



## **Byron certainly deserves better... it deserves to house its community!**

**By Kim Goodrick and Sabine Muschter**

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The Byron Shire celebrates a diverse range of ideas and beliefs. We consider this to be a good thing. But, when sharing those beliefs with the community, it needs to be done with respect, a commitment to the truth and transparency. These attributes are lacking in the recent advertisements of Byron Deserves Better (BDB) published in The Echo, statements on their website and in various articles.

Our concerns are that the ads and statements on BDB website misrepresent the complexity of Byron Council's short-term rental accommodation (STRA) planning proposal for the community; fail to acknowledge the financial interests of those behind the ads in maintaining the status quo; and fail to reference the data they rely on while misrepresenting existing independent research.

We acknowledge the financial interests of those involved with BDB. They represent a significant business commitment to the Byron area. For example, two BDB supporters work for the holiday accommodation service A Perfect Stay, which hosts 142 of the 2,815 Byron Shire properties listed on InsideAirbnb (6.10.22). However, these business interests need to be balanced with the wellbeing of all residents and workers in the Shire.

Significantly, the EIA report predicts that with the council's 90-day cap proposed policy (including exempt precincts), an approximate 10 per cent increase in long-term rental supply would result from this simple change. This view is shared by Dr Peter Phibbs, who peer-reviewed the EIA report in December 2021, and concluded that it '... seems likely that the economic impacts on Byron Bay of the changes proposed by the Council would be very modest...' (page 7).

Further, in analysing the demographic and housing data the EIA report revealed that the Byron LGA is experiencing housing-market failure, with poor affordability, very low rental vacancy rates, and high concentrations of non-hosted STRA approaching 35 per cent of total dwelling stock (see EIA, pages 43–44).

Dr Sabine Muschter, a Byron local and a co-author of various research studies regarding impacts of STRA on the Byron Shire and other communities, summarises: 'In my view, the proposal will not result in a shortage of tourist accommodation at all as the exempt precincts will increase bed night availability and "hosted" STRAs are not impacted by the policy at all.

'Furthermore, in 2019 Byron Shire's over 100 Approved Accommodation Providers (AAPs), such as hotels, motels etc, had an average occupancy rate in the mid–high 60 per cent, low for a heavily touristic region and compared to the average of 74 per cent in NSW (Tourism Research Australia, 2019; Destination Byron, 2019). This suggests there are a lot more nights available in AAPs for visitors to stay in the Byron Shire. AAPs pay commercial rates and ensure compliance with noise and nuisance requirements,' she explained.

'Therefore, I question the argument that jobs, and money, will be lost with the proposed STRA policy. And just imagine, more families and essential workers will have the opportunity to live locally in full-time rentals and contribute to the town's community activities, as well as the economy, all year round – not just in the holiday peaks.'

So by all means, BDB, have your say and promote your interests, but please don't use unreferenced and out-of-context data, or statements designed to mislead the community about the structure and impacts of Council's STRA proposal.