

19 October 2022

Dear Minister

A Call for Balanced Policy on STRA, Housing and Tourism in Byron LGA

STRA should be regulated but it's become a political football. The proposed 90 day cap won't solve our housing crisis and risks damaging our local economy, as we recover from Covid.

Byron Shire suffers from long-term failures to plan for both our diverse housing needs and for tourist accommodation. Scapegoating STRA will not fix those problems. We need to build houses and apartments, and develop sustainable, small scale hotels and holiday parks.

The case for '90 days' is based on pre-Covid data which is out of date, overstates the numbers for STRA and exaggerates the benefits of the proposal. The data assumes we have over 5000 STRA properties when the number is under 2000. Claims by our mayor that 1,500 properties will be returned to our rental pool are not credible and should be challenged by state government.

The policy is ignorantly anti-business. The STRA sector indicates over 1000 jobs are at risk - a massive number for our community. There are also equity issues because the policy works retrospectively – owners bought in when STRA was legal – and sets arbitrary boundaries for '365 day precincts' crowding-out residential use, while STRA is limited to 90 day 'across the road'.

The STRA industry should be regulated – but with licensing, safety standards, and a levy that helps meet the costs of tourist and community services and infrastructure.

Byron Shire has also been self-indulgent. It seeks special treatment when its own policy house is not in order. Our LGA has not even signed off on our Residential Strategy – now years overdue and endlessly delayed – and has not signed off on our Sustainable Visitation Strategy.

The State Government may have approved '90 days' in the wake of the floods – which is understandable - but a better approach would be to invest in new housing for young families and key workers, and to support the tourist economy which has long been central to the life of Byron.

I fear that the community will support the planning proposal because it feels good and feels like action. STRA is not popular among many locals. The risk is that 90 Days will not achieve its objective and leave us without the new housing and tourism accommodation we sorely need.


Mark Swivel
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