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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

State tips in \$6.8m to turn old Bunnings site into film studio

A FORMER Bunnings Warehouse is set to undergo a \$6.8m transformation to become a world-class film studio that rockets the industry to new heights in Cairns.

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has signed off on a proposal to convert the 6500sq m building on the corner of Spence and Fearnley streets into a new production facility complete with a state-of-the-art sound stage.

"This would be another drawcard for interstate and international productions choosing the Far North as a film destination," Ms Palaszczuk said.

Construction is set to begin early in 2022 and should be completed by the middle of the year. A FORMER Bunnings Warehouse is set to undergo a \$6.8m transformation to become a world-class film studio that rockets the industry to new heights in Cairns.

Speculation over the future of the old hardware megastore at the corner of Spence and Fearnley streets has been circulating for years.

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has now ticked off a proposal to convert the 6500sq m building into a new production facility complete with state-of-the-art sound stage.

"Locally made, interstate and international productions are big business for Queensland and right now our screen industry is thriving," the Premier said.

"In the last 18 months, we've had a record number of projects being filmed here or wanting to film here, generating millions for our state economy and requiring a workforce of thousands.

"The pipeline of productions is critical for our economic recovery, having kept Queenslanders in jobs throughout one of the most challenging times in our history.

"And we want to continue and grow that momentum, which is why we promised to build a new \$6.8m studio in the Far North."

Ms Palaszczuk gave special mention to Mulgrave MP Curtis Pitt – who got the government's honorary Far North Queensland screen champion title in May – for his work on the project.

He has been trying to get it off the ground for years, even posing for photos with superhero figurines outside the former Bunnings when he first flagged its potential studio use in 2018.

That dream is now coming true.

"This will create an ideal space for local TV and film creators and would be another drawcard for interstate and international productions choosing the Far North as a film destination," Ms Palaszczuk said.

"This new studio for the north also creates a statewide network of worldclass facilities, with Screen Queensland Studios in Brisbane and Village Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast, giving producers yet another reason to choose Queensland."

Mr Pitt has been working on the plan for months with local production companies, including Lone Star, run by actor and producer Aaron Fa'aoso.

Screen Queensland and CQUniversity have been intimately involved in the process and will continue to be once the facility is built.

"This studio is ideally located, five minutes from the CBD, 13 minutes from the airport and with excellent access to the southern corridor highway," Mr Pitt said.

"Far North Queensland is famed in the industry for its picture-perfect tropical and coastal locations, so the construction of this state-of-the-art facility will provide much-needed infrastructure to cater to the creative and logistical needs of local and visiting productions."

Screen Queensland chief executive Kylie Munnich said recent Far North productions included *This Little Love of Mine*, which rated No.1 on Netflix in the UK, and Network Ten series *Dive Club*, which was filmed in Port Douglas.

"The Far North is home to expert local screen businesses such as Lone Star Productions, the team behind the NITV and SBS food and travel program *Strait To The Plate*, and cinematographers BioPixel and BioQuest, who worked on David Attenbor

ough's *Life In Colour*," Ms Munnich said.

"Currently in production at Mission Beach in FNQ is Screen Queensland-supported *Irreverent – Matchbox Pictures' drama series for Universal Studios Group about a criminal who poses as the new church reverend in a small reef town.*"

The studio complex will have a sound stage and support facilities including production offices, construction, wardrobe, and hair and makeup departments, along with an events space and permanent creative tenancy opportunities.

Construction is set to begin early in 2022 and be completed by the middle of the year.

It comes in addition to \$71m in this year's state budget to attract new homegrown and international blockbusters to be filmed in Queensland.



That outlay includes \$4m for a new four-year North Queensland program to build skills and opportunities for the local screen workforce.

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