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Living history

Tweed Shire Council's environmental credentials really are a joke if such a magnificent old landmark tree as the one at the Chinderah Tavern is chopped down.

As it stands, council offers no protection for the tree – which is absurd considering other councils neighbouring the Tweed have bylaws in place to protect their heritage, whether on public or private land.

If they were really concerned, councillors at the very next meeting would vote to immediately adopt a heritage register with real protection to list and protect priceless items such as the old fig tree at Chinderah.

In the past year alone, historic or landmark trees at Byangum, Banora Point, Kingscliff and Tumbulgum have been chopped down on public and private land, for one reason or another, but surely these living links to our past could have been saved if the will was there.

Only earlier this month, council approved an industrial subdivision near Pottsville where the developer had deliberately burnt down a sacred Aboriginal tree because, we presume, it stood in the way of more lots and big fat profits.

The casual who-cares attitude to these trees is expected from greedy, redneck developers but councils should do all it can to protect not just heritage buildings but the living past. *The Echo* was somewhat surprised by the offhand response by a council PR staffer when first alerted about the issue: 'It's on private land, so they can do what they like.' This of course was not an official response but showed many people in the community think only public heritage can be protected.

In the interim, before any comprehensive heritage study is adopted, council can simply resolve to make, revoke or amend a tree preservation order (TPO) to give the community some peace of mind over any heritage item under threat.

But when you have a pro-development mayor and his faction dominating council, don't hold your breath for any meaningful environmental or heritage protection in these parts.

The faction (Crs Polglase, Youngblutt, Skinner and van Lieshout) thumbed its collective nose at council's own professional planners' advice recently in approving the contentious industrial estate at Pottsville.

They supported what the planners said was the worst of five possible outcomes and not surprisingly backed the developer's favoured option. That option allowed for a prominent hill to be flattened and intrusion of the development into an area which was covered by a TPO, but which had already been illegally cleared in parts.

The 'gang of four' also controversially voted not to prosecute the landowner for allegedly destroying a large number of protected trees and poisoning others.

One councillor disingenuously justified his support for the developer by saying the developer 'might just walk away' if council was 'too restrictive'. Have we missed something here? Aren't councils supposed to restrict or even prevent inappropriate development or activities? It seems not for this lot of 'puppets', as the commissioner probing the last council described the current mayor and his then faction controlling council. Of course that council was sacked for the very reason that councillors were acting as puppets of the developers. So what has changed?

Leadership appears to have gone missing when a council so divides a community, where many are sceptical of who their councillors really represent. This week the mayor went on television to welcome the whitewashed rally review tabled in state parliament last week, saying council had to resolve soon to approve the event because, he claimed, as did the rally organisers, that it was a big economic stimulus for the area.

So once again he and his cronies are battling for one side, the big end of town, and ignoring the community. Although Cr Polglase will have no trouble re-electing himself as mayor next month (the ballot is restricted to councillors), his use-by date is well past.

Tweed Shire Echo

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'The job of a newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.' – Finley Peter Dunne 1867–1936

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Not all over till the fat lady sings

There is a superstition among many political commentators that the nation has some sort of collective mind; that when the voters go to the polls there is a psychic bond between them which determines the overall result.

This strange belief manifests itself in newspaper headlines like: 'Australia Decides', as if the entire country had become a single entity for the purpose of determining who should govern it.

This is, of course, nonsense: Australia doesn't decide, individual Australians do. And a close election cannot be taken as evidence that they are in any way ambivalent about their preferences: Voter A does not communicate telepathically with voter B to agree 'if you vote Labor I'll vote Liberal to balance it out.'

But having said that, there is little doubt that on August 21 a lot of people cast their ballots without a great deal of conviction. I overheard one woman tell a friend that she had changed her mind a hundred times about how to vote, the last time as she was actually numbering the squares.

And there was a larger than usual informal vote – more than 5.5 per cent. It was not clear how much of this was due to Mark Latham's anarchic and irresponsible advice to voters to hand in blank forms, but it certainly suggested a lack of enthusiasm.

Politicians tell us that in the end the people always get it right and that their judgment must be respected; but when that judgment is that a large proportion of the population – perhaps even a majority – doesn't really want either of the contenders, it takes a lot of the gloss off the victory.

So in some ways it was al-

most a relief that on Saturday night there wasn't really a victory to claim. And if the last days of the campaign were to be taken as a sample of what each side was offering, it was probably just as well.

Tony Abbott had never really presented himself as a prime minister: he had always been the opposition leader, attacking the government from all directions but offering noth-

ing much in return. It was all about them, not about him.

And after this 36 hour, or 42 hour, or five week sleepless marathon he was okay, as opposition leader this was the role he had chosen right from the start and at least he could claim consistency.

What if she had stayed loyal to Rudd and been content to wait until after the election when she could have had the leadership without the stigma of treachery?

by Mungo MacCallum



But incredibly Gillard spent the last 24 hours chasing him down the same road of negativity.

She sounded not just desperate and panic stricken, but a trifle unhinged. It was not about her, it was all about Abbott, she raved. He was the great destroyer, the enemy of all that was good and decent. Not only that, he would bring back WorkChoices...

Well hang on a minute. Gillard was the incumbent, the Prime Minister. It was her job to be positive about her government; she should have been saying Vote For Me, not Vote Against Him. This was elementary, politics 101. Either she had acquired a political death wish or she was still listening to the

strategists of Sussex Street, which amounted to the same thing. Up to this point I had retained a shred of optimism; I had relied on the hope that Labor's expertise in holding on to its marginals against the odds might just push the government over the line. It now seemed improbable; any remaining swinging voters would surely have succumbed to Gillard's own despair.

It became a matter of what ifs. What if Gillard had resisted the pressure to make a cynical promise to build the Parramatta to Epping railway, thus aligning and identifying herself with the loathed and doomed regime in Macquarie Street?

What if she had rejected the advice to go early, and had waited until October to establish herself in the job and take full advantage of the high moral ground of incumbency?

What if she had not accepted the Right's blandishments, stayed loyal to Kevin Rudd and been content to wait until after the election when, win, lose or draw, she could have had the leadership without the stigma of treachery?

What if she had joined Rudd to insist that climate change was indeed the great challenge and the Emissions Trading Scheme should stay front and centre in the government's platform?

And, the biggest what if of all: what if the government

had defied the cowardice of the numbers men and gone to a double dissolution on the issue of climate change back in February – just six months ago?

I spent much of the day in such pointless contemplation, and I wondered if Gillard had the same thoughts as she made her way back to Altona to join the sullen and disgruntled voters, queuing to vote in an election they would rather not have had, to contemplate a choice they did not want to make.

There is still a possibility that Gillard could survive in a minority government; she will get the support of the green Adam Brandt in Melbourne, and can hope for Andrew Wilkie in Dennison if he gets over the line. But she will still need at least one of the three resident rural independents, Bob Katter, Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott.

All three are former Nationals but, as South Australian premier Mike Rann has pointed out, they left the Nats for a reason; they may be conservatives but they are not part of the pack.

And all three have expressed strong support for Labor's national broadband plan, which could still be the game breaker.

But this is all speculation and fantasy: it would be at least another week before the fat lady was even ready to clear her throat. On the morning after the night before, only one thing is certain:

Labor has lost the confidence of most Australians in the space of less than a year, and the architects of the policy failures which had brought this about through their cynicism, cowardice and self-importance should be hung by their testicles and lashed savagely with bulls' pizples.



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