

Regional COVID-19 quarantine facility to be built near Wellcamp Airport in Queensland

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Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk said the facility would have 1,000 beds by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

The Queensland government is pushing ahead with its own regional dedicated COVID-19 quarantine facility.

Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk announced on Thursday that Cabinet has approved the project on vacant land owned by Wagner Corporation, just outside Toowoomba, west of Brisbane.

The announcement came as the state recorded two new cases of COVID-19, both in hotel quarantine.

Construction started at the site near Wellcamp Airport on Thursday, with 500 beds to be available by the end of the year and a total capacity of 1,000 by March next year.

Construction firm Wagners first submitted the plan to use its Wellcamp Airport as the landing point for some of the Australians stranded overseas in January.

The financial arrangement between the state government and the Wagner family will be commercial-in-confidence, but the state government has signed a one-year lease, with the option of extending to two or three years.

Queensland COVID-19 snapshot:

- Confirmed cases so far: 1,984
- Deaths: 7
- Tests conducted: 4,057,569
- Active cases: 20

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"Our hotels were not built for the Delta strain of this virus," Ms Palaszczuk said.

"This is going to be a great boost for our defence against the Delta virus in this country, and in fact I believe we need regional facilities, right across the country.

"I have been advocating for this for a long, long time. It is a no-brainer."



Work has started at the Wellcamp Business Park site. (ABC News: David Chen)

Deputy Premier Steven Miles said he hoped the facility would prevent future lockdowns sparked by the virus leaking out of hotel quarantine.

"When you consider that the last lockdown alone cost more than a billion dollars in economic impact, and compensation, you can see just what fantastic value it will be," he said.

'Much safer than non-purpose-built hotel quarantine'

The federal government has made it clear that it would not pay for a quarantine facility at Wellcamp.

In June, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the site did not meet the criteria for a Commonwealth-funded quarantine compound because it was not within easy access of a passenger airport terminal or tertiary hospital.



Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk and businessman John Wagner at the site of the Wellcamp quarantine facility. (ABC News: David Chen)

He knocked back the plan and instead proposed a facility at the Damascus Barracks, about 5 minutes' drive from Brisbane Airport.

A feasibility study by consultancy group AECOM found the Pinkenba facility could be up and running for the first 500 travellers by March 31, although some challenges posed a "significant risk" to this timeframe – including modifying accommodation to mitigate aircraft noise.

On Thursday, Mr Morrison said despite the Wellcamp facility not meeting national guidelines, Ms Palaszczuk has "been at liberty" to build the site "for months".



The state government has signed a one-year lease with the Wagner family for use of its Wellcamp airport. *(ABC News: David Chen)*

"We've made it very clear that that facility did not seek to meet the national guidelines and that's why we're going together, forward together, at Pinkenba," he said.

"They've made that decision and they could have done that months ago if that's what they wish to do, but it's good for them and I wish them every success."

Ms Palaszczuk has previously said the federal government-funded Damascus facility as well as one at Wellcamp could eliminate the need for quarantine hotels.

Health Minister Yvette D'Ath said had the Wellcamp facility been built earlier, the Queensland government may not have had to pause arrivals from interstate hotspots for the next fortnight.

"If this had been built months ago when we first asked the Commonwealth to partner with us and the Wagners, we potentially may not have had to make the very difficult decision that we made [on Wednesday]," Ms D'Ath said.

Travellers could arrive for quarantine by bus

Mr Miles said once the Wellcamp facility was operational, travellers would be taken by bus to the site from Brisbane Airport, if the Commonwealth government decided not to allow flights to land at Wellcamp Airport.

"We currently bus arriving travellers from Brisbane to hotel quarantine accommodation on the Gold and Sunshine Coast, and so that would remain an option to get people here safely," he said.



Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk at the Wellcamp Business Park where a regional quarantine facility will be built. *(ABC News: David Chen)*

The design is being modelled on the Howard Springs quarantine facility in the Northern Territory.

Mr Miles said there would be a mix of single, double and family-sized rooms in the design of cabins and all rooms will have balconies.

"Importantly no hallways adjoining rooms, which we have seen as vectors in hotel quarantine for the virus," Mr Miles said.

Travellers who test positive for the virus and require hospitalisation will be transported to one of five hospitals in Queensland with COVID wards.



The Queensland government had been pushing to create a quarantine facility at Wellcamp Airport. *(David Chen)*

Millionaire businessman John Wagner said the facility would create local jobs.

"Just by the fact that we have to produce 3,000 meals a day, [the region] will really benefit from this," he said.

"As the landlord of this facility to the Queensland government, we are working through the final design criteria to make sure that we have the best fit-for-purpose regional accommodation facility for return travellers that there is in the country or in fact the world."

Sewage testing detects virus on Palm Island

Health authorities have detected COVID-19 in wastewater on Palm Island for a second time this week.

Coronavirus was initially picked up in the island's sewerage system on Wednesday, but late Thursday afternoon a second test came back positive.

Ms D'Ath said precautionary testing was being done on Palm Island in north Queensland after sewage test results showed fragments of the virus that causes COVID-19.

"That could be just someone who is shedding, who has had the virus previously, but we're not aware of anyone on the island who is a former positive case," Ms D'Ath said.

"What we have set up, starting [Thursday] morning, is extra capacity to ask every person on Palm Island, who has any symptoms whatsoever, to come forward and get tested, so we can rule out that there are any positive cases there."

About 100 residents were tested Thursday.

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- [The number of cases in Australia](#)
- [Tracking Australia's vaccine rollout](#)