

LIZ FRIEND - SPEECH FOR IPC HEARING TUES 21 FEB 23

As a long-term resident of the area, I am here today to represent the local community. The current housing crisis is radically altering the nature of Byron Shire, affecting the demographics of this community forever. We need this 90-day cap so our region can have a say in its future direction.

In October '22, I set up a Change.org petition called 'Byron Deserves Balance' to provide our community with an alternative voice to the 'Byron Deserves Better' lobby group. This cohort of wealthy investors and property owners have been lobbying the State govt and have recently spent thousands of dollars in the local press in an attempt to drum up support for their position.

The petition represents the majority view of our community, shown by well over 4000 signatures received already.

Many out-of-town and local investors have purchased multiple properties and have converted them to short term rentals. Meanwhile, permanent renters have been forced out, resulting in a serious crisis that has led to homelessness and displacement across the entire Northern Rivers. There was a housing crisis before the mega floods in February '22 and now the situation is desperate.

We are not against tourism or hosted holiday letting, but the UNREGULATED and UN-HOSTED holiday letting in Byron Shire has become an investor industry. It is now seriously impacting the whole community, including the residential areas.

We need legislation that will effect an equitable and fair outcome for ALL!

Research around the world shows that if Airbnb and similar platforms are allowed to run rampant, both the community and housing supply are the ones to suffer. Many countries have put regulations in place and yet there is little regulation in Australia.

We need to protect our residential housing stock. A 90-day cap would be a good start.

Byron has long been one of the so called 'hero' destinations for tourism throughout the state, as described on NSW State Govt's 'Destination NSW' website. **However, there is nothing heroic about policy that pushes people into homelessness.**

The pandemic only added to the unprecedented and exponential growth of tourism and housing investment that has led to the current crisis. We need to find a balance here - if not, there will be no locals left, no one to serve coffee or clean, teach our children, staff our hospitals or provide other essential work.

Investors are now infiltrating the residential areas. Un-hosted properties are a commercial business and should be regulated.

We need a realistic and just solution to this problem. It is affecting people's lives, their ability to work, support themselves, their families and their children's schooling. There are now severe mental health issues across the community due to this crisis.

Whilst getting signatures for the 'Byron Deserves Balance' petition, we have met so many people who've had to move multiple times, whilst trying to maintain their work and family lives – many are forced to live in their cars, as they need to be close to their work and yet have nowhere to live. If they **were** lucky enough to find accommodation, many said that most of their income was going in rent!

We met a local tradie with full time work who is living in his van;

Rhonda, 63, works 2 jobs and has just been given a month's notice on a property she has been living in for 5 years;

A woman who runs a cleaning business is now struggling, as she has to pay travel money to her staff so they can get to work;

Byron paramedics are having to travel to work from Murwillumbah and Goonellabah.... this is impacting staffing levels there and at Byron Hospital.

There are so many stories – too many to mention here.

On the website VisitNSW.com, the introduction to Byron Bay paints a completely false picture of Byron and its lifestyle. It says: *'Embrace the boho. It's boho meets beachside, hippie meets hip, spiritual meets sophisticated...a place where you're just as likely to see Chris Hemsworth tucking into Sunday lunch at The Farm as you are to encounter dreadlocked drummers heralding in the sunset on the world-famous beachfront. Whichever version of Byron Bay you embrace, you'll come away with a renewed sense of calm – and cool.'*

FACT: this quote is deceptively shallow and misrepresents reality. There is little calm in Byron Bay now. The so-called dreadlock drummers & hippies they mention in their 'spin' have mostly all left town because they can't find anywhere to live. **And the use of** Chris Hemsworth and The Farm.... who both contribute greatly to our local community... is again shallow and flippant in its description.

The same website says:

'Byron was once the favoured domain of hippies and boho seachangers – these locals never left, but have been joined by forward-thinking restaurateurs, designers and celebrities.'

FACT: Many of 'these locals' are now homeless or have been forced to leave this region! The commercialisation of this area has actually driven out the artisans, musicians and alternative life-stylers - who had a sense of authenticity, love and vision for the region. There is little forward-thinking or common ground here.

Many people are angry, they say they have lost faith in the government, as they feel 'power and money' is the only

thing politicians understand.

We hope you can see past the influence of this self-interested lobby group and give the community of Byron Shire some hope with a 90-day cap.

Thankyou for listening.

Liz Friend, Byron Deserves Balance