is now done in Fremantle Western Australia.

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First step a move on right path

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The Government has also promised to employ a Cairns-based representative for trade with Papua New Guinea to chase business opportunities for the city.

And it will spend \$100,000 to move a tropical science conference from Townsville to Cairns next year as part of a promise to make the city a “hub of tropical science expertise”.

“We know that the future of Cairns will always have tourism at its heart,” Ms Bligh said.

“But we also know that, if we are to protect Cairns from the ups and downs of the international market, we have to diver-

sify the economy.”

Business leaders, who have lobbied the State and Federal governments for support for the New Deal economic recovery plan, hailed yesterday’s announcements as a major win, despite many called-for projects being left off the list.

Advance Cairns chairman Russell Beer said yesterday’s announcements were important, but what really counted were Ms Bligh’s comments that this was just the “first step”.

Cairns Chamber of Commerce president Jeremy Blockey echoed that sentiment, calling the announcements “tremendous” but a “very obvious first step”.

Senator Mark Arbib, who is co-ordinating the federal response to the New Deal call, said in a statement yesterday he hoped to soon reveal more details on what that would include.

He is due back in the region on December 9.

The state package also involves bringing forward money for programs such as a \$57 million environmental health infrastructure scheme for remote indigenous communities.

Ms Bligh praised the business sector for its co-ordinated call for help.

» Go online to www.cairns.com.au for a full list of projects.