

I am submitting this statement to the I.P.C. in my role as a long-time facilitator/drawing teacher and resident of Byron Shire.

Firstly, let me apologise for the length of this submission. I am sure that you have many to look at, so if you could just bear with me, I feel it is relevant.

As you may be aware, the arts community here (music/dance/yoga/perma-culture/the surfing sub-culture/alternative lifestyle 'n housing /meditation/ healing etc.) have all played a significant role in the evolution of the profile that many people know and recognise as the unique drawcard that is Byron Bay, indeed the whole of Byron Shire.

In fact, it is this unique 'lifestyle', characterised by radical social exploration and innovation (that has established it as a 'destination' over the last four or five decades, since the early 1970s), that has been the precise reason, or at least one of

the major reasons as to why so many people have perhaps come here; to see and experience for themselves the culture and in many cases, decide to live here.

I have been a permanent resident/ratepayer of the Shire since the mid '80s and a part-time visitor and resident for over a decade before that. In that time, I have seen Byron Bay go through many changes in terms of lifestyle and demographic. And during that time, there have been many investor-driven attempts to impose projects and activities that would have threatened both the environment and the integrity of this area. However, the community has always stood up and resisted such advances, that were either profit driven or did not resonate with/or went completely against, the majority aspiration..... vision of the residents. This is how Byron is.... and over the years has always been. We are a strong community which is proud of and value what we have here.

- When logging threatened our forests, we resisted.
- When Club Med and McDonalds both attempted to move in here without a social licence, we marched and protested in our thousands..... and they left.
- When developers have attempted to initiate projects that have threatened the pristine nature of this unique environment, they have heard from the people who live here.
- When the CSG industry attempted to begin drilling for coal seam gas in early 2014, they were met by a tidal wave of opposition at Bentley and had to leave. They had no 'social licence' – there were farmers, nurses, teachers, office workers, alternative life-stylers all standing side-by-side to block the drilling rig.

The point I am trying to make - and it is clear – (you only have to walk and talk to people down the street here and you will soon realise how they feel) that the unregulated short-term holiday letting industry, and its wholesale

rampant consumption of housing stock in this area, is seriously impacting peoples' lives at every level.

Rents have gone through the roof and housing availability is almost at zero for the average person. Many workers in this area are having to travel from outside the Shire just to simply keep their jobs. This is clearly unacceptable.

While this industry and its operators, represent perhaps 1 to 2% of the population, they benefit greatly from the 'goldmine' that 'brand Byron' has become, while the broader community's cost of living and access to housing and rentals and 'peaceful enjoyment of life and property' is severely impacted, with many people being forced to leave the area. This rapacious industry is tearing apart the social fabric of what many of us who live here know to be our home, the place we live... and the dream we believe in.

In my role as a facilitator/teacher in Byron Shire, over the last 25 years, I have encountered hundreds, if not thousands of people during that time – students, artists and drawers, their

families and friends. '*dynamic drawing*' is and has always been the most popularly attended art class in the area.

I have been intimately connected with the creative current of this town for many years.

What I have seen in recent years, since the rapid rise of the Air B&B 'industry' - and make no mistake, that is what it has become - is a long way from its innocent beginnings, where Air B&Bs were conceived of as a means, a financial boost, to help live-in, hosted house buyers and property owners with their mortgages, to perhaps let out their places over a weekend or during holiday times. Those days are long since gone. It is a whole different situation now. The investors have moved in and it is radically altering the very nature of the area, and more or less defining who can afford to live or be here and who can't.

As a drawing facilitator, I have watched these changes and the impact this is having through seeing the type of people attending my classes. It is no longer the grassroots - the numerous

vintage kombis, station wagons, old cars and lifestyle vans, even pushbikes..... parked outside the halls as it was in previous years. Now it's mostly upmarket, expensive cars.... four-wheel-drives, suv's etc - not that that is any measure a reflection upon those people or their desire to draw and participate. Many are wealthy tree-changers...come from the city looking for lifestyle changes / creative identity /purpose etc. But more importantly, this is an indicator of who lives here now, who has the money and is still able to afford to come to classes these days (not just mine..... many classes are experiencing this).

I have begun to notice, especially over the last few years as house prices have gone up and up and rentals harder and harder to find, that many people I have known both as students, friends and practising artists, have simply been forced to pack up and leave and go to other towns (mostly further inland) where they can afford to live. The same with life models who I employ. There was a time when I didn't even need to advertise,

they would simply turn up at the classes asking for work, that is, I always had a healthy pool of models. Nowadays, even when I advertise in the local paper, it is much more difficult to get models. Most of the ones who used to live here are gone, they simply can't afford the rents. While class numbers have stayed healthy, the nature and demographic of the people who are coming has changed radically in the last few years.

While my experience has been a relatively positive one... there are many people I know whose classes have collapsed due to lack of attendance, which then has a ricochet effect on those particular (unlucky) facilitators who then have lost their income and often cannot survive in this mega-rich 'playground' that Byron has become and so they too, have had to leave. So, another thread is drawn from the disappearing fabric of the community.

Just as the community itself has been fractured by and been impacted by an ongoing juggernaut of investment and commercialisation that has driven many away, equally I have witnessed the same thing personally in the socio-economic income level/ profile of the people who attend my classes and workshops. While I love and enjoy working with people from whatever background, it does sadden me to see so many excluded and being left out, falling by the way, simply by virtue of the fact of what Byron has become. Thank you for your time.

Yours respectfully  
Ron Curran /facilitator  
Dynamic Drawing