

## Flight risk: How Brisbane airport is facing up to climate change

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With a new federal government report highlighting \$226 billion in climate change risk to coastal infrastructure, Colonial First State infrastructure investment asset manager Mark Rogers says Brisbane Airport Corporation offers a good example of how business should respond.

Rogers, who is also a director of the Australian Green Infrastructure Council, said Brisbane Airport has undertaken extensive studies to determine the height of its proposed [parallel runway](#), taking into account the prospect of more extreme weather events.

"They've got a special committee to look into this and, based on hydrology and climate studies, are confident their infrastructure planning will ensure the business continuity of the airport," he told *CE Daily*.

The owners of the airport – which is located next to Moreton Bay – have "looked at all sorts of things in that process – changes in sea-level, changes in storm patterns, flood levels ...", Rogers said.

"That cost benefit analysis is quite an interesting exercise – to actually work out is it worth spending an extra amount 'x' dollars to raise the runway up to prevent it potentially being inundated in 20 years time when a flood event comes around."

### **Asset owners must understand design ramifications**

Speaking the day after the climate change department released an updated [report](#) on risks to coastal buildings and infrastructure, Rogers said safeguarding critical infrastructure against extreme weather is "an enormous task" and some asset owners are dealing with it better than others.

The key task for infrastructure designers, owners and operators is working out what the science means for infrastructure design, he said.

What constitutes a one-in-50-years event, or a one-in-100-years event is changing: "But has design actually caught up to work out what those impacts are? At Brisbane Airport yes, but more generally, I am not sure".

However, Rogers said groups like Engineers Australia are putting a lot of effort into grappling with these issues. And, despite the uncertainties, asset owners and operators now need to "work out what it means for your business and mitigate that risk".

In some cases that might involve designing-in additional protection measures and in others the best choice might prove to be business continuity insurance if that's available, he said.

It might even prove to be a decision to simply be prepared to "take it on the chin" and pay for it at the time if an extreme weather event disrupts business, he said.

Either way, the decision has to involve building a robust business case, even though this is "very difficult when some of these numbers are still so 'big picture' and hard to grasp".

"You've got to actually put that justification on the table, to make sure you are actually spending the money ... in the right place."

Colonial First State is the largest institutional investor in Brisbane Airport, with a 26% stake, and is represented on the board.

**Worst-case scenario**

The updated climate department report on risks to coastal infrastructure assesses risk under a "plausible worst-case scenario" involving sea level rise of 1.1 metres by 2100.

It concludes assets with a replacement value totalling more than \$226 billion would be at risk, including commercial buildings, light industry, transport infrastructure and housing.

[Climate change risks to coastal buildings and infrastructure \(Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, June 2011\)](#)