

Airport buyer could start international flights here

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MACKAY Airport could become an international airstrip once sold to a private organisation.

Mackay Port Authority chairman Graham Davies said there was nothing to stop carriers such as Virgin Blue, Tiger and Jetstar introducing overseas departures and arrivals at Mackay Airport.

"Who knows, by the end of next year we could see flights to Singapore and New Zealand," he said.

"We are the gateway to the tourist mecca Whitsundays after all plenty of people are attracted to the region."

Mackay Airport general manager Trevor Heard said the airport could currently handle 767-300 model aircraft.

"These aircraft can carry up to 300 people and are used elsewhere in Australia for flights to and from Singapore and New Zealand," he said.

"Obviously there would need to be some terminal changes so that customs and immigration could be set up."

Mr Davies said although he was quietly confident the State Government would find a buyer for the Mackay Airport before the end of the year the necessary due diligence could take much longer.

"We will do everything possible to make sure the sale goes smoothly but I think the plan to have the sale completed by the end of the year is a bit ambitious," he said.

Mr Davies said he hoped the government would step in and fast-track any necessary red tape so Mackay could get a new hospital by 2013.

In the Mackay Port Authority's annual report for 2006/07 airport assets were valued at \$66million.

That figure came from its latest valuation in 2005. According to the report, Mackay Airport is the eighth busiest airport in regional Australia.

It also revealed The Mackay Port Authority's net profit for the 2006-07 financial year, after tax, was \$2.984million, up 41%.

Airport passenger movements were 740,787, up 13%.