

## 5.1 Notice of Motion - Castle Drive - Fig Tree.DOC

29<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Honorable Mayor of Ballina Shire Council  
Ballina Shire Council  
PO Box 450  
Ballina NSW 2478



**Attention: Cr David Wright**

**RE: SUBMISSION RE PROPOSED REMOVAL OF THE MATURE MORETON BAY FIG IN 7 –  
9 CASTLE DRIVE, LENNOX HEAD. NSW 2478**

The Veteran Tree Group Australia Ltd (VTGA) is a not for profit group that is interested in identifying, recording and promoting the preservation, appreciation and best practice management of veteran and other significant trees in Australia. We maintain an Australia wide register of veteran and other significant trees. We recognize the importance and acute shortage of mature and old trees within urban areas and therefore also advocate for the retention of established trees wherever possible within urban areas for the long-term benefit of all inhabitants.

Recently we have been alerted by community members that Ballina Shire Council have intention to undertake removal of a mature Moreton Bay Fig tree (*Ficus macrophylla*) that is situated on public land (road reserve) outside the frontages of 7 and 9 Castle Drive Lennox Head. The tree is a significant landmark and asset of great value not only to the residents of Castle Drive but also the broader community. The tree possesses outstanding visual amenity, confers highly significant environmental benefits to the locality and makes an invaluable contribution to the social and natural history of the area as a living monument.

The many benefits of broad canopied shade trees in urban areas have been well studied and documented; they are a key to the health and survival of our cities through a period of climate warming and increasing urban densification. In recognition of this important role, management of urban trees should take a proportionate and reasoned approach giving consideration to benefits as well as costs of damage or risk mitigation. The removal of this particular Fig tree represents a significant asset loss to the local community that cannot be easily replaced by planting immature trees.

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Arboriculturists have estimated the age of the tree to be 150 to 200 years old which makes the tree a very valuable public asset.

It is our understanding that the tree has been scheduled for removal on the basis that it had caused disturbance of some paving at 9 Castle Drive, as well as upheaval of the driveway and other damage to the house and external structures at 7 Castle Drive.

Tree roots are rarely the sole cause of damage to buildings and infrastructure, rather they may exacerbate pre-existing issues and in some cases the removal of nearby trees can lead to other problems that cause damage such as soil 'heave'.

The interactions between trees, soils and buildings can be very complex and require the engagement of a multi-disciplinary team (mainly engineering and arboriculture) consisting of qualified professionals that have specific experience in dealing with such matters.

Clearly, it is necessary for Council to provide evidence to the community that there is a substantial and justifiable reason to remove a tree of this significance and that all management options were considered before the decision to remove the tree was reached.

The community has a basic expectation of elected representatives to reach final management decisions in relation to significant tree assets, in this case the Moreton Bay Fig, through a transparent process, based upon substantiated evidence and supported by rational debate. It is incumbent on those that manage our public trees to ensure that decisions affecting their preservation are expertly informed and consider the full value of the tree assets to the community and the environment.

Removal of such important trees should only ever be considered after all other preservation options are explored and eliminated.

The VTGA are concerned that there may be insufficient justification to remove this tree and the community deserve the benefit of more information and evidence (particularly the engineering reports) to substantiate Council's decision. We ask that you consider our submission and request that the decision be reviewed at least until proof of justification can be provided to the community. A thorough explanation of the decision is in any case required to maintain community confidence in Council tree management decisions.

The benefits to the local community and ecology that this and other large trees obviously provide are things upon which it is difficult to place a value. Whether it be the ecological, environmental or social values, be it habitat, visual amenity, shade provision, microclimate

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control, stormwater capture, flood mitigation, improved air quality or any of the many other values provided by trees of age and significance, they cannot be replaced by the planting of much smaller and obviously much younger trees. Nothing can compensate for the passage and investment of time which has resulted in the mature asset the Council is now custodian of, in the form of this tree.

We benefit today from the shade of trees planted by those with a sense of civic pride and optimism that saw beyond their own lifespan. Mature trees embody resilience and a connection to the past; emotional attachment of the local and broader community to this landmark tree should not be underestimated. It is important that Ballina Shire Council take this opportunity to address community concerns and review the decision.

Specifically we request that you:

- Urgently address this matter to stop or at least delay any action to damage or remove the subject Moreton Bay Fig Tree in Castle Drive
- Review the decision making process surrounding this tree to ensure that it was informed by thorough investigation which involved suitably qualified and experienced experts that focused on the interactions of the tree, the soil and the affected buildings
  - Make publicly available the engineering report/s that have informed the Council decision to remove the Fig tree.
  - Provide the community with an extended period of consultation prior to carrying out any management actions that would damage this tree so that they may have opportunity to:
    - Review the supporting evidence and decision
    - provide further submissions in relation to the proposed tree management
    - if so desired, request further expert opinion to thoroughly inform the current management of the tree nominated for removal.
  - Take this opportunity to consider and address the preservation of other veteran and significant trees within the Council area boundaries.

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It can be expected that fluctuating weather patterns and climate change can be expected to be the catalyst for more cases that involve trees and buildings and many local authorities in Europe and America have developed guidelines and procedures for managing these cases. In addition, it is interesting to note that adopting these strategies greatly improves the relationship and support between the local authorities and their insurers.

The VTGA has expertise in this field and would be happy to offer assistance to Ballina Shire Council to develop its own guidelines to manage these potential conflicts.

We are interested in your written response to our concerns and hope that you will feel free to contact us to discuss any matters raised in this correspondence. Our hope is that you will recognise the significance of this tree and help to address the concerns of the local and broader communities.

Yours faithfully

*Jonathan Hobbs*

Jonathan Hobbs, Chairman, on behalf of The Veteran Tree Group Australia Ltd

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