

# what stays and what goes?



**It's the age-old argument.**

**Should we be constantly be clearing land and knocking down old buildings in the sacred name of development, or should we declare that enough is enough and ban development outright?**

In truth, most people lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, willing to support some developments but not others. It could even be argued that this diversity of opinion hands an advantage to developers, who by definition are unanimously committed to development wherever they can manage it.

Cairns is an unusually sensitive location, with its environmental significance and rich heritage facing off against the city's rapid growth.

The Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC) estimates that the population of Cairns will grow 56% from 120,000 in 2001 to 188,000 in 2021, an annual increase of 2.3% a year. This is almost double the 1.2% increase for Australian cities in general. It seems that pro- and anti-development lobbies are in for a long trench war in the Far North.

**PIER PRESSURE**

One of the most high-profile tussles has been over the fate of the Cairns Yacht Club, a charming, ramshackle old building which has the misfortune to sit right in the middle of the Cairns Port Authority's new multi-million dollar CityPort project.

But after years of submissions and petitions, the yacht club's supporters agree that the battle has been lost.

"I'd say it's gone," says Rob Williams, principal of the Cairns Heritage Group, which has been fighting for several years to save the building. "A final submission has been lodged with the heritage people in Federal Government, but I think it's too late."

The yacht club was probably doomed from the moment the Queensland Heritage Commission refused to register it on the grounds that the building "is not of cultural heritage significance and that it does not satisfy the criteria for entry into the register."

The State Opposition has supported saving the yacht club, and their miserable defeat in the recent elections was the last straw for some club supporters.

What will replace the yacht club is not clear — the CityPort brochure suggests a boutique hotel, but state politicians have

been quoted as saying it will be used for a public amenity of some sort.

Nor is it clear when the building will be demolished. Mike Colleton, commercial manager of the seaport for the Cairns Port Authority, said that the nearby wharfs — which are heritage-listed — will not undergo renovation for at least a year.

"There's a lot of stuff to be sorted out, logistics, transportation, and security as regards the cruise ships," he says. "I think you're looking at a 12 to 24-month timeframe for the wharf."

"It'll be a crime when they knock it [the yacht club] down," says Williams. "It doesn't even belong to the Port Authority, it was built by the people of Cairns."

**ARCADE GAMES**

Plenty of people will be put out by the demolition of the yacht club. A smaller but significant number will be disadvantaged by the makeover of the Andrejic Arcade in the centre of town.

Home to an eclectic mix of shops such as art galleries, organic food outlets, second-hand clothing stores, the city's biggest map shop and the offices of the Wilderness Society, the arcade has been bought by a Melbourne developer who has ordered the upstairs residents out by Nov.1 and upped the rents downstairs by up to a factor of three.

Still, most of the small businesses are resigned to moving or seeing their profit margins slashed.

"It's their building and so they have the right to do with it what they want," said one shop owner. "The value of the land is high and we've had a reasonable deal on rents before."

"We've been told they're not going to rebuild it [as non-retail space] but just refurbish it, and maybe they'll do some great stuff," said another shop owner. "But we're all a bit apprehensive, with the rent going up by three times and us only having a seasonal market."

But constant submission to raw commercial interests is damaging Cairns irreparably, according to the Heritage Group's Williams.

"There's no stuff to look at any more in the city after all the changes", he says. "But look at Townsville, where they've done a great job keeping their old buildings. Here, they're taking away the heritage of the people of Cairns."



**FALSE HOPE?**

Arguably the most important stoush is over the future of False Cape, on the far side of Trinity Inlet. The proposed Reef Cove development in this untouched area seemed certain to go ahead until a late decision in July by the Environmental Protection Authority to block the access road on environmental grounds stopped the project in its tracks.

“Essentially, they’re stuffed unless they can renegotiate access,” says Steve Ryan of CAFNEC. “We believe that if they try to renegotiate access, they should put the whole project back up for approval as the existing approvals date back to the 1980s and 1990s.”

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But as environmental lobbyists have said in the past, developers never accept that they are “stuffed”. They just keep on coming back.

“Developers are like terrorists in that they only have to get lucky once, while environmental groups have to keep on getting lucky,” one U.K. activist has been quoted as saying.

If efforts are made to restart Reef Cove, CAFNEC will be ready, according to Ryan.

“We are lucky in that the community here keeps us very well informed as to what’s going on,” he says.



False Cape is doubly important in the eyes of those who believe in the domino theory of development — that if a development goes ahead in a pristine environment, it inevitably degrades that environment and hence makes it harder to block further developments in the area. In this case, it is the whole of the east side of Trinity Inlet that is up for grabs.

**COUNTER CULTURE**

The argument has always been presented — very skilfully — in Cairns, that if you are anti-development, you are anti-jobs. Development creates jobs and is therefore a Good Thing. But is that necessarily true? More jobs means more people, and more pressure on housing and thus .. more development. So what development mainly creates is more development.

The anti-development argument takes the line that increasing development effectively destroys the reason that people like living here and why they still arrive in large numbers. The much-vaunted laid-back tropical lifestyle is in danger of being submerged under new highways, endless McSuburbs and shopping malls, they argue.

The continued success of Cairns relies on somehow integrating these two viewpoints so that development, when it occurs, enhances the attractions of the city and of the region.

As urban planners everywhere have discovered, that is not an easy task.

**David Legard**

**• SCENE & HERD •**

**TRADE SECRET:** While the trade ministers of the world were attempting to revive the flagging WTO talks in Cairns last week, their aides and minions at the Global Trade Forum were partying the night away at the Shangri-La Hotel. Scene & Herd hears local bands entertained the visiting throng until 3am three nights in succession. As George Gershwin once said, nice work if you can get it!

**FORD EYES FED SEAT:** Desley Boyle, Lesley Clark and Naomi Wilson all used local government as a springboard to state parliament, and now another female councillor, long-standing Cairns City Council member Deirdre Ford, is reportedly toying with the idea of standing for the seat of Leichhardt at the 2007 federal election. She may have an uphill battle on her hands with strong opposition to her proposed candidacy from other Liberal stalwarts.

**CENTENARY BASH:** Walkers and cyclists at Centenary Lakes were forced to dodge motor vehicles on the footpaths last Wednesday. This unexpected intrusion was sparked by a plush private function, held under a marquee on the lawn between the bamboo clumps and the boardwalk. The area will skirt the re-configured Collins Avenue under the City Council’s grand plan for the area.

**TRINITY’S TIME:** The Trinity Wharf complex on the edge of Cairns Port has been cordoned off and looking decidedly downtrodden for some time now, but the ball & hammer is about to strike. *The Gate*, ensconced in the historic Jack & Newell Building opposite the crumbling citadel, is looking forward to an uninterrupted view of the Inlet — even if it is only temporary,

**THEATRE SCHEDULE:** Even though a hoarding has been erected at the designated site of the Cairns Civic Theatre Mark 2 next to the courthouse complex in Sheridan St, declaring that it’s ‘Coming Soon’, it’ll actually be a long while before any building commences. Scene & Herd hears the plans have yet to be finalised and that the funding process has barely commenced. One insider doesn’t expect the new Performing Arts Centre to be up and running before 2009.



**ROPE TRICK:** Appearing on Andrew Denton’s *Enough Rope* could be construed as the kiss of death. After all, Rene Rivkin, Steve Irwin and Peter Brock — iconic Aussies all — succumbed to the Grim Reaper’s scythe within a year or so following their appearances on the popular Monday night ABC TV chat show. Hawkeye wonders if this hoodoo is in anyway linked to the program’s macabre title?

**HIGHWAY TO HELL:** The recent news of a joint venture \$500 million development at Palm Cove, on top of other large estate projects in the area, has residents of the Northern Beaches concerned about how the Cook highway will cope with what will assuredly be a huge increase in traffic in years to come. The Caravonica and Smithfield roundabouts already witness tailbacks during peak periods. Locals fear the situation will soon be as chronic as Cairns’ Southern Access.

**NOT SO GLAD WRAP:** The old adage that today’s news is tomorrow’s fish & chip wrapping has proved, sadly, true. The Apres Beach Bar & Grill at Palm Cove has, we have it on good authority, been using copies of edition one of the *The Gate* for such a purpose. Sacrilege indeed!

**FESTIVAL FEEDBACK:** With Festival Cairns over for another year, it’s time to hand out some bouquets and brickbats. Hawkeye and his cohorts were blown away with Reggaetown — particularly the salubrious setting at Tjapukai Park — but disappointed with some other cornerstone events, in particular Carnival on Collins, which they reckon would have benefited from better entertainment. C on C is a perfect opportunity to showcase some of the area’s finest professional bands.

**Hawkeye**

