



Australian
Institute of
Architects

QLD

ABN 72 000 023 012

The Royal Australian Institute of Architects
trading as Australian Institute of Architects

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7 September 2023

Professor Simon Biggs

Vice Chancellor

James Cook University

By email: vc@jcu.edu.au

Re: **Support for the retention of the JCU planning and urban design programs**

Dear Professor Simon Biggs

I am writing to you to strongly express my concern, disappointment and objection to the proposed disestablishment of the Bachelor of Planning and Master of Planning and Urban Design programs in Cairns and Townsville. The importance of the James Cook University (JCU) planning and urban design programs should not be undervalued, as these courses provide a vital local source of professional insight and research regarding urban design and planning issues that are unique to your region. Further, the skilled urban designers and planners that graduate from those programs are of great value to these growing communities as they apply their specialist knowledge to assist practice and governments to shape North and Far North Queensland.

The establishment of a planning course in the early 1990s was an important and significant milestone for North and Far North Queensland. A local tertiary planning course for the first time was available and encouraged local students to 'stay local' with their tertiary studies. As you are aware, prior to this course, students with an interest in planning or design had to travel to Brisbane to undertake tertiary studies in these disciplines. The travel miles for such commuting is neither financially or climatically affordable, while relocation to Brisbane tended to cause graduates to remain in Brisbane for employment.

Naturally, the ultimate beneficiaries of these courses beyond the graduates are the communities in North and Far North Queensland. JCU graduates provide local government, state government agencies and private consultancies with a local source of highly skilled, well-educated planning and design professionals with skills in the fields of regional planning, indigenous land management, environmental planning in world heritage areas together with a grounding in urban design that is focussed on a small town/regional context. It is this mix that is important to the professions and employers.

In this regard, I note that Tropical Design Studio received a Minister's Award for Urban Design in 2021 for the *Strategic concept masterplans in northern Queensland country towns* project a collaboration between the Tropical Urbanism and Design Lab (TUD Lab) at James Cook University (JCU) together with CA Architects, LA3 Landscape Architecture and TPG Architects with Tablelands Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council and Hinchinbrook Shire Council.



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In an era where we know that the quality of our towns and places in which we live influences all components of our daily life and where good design is a critical ingredient in promoting long-term economic, social and environmental benefits, the collaborative approach demonstrated by TUB through the *Strategic concept masterplans in northern Queensland country towns* project is an exemplar of what is required to give students the necessary skills for application in real world scenarios.

It is also important to acknowledge that JCU's program holds a unique distinction as the only tropical planning and urban design program in Australia. In the 21st Century where issues are frequently centred around climate change concerns, this program serves as a critical source of education and research focused on addressing challenges pertinent to tropical regions. The program's contribution is invaluable in charting a sustainable path forward for such areas.

As we move towards the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games where legacy is an issue at the front of everybody's mind and in light of the issues noted above, I request that the proposal to disestablish the Bachelor of Planning and Master of Planning and Urban Design Programs be withdrawn. Instead, let the enduring legacy of JCU together with the collaboration of key stakeholders be the ongoing support for these programs so that they can continue to serve the interests of North and Far North Queensland and beyond.

Should you require any further information or seek to collaborate on securing a positive outcome that aligns with the needs of North and Far North Queensland, please contact me via a reply e-mail at the Institute or on at my practice at info@degenhartshedd.com.au or by phone on 0432 861 536.

I would like to express my sincere hope that the many submissions made by government, professional organisations, and industry representatives may have an influence on this key decision for the future of the Cairn and Townsville Regions.

Yours sincerely

Amy Degenhart LFRAIA
Queensland Chapter President
Australian Institute of Architects