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GAME-CHANGER

\$11.5m jetty opens up community to world of opportunity

A SPIRIT of change is brewing in Yarrabah as the final platforms are laid on an \$11.5m jetty that will open the community to the world.

Construction crews are nearing the end of a new 165m jetty about a kilometre northwest of the township at Gribble Point – unmistakable physical evidence that Yarrabah is on the move.

The community is ready to develop a thriving cultural tourism industry, with global visitors crossing the inlet from Cairns.

Mayor Ross Andrews said the jetty was the town's most important piece of infrastructure in years, and locals were ready to embrace it.

"It is evidence that you can balance economic opportunity with cultural heritage. It's going to be a game-changer," he said.

Yarrabah is a 45-minute to an hour drive over the range from Cairns. New ferry services will slash that to 25 minutes and open easy travel for incoming tourists and outgoing residents who want to pursue education, work and recreation in Cairns.

Yarrabah is not the only place that will benefit.

The Mandingalbay Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation's new eco-tourism project is up and running with cultural tours, overnight stays and the popular Deadly Dinner.

Mulgrave MP Curtis Pitt said there was a lot more waiting in the wings.

"The long-term plan for East Trinity is very impressive," he said. "You only need to look at the plan for towers and zip lines to see how impressive it is going to be."

Water access will be crucial to the endeavour reaching its full potential – and plans are under way to ensure everyone gets a bite.

"There's going to be opportunity for people to go via the water to the Mandingalbay Yidinji experience, then around the corner to Yarrabah for a taste of their local art centre and to experience the largest mainland Aboriginal community in Australia," Mr Pitt said.

"It makes perfect sense." The numbers show why the jetty is so important.

According to the 2016 Census, Yarrabah had a 45.4 per cent unemployment rate compared to a 6.9 per cent national average. It was also significantly higher when the non-Indigenous population was taken out of the mix.

There are simply not enough jobs, and a higher education shortfall only exacerbates the issue.

"Roughly one in three people in Yarrabah own a car to get over the hill," Mr Pitt said.

"That one-third doesn't mean all of those vehicles are in an operational state.

"So for people to get either senior high school education, other education or employment, this is very important."

Moves are afoot to get a bigger and better shopping centre to service the population, and the Yarrabah Leadership Forum is committed to working with the private and corporate sectors on new ventures – but tourism is the chief opportunity.

"We don't really have any big industry in Yarrabah," Cr Andrews said. "We've got to try to be courageous and brave in terms of exploring what does industry look like."

Cr Andrews said practical completion of the jetty was expected next month but its first major test would come in April when Jess Mauboy headlined the Yarrabah Music and Cultural Festival.

The jetty will not give complete tidal access but Mr Pitt foresaw "a very high percentage" with the addition of a floating pontoon.

"People in Brisbane do it all the time; they live in Bulimba and work in the city so they hop on the City Cat and go to Brisbane," he said.

"It happens in our capital cities and there's no reason it can't happen in Cairns."

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