

Kuranda off track for month

THE Kuranda Scenic Railway will be out of action for another month with tour operators again calling for natural disaster funding as compensation.

Queensland Rail last night promised to meet the tourism industry next week to brief them on the reopening.

The railway was closed after a landslide struck a locomotive three weeks ago.

Six people on board the train carrying more than 220 passengers were injured.

Since then 3000cum of rocks and soil have been removed but Queensland Rail is undertaking a geotechnical risk assessment.

Far North Queensland Tour Operators Association president Ross Maxted said the delay was "extremely concerning and disappointing news".

"It comes at a critical time for the commencement of the new tourist season and the Australian Tourism Exchange next month," he said.

Mr Maxted called for the assessment and any extra work to be given priority.

"They should treat this works program as if the event had occurred as a natural disaster, and commit to the required funding for the our region, to provide our visitors with a reliable first class world renowned

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tourist experience," he said.

Kuranda Chamber of Commerce president Barry Smith said it could not have come at a worse time.

"That's bad, this is going to be an absolute killer," he said.

"Some people will close their businesses and staff will be without jobs.

"We are suffering badly and it's time the Member for Barron River Steve Wettenhall did more than wait and see and give us some disaster relief funding."

Mr Smith said his business, the Kuranda Hotel-Motel, was struggling.

"I'm down five staff. We're flat out giving them the hours and the wages to pay their rents and mortgages," he said.

"Kuranda does rely on that train."

QR is to receive geotechnical advice today as part of a risk assessment for future services.

QR passenger executive general manager Paul Scurrah said the service would not reopen until the assessment was complete, which was expected to take at least four weeks.

He said QR was working on other short-term tourism options.



Homeward: Jess Macaulay and Jules Cooper cycle into Cairns on their 33,000km world tour. Picture: MARC McCORMACK

33,000km trip – just to cycle home

THEY haven't got the blisters to prove it, but by July this couple will have ridden 33,000km across four continents and 27 countries for charity – and a slice of adventure.

Jules Cooper and Jess Macaulay have been cycling around the world since December.

Living in London, the couple thought the bicycle adventure would be fun and a cheap way to

make it home to Melbourne.

Before reaching Australia last month, the pair spent months visiting countries such as China, Argentina and Russia, cycling around historical areas.

On their Australian leg of the tour, the duo decided to ride for the Ardoch Youth Foundation, a not-for-profit group helping educate thousands of disadvantaged

children and young people.

"We've slept under highways and in caravan parks, but it's worth it," Mr Cooper said.

"It was a way to get home and help people and it's a challenge."

The pair arrived in Cairns this week for a rest and will leave on Sunday for Innisfail before heading south to Melbourne.

► To support them visit www.julesandjess.com



Salty: On the Salar de Uyuni, the world's largest salt lake in Bolivia.



Tough going: Crossing a flooded road via a railway bridge in Bolivia while (below) the couple smile at the Argentina-Chile border.



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