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Flood-prone house demolitions continue

by Miriam Torzillo

Just when we thought the Reconstruction Authority (RA) had got the message that the Big Scrub homes should be deconstructed, salvaged or relocated, reports are coming in from residents about the ramping up of demolition in Lismore.

Locals have been recording the destruction and sharing it on social media. The community is not happy.

According to Laurie Axtens, North Lismore resident: "In my neighbourhood they've levelled three houses in under a week.

"Timbers worth \$80/m are all crushed together with roofing and trucked away to landfill sites across the border or worse. What a failed scheme it has been. Now they're destroying the evidence."

Residents report the constant demolition noise, including from the early hours of the morning, and many are wondering why.

We can only hazard a guess that this has been spurred on by the imminent deadlines for the relocation and removal of houses from the flood plain.

Communications and press releases from the RA suggest that everything is going well, while in



Photo: kittykittymeowmeow

reality, underneath the surface they seem to be in a bit of a panic.

For example, figures available on the RA's 'Our Progress' page show a disconnect between the number of houses left in Lismore and the deadline for them to be relocated by December this year. The numbers and proposed timelines just don't add up.

The engagement and comms team battle on, but the disconnect between the rosy glow of RA promises and reality is ever-widening. The RA claims that

homes bought back under the RHP are thoroughly assessed by qualified experts to "decide on the future use" and "several factors are carefully considered before a final decision is made".

In fact, a recent fast and furious demolition of a row of houses close to the showground happened in record time, not long enough for careful consideration or notification of neighbours, because as it turns out, the land is needed to expand carparking for the redeveloped showground.

In line with that objective, the sites were cleared of all vegetation, including tree crops and fruit trees, which according to a spokesperson from SOAR (Socialise Organise Art Resist) is contrary to the intentions for the North Lismore of agro-forestry, food forests and rewilding.

The RA had previously assured the community that garden plants could be rehomed to those wanting them.

Many in the community believe this furious smashing of valuable

and often heritage materials in a time of shortage doesn't pass the pub test. One FB post expressed the anger and sadness of many:

"To pay a demolition company over \$110,000 to destroy a perfectly good house is really quite criminal in this day and age, but will be seen and recorded as expedient because there is now a timeline that must be adhered to."

Some concerned residents have written to the RA in a spirit of open curiosity to question the haste of this latest demo round and the secrecy that surrounds it.

The response was typical of the form letters produced by bureaucracies, very probably written by AI.

Take this set of weasel words: "RA will continue to manage the demolition of properties that are not able to be relocated or that are deemed structurally unsafe or a risk to community safety. Where it is economically viable, materials are salvaged and recycled wherever possible, to reduce landfill."

We learnt pretty quickly after last year's demolition wars that according to their definition, using rainforest hardwood for mulch qualified as recycling.

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