

Jan Barham presentation to IPC Hearing 21.2.2023 re STRA

I acknowledge that we are meeting on Arakwal Bundjalung country and pay my respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.

I thank those who remain vigilant for the protection of our community rights and amenity.

I'm supporting the council compromise proposal for Short Term Rental Accommodation restrictions, not because I believe it will solve all the problems we face from the commercialisation of our neighbourhoods, but because it may return homes to our community as has happened overseas and identified in the Council reports.

I want to encourage you to go beyond the narrow focus that the Minister has proposed and gain a broader understanding as to why our Council and our MP, Tamara Smith and so many residents have supported the restrictions.

This activity goes beyond housing issues, it impacts on the capacity of our community to thrive and be resilient as it results in the loss of permanent population.

I propose that there's a greater loss, economically, socially and culturally by the unrestricted use of unhosted STRA in residential zones.

Local Government is required to follow State planning laws and prior to the Housing SEPP 2021 the use of dwellings in residential zones for tourism was prohibited. The concept of state wide uniformity is inconsistent with sound strategic planning. Each location is different and should be recognised as such.

In Feb 2003, 20 years ago, I proposed a motion to regulate holiday letting by requiring a development application. This was just after the Bali bombings and a summer where Byron was inundated by tourists. Our residential areas became unhosted hotels and the community was heavily impacted.

The staff response to my motion correctly stated the use was prohibited in residential zones. . A position upheld by the Land & Environment court .

Then the development of a Byron Tourism Management Plan in 2008 resulted in a clear community opposition to the use and a recommendation to strengthen the prohibition on holiday letting. Council also attempted a precinct model but again there was a lack of support.

When Council tried to amend the LEP in 2010 we were thwarted by the government, they were looking into it.

In the academic paper, 'Pop-up' tourism or 'invasion'?' by Gurran, Zhang, Shrestha

Byron has been defined as being subject to an 'invasion' and that's how it feels. Our neighbourhoods have been under attack from commercialisation.

We want neighbours not strangers. Homes not hotels.

The paper also notes that,

*“with platforms such as Airbnb adept at mobilising the latent political power of ‘home-sharers’ through seemingly grass roots campaigns, **politicians are often reluctant to seriously restrict these activities.***

This is sadly true and many in our community feel that we have been betrayed by the State, again. There are also questions about politicians not declaring their conflict of interest, as it's publicly known that some are STRA investors and or operators.

Without a comprehensive cost benefit analysis there's a skewed view on this issue, if a decision is going to be determined on the economics then please ensure that you consider the real costs to our community.

It's not just about the economic contribution of STRA because that fails to be weighed against the value of community and what's at risk. .

The financial contribution of permanent residents supports local businesses all year round.

The contribution that residents make to the social and cultural framework isn't valued. But volunteering in the care sector, sports, emergency management, cultural events and environmental repair and care are essential for our community to thrive and ironically, contribute to the attraction of Byron, at no cost to the tourism industry.

These are values and they can be monetised to show the other side of the argument.

Then there are the costs, without neighbours, our communities are less safe and people's wellbeing declines as our connections and supports are eroded. This disruption causes stress, which is also a cost.

The lack of a financial contribution to council as the real tourism industry provides to offset the impacts of the commercial use as well as support for infrastructure and compliance results is an unfair market advantage to STRA and impacts on the legitimate tourism providers.

The lack of affordable housing has made it impossible for essential workers and volunteers to live locally and businesses can't operate due to lack of staff.

These are the very real stresses on our community.

The recent disasters highlighted the strength of our community.

To quote Minister Roberts from the recently adopted North Coast Regional Plan 2041

*“It’s a region of resilience strengthened by a rare community bond. The courage and support for each other in the face of these life-changing events has been inspirational and the government will continue to stand with these communities and provide them with the **support they need to prosper**. This updated vision for the region is part of that effort*

Well we need to see the effort now, we need the Government commitment to our community, not support for the ongoing invasion.

I fear a narrow focus in this inquiry won’t do justice to the complex and crucial risks that we face if there isn’t some constraint on STRA.

I encourage you to recognise that our community is suffering and there are values and risks that must be considered.

Please support us to prosper as a community and not to be treated as a commodity.