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Jobs on the rise for city aviation scene

CAIRNS Airport employment is now higher than preCovid levels despite international travel being ripped out of the equation – and it is causing headaches.

A new Cummings Economics report has painted a picture of the city's general aviation sector as it stood in 2019 when the world was still oblivious to the global shutdown that was about to hit.

It found the sector's annual turnover was \$320m with a 720-strong permanent workforce and about 60 helicopters and 40 fixed-wing aircraft.

The report identified 33 separate operations consisting of 11 maintenance, repair and overhaul businesses, 18 flight operators and four "others" – the Cairns Aviation Skills Centre, air cadets, fire and rescue and charter agents.

"Although some of those operations were heavily affected by loss of international tourism business, the indications are that the numbers are well up in some of the maintenance and repair businesses and that in 2021, numbers are well up (overall)," the report found.

"It is estimated that 90 per cent of employees in the sector are full-time with only 2 per cent regular part time and 9 per cent casual part time.

"It is estimated that about 14 per cent of the workforce had shifted to Cairns over the past five years.

"On top of regular staff ... it is estimated that contractors add about 12 per cent to the workforce, taking total up towards 800 employed."

FNQ Avionics chief engineer Ryan Toyne said the business was going strong despite early fears that it could collapse.

His biggest problem now was finding the right staff to do the job.

"We've actually been advertising for people for 12 months now but just can't find anyone," Mr Toyne said.

"Obviously a lot of the airline guys are looking for jobs at the moment, because a lot of airlines have laid people off.

"But they're not really useful in our sort of trade."

It was a much better problem to have than the alternative.

Mr Toyne said the trend of airlines downgrading to smaller aircraft and a resurgence in charter flights had played perfectly into what the Cairns aviation sector did best.

"We did have quite a bad spell in early-2020 when it all happened, but it's definitely picked up now," he said.

"Even when they weren't flying, they were busy doing upgrades and that sort of thing."

The report was presented to Cairns Regional Council's governance and economics committee.

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