

Byron Shire Echo

15.05.08

Dear Editor,

I see Byron Council has its Heritage Plan on public exhibition.

The first question Byron 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 managed by and for the benefit of 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 and local rate payers, who are all expected to fork out to subsidise these people's heritage hobby.

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 to. 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 - again most especially at the local government level. City Councils have been ripped off by these heritage spivs for the past 30 years who now seem to be moving in to feast on rural Councils. Councils and Councillors should wake up to the financial sink hole of heritage and the state and inform themselves about the recent state government reforms aimed at stopping heritage fraud. Many 'in the know' heritage fanatics have been working relentlessly to try and have their Heritage Plans finished before the heritage reforms become law. NSW country Councils should say 'no' to adopting any such Heritage Plans until the full impact of the heritage reforms are costed.

The NSW Society of Heritage Owners [sohonsw@gmail.com] warn the rate payers and Councillors of Byron to be on high alert and extremely cautious about 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 but the reforms have changed that so that owners will have decent appeal rights which if exercised will end up costing Councils a lot of money. We also object to the outright heritage propaganda normally found in NSW 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