



It's high time for a new skyscraper city on Coast

By Brian Harrower

THE range of sensational new mega towers planned for the Surfers Paradise CBD must have long-term and recent arrivals wondering how long the original high-rises of the city can remain standing.

The audacious, bold, visionary – call them what you like – plans by companies associated with Greek-born Jim Raptis to build four giant towers up to 65 storeys high around where the Gold Coast International Hotel now stands is seen by many as the most scintillating development proposals concept for a long time.

Visitors and regulars at the five-star Gold Coast International Hotel are still shaking their heads in amazement that this once iconic new addition to the tourist mecca is being earmarked for destruction to make way for a new era of apartment and hotel skyscrapers.

Surfers Paradise is being redefined: Richer one day, even richer the next.

Who could have thought that a high-profile, classy tourist resort hotel, the favourite of so many Japanese in its mere 20 years' life, could one day be demolished when there are so many older buildings more deserving of this fate?

The very-much, time-worn and shaggy looking 11-storey Paradise Towers just metres from Cavill Avenue remains standing and usually fully booked out as the city's second-oldest high-rise apartments building after coming on stream in 1959.

A year earlier, the almost adjoining nine-storey, but much smaller, Kinkabool in Hanlan Street remains untouched.

It is now Heritage listed.

The city's tourist hub has even the most sceptical of southern critics in a mind spin and revving for a record investment year.

The flagship of the Gold Coast's amazing 381 per cent investment growth boom since 2000 continues to draw gasps of wonder from first, second and third-time visitors.

When any city is sitting on a current investment boom of a reported \$66 billion, underway or in the pipeline, you know that city truly has a golden future.

And even more so when it is not a capital city.

So when back in 1958 – 50 years ago – an alderman called Vern Thurecht of the then South Coast Town Council, forerunner of the Gold Coast City Council, moved a motion for the area between Coolangatta and Main Beach be called Gold Coast town, and proclaimed as a city in 1959, that man must surely have been this region's first

visionary in local government.

There are certainly not many of them around now in today's politically charged, bureaucratic-driven government sectors.

Bearing in mind Thurecht's vision of a Gold Coast occurred when there was not even one building higher than two storeys.

His idea was accepted as a better name than the Town of Alexandra, which was also nominated by someone on the original council who didn't have Thurecht's foresight.

Surfers Paradise is one piece of land in Australia that defies all market logics.

Where other places are going slowing down or have hit stagnant new investment, the tourist icon surfs ahead on the crest of even bigger money waves.

And at the helm is iconic developer Greek-born Jim Raptis.

Between the Raptis Group and another listed developer, Sunland, led by Iranian-born Soheil Abedian, these two people have largely transformed the shape and image of our skyscraper city.

The resurgence of Surfers Paradise from the Keating government's recession era of the 1990s was led by them.

The Raptis Group's massive redevelopment of the former Chevron Hotel site into the Chevron Renaissance retail and apartments conglomerate, was well supported by Sunland's twin skyscrapers, Circle on Cavill, then Soheil Abedian's signature tower Q1, which entered 2006 as the world's tallest residential building at 85 storeys.

It's the kind of confidence the area needs to keep attracting other big players such as Melbourne-based construction group Grocon with its \$2.5 billion worth of towers planned in southeast Queensland, and more importantly for Surfers Paradise, demolishing the 1980's era Raptis Plaza site on the beachfront to make way for developer Juniper's 77-storey Soul tower.

Now Raptis is bringing one of the world's hotel giants, Hilton, to central Surfers Paradise on the redeveloped landmark Dolphin Arcade site, with a \$700 million twin-towers project to add a further 89 levels in total, 170 luxury hotel suites and 340 swish sky homes.

And many more sky-reaching towers are in the pipeline.

That the 77-storey beachfront Soul skyscraper, soon to be built, can attract more than \$400 million in upfront sales is an indelible marker for the future confidence of the city's amazing tourist hub.

The city's excitement aura revolves around it.



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Retailers are well supported



The beach is a drawcard



Tourists flock to the suburb



Surfers Paradise is being redefined with a golden future ahead