



WHITSUNDAY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

Caring for the future is in our nature

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AIRLIE BEACH LOSES ICONIC ENTRY STATEMENT – “NOT JUST ANOTHER GUM TREE”

The fantastic landmark tree that once dominated the entrance to Airlie Beach, is gone forever!

The Whitsunday Regional Council (WRC) Climate Hub has published on the importance of vegetation for cooling the urban environment to reduce the ‘heat island’ effect. Airlie Beach is already noticeably hotter than Cannonvale due to the predominance of dark-coloured hard surfaces and the loss of tree cover, which is ongoing and unregulated.

Is our council out of step with the importance now being placed by other planning departments on the importance of the Urban Tree Canopy and its role in reducing the temperature of urban heat sinks?



On 19 September 22 Whitsunday Conservation Council (WCC) enquired to WRC about the future of this significant tree now that the site was due for redevelopment.

WRC responded 12 Oct 22 advising that as Council has no tree protection policy, it could be cut down. They also stated that it was on private land, but no plan to remove it was mentioned.

Though, according to Queensland Government mapping, the tree appeared to straddle private and Council land or could have been wholly on Council

managed land. This photograph taken in Sept 22 shows the original fence line ran behind the tree. So that as far as the public were concerned, it was effectively a roadside tree.

But early morning Friday 18 Nov 22 the alarm was raised that the tree was about to be felled. WCC members went to the site and found the manager of WRC Parks and Gardens Department in attendance. We were told it was only reports of agitated and irate public that had brought him to the site to contain any public outrage. That until this time he had not been aware the tree was coming down because the developer had contacted someone higher up in Council for approval to remove the tree.

Members of the public at the scene asked why the tree was being removed and were told that part of it was damaged and could be unsafe. To our knowledge, even after the major impact of Cyclone Debbie, no concerns were raised about the safety of this tree, so why had it suddenly become a hazard?

Members of the public asked the tree removal contractor if it could be made safe and the response was yes. It would require follow up trimming, but it could be done.

continues

AIRLIE BEACH LOSES ICONIC ENTRY STATEMENT – THE COLONIAL MOTEL GUM TREE

continued

Apparently the developer has contributed a handful of seedling bluegums to the revegetation project at Twin Creeks Cannonvale to ‘compensate’ for the destruction of this mature tree. But this publicly funded revegetation project is already in place, so these trees would have been planted anyway.



In any case, this type of thinking by WRC is not in line with modern trends which value the importance of maintaining urban canopy as a means of naturally cooling our atmosphere as the effects of climate change become reality.

A dozen seedlings do not provide shade, cooling and habitat for several years. Even if one was planted onsite of the tree felled today, it will be more than fifty years before it could provide the benefits of the removed tree.

Our residents and visitors need the cooling benefits of the trees we have now, not in 50 years. This wasn't “just one gum tree”. It is part of a cumulative effect of mature tree removal throughout our region reducing the overall liveability of our town and suburbs.

Try standing in the middle of Main Street Airlie Beach on a hot day, and then stand under a tree and see where you would prefer to be.

In the end, this magnificent tree was destroyed, despite public protests, and in full view of cruise ship visitors and tourists. Just another mature tree felled along with all those shade trees lost when the Airlie foreshore was “revitalised” and with so many new development sites being clear felled.

Locals and visitors know how uncomfortably hot it can be to walk around the foreshore where there are no longer any shade trees available to sit under and enjoy the entertainment or picnic with your family. Metal shelters can't compare with the cooling effect provided by nature's air-conditioners.

Why is our council so out of touch? Don't they read the reports published by their own Climate Hub?

WCC asks why Whitsunday Regional Council still has no policy on Local Matters of Environmental Significance, including a SIGNIFICANT TREE REGISTER to provide protection for iconic trees like the one lost today?

Other Councils in our region have tree protection and maintenance policies and do not allow mature trees to be removed without first making every effort to maintain and nurture these beneficial giants of nature.

This tree was on the extreme corner of the development block. Surely enlightened design and prudent trimming could have seen this tree safely incorporated into the plan for the new hotel.

COPY ENDS



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