

Ballina Advocate

12.05.08

Dear Editor,

I see Ballina Council has its Heritage Plan on public exhibition. [Advocate 6.05.08].

The first question Ballina rate payers should be asking is what is the total annual and cumulative costs for all of this.

The second question is whether the process has been the usual incestuous money making venture for heritage fanatics. Minority heritage fanatics normally put pressure on Council and Councillors to divert rate payers money from essential infrastructure works such as roads, to activities that make their mates in various heritage organisations, heritage consultancies and heritage businesses a lot of money - normally at the expense of owners of private property that has been heritage listed.

In 2006 the Federal Productivity Commission Report into Built Heritage exposed these heritage rorts most especially at local Council level. They called our Council heritage listing system a disgrace and recommended many reforms. The Expert Panel reviewing the NSW Heritage Act had their report made public in March 2008. They made a slew of recommendations to curtail out of control heritage industry especially at the local government level. City Councils have been ripped off by their heritage spivs for the past 30 years and now that they are waking up to the financial sink hole of heritage and starting to say no, they have moved in on country Councils in NSW.

The NSW Society of Heritage Owners [sohonsw@gmail.com] warn the rate payers and Councillors of Ballina to be on high alert and extremely cautious about what we call heritage fraud. Private properties are being heritage listed by Councils without valid assessment and not using acceptable heritage listing tools such as the Burra Charter. For the past 30 years, affected owners have very limited and very expensive options to fight such heritage fraud. Outright heritage propaganda is normally found in Council heritage brochures. They are invariably about the benefits of heritage listing and never cover the negatives to the same depth. Most Council heritage committees are overwhelming comprised of heritage fanatics whose sole agenda is to increase heritage listings irrespective of genuineness. Many items are listed for purely sentimental reasons.

For the sake of balance and inclusion SoHONSW strongly recommends all NSW Councils must have a representative of heritage owner's organisation on all committees, that the heritage brochure contents be vetted for accuracy of both negatives and positives associated with heritage listing, that Councillors keep a close eye on how much rate payers money is being diverted to heritage issues and be mindful of how these closed shop heritage fraudsters operate to gouge money out of rural councils.

C. Hayward

Society of Heritage Owners NSW