

National champion is simply majestic

BALLINA has a big thing which is a national champion — and it's not the Big Prawn.

With the recent controversy over the removal of a Moreton Bay fig at Lennox Head, many will be pleased to know this giant is a tree.

The Norfolk Island pine tree — *Araucaria heterophylla* — which sits beside Shaws Bay in the beer garden of the popular Shaws Bay Hotel has been listed as an “Australian champion” of its species in a tree register.

It shares the title on mainland Australia with two other Norfolk Pines — one at Gerringong on the South Coast of NSW, and the other at Raymond Terrace just to the north of Newcastle.

There are a couple of other bigger trees on Norfolk Island itself.

The tree register it is listed on is the work of Sydney man Derek McIntosh.

Now, it's not a formal register, so it doesn't have any clout in terms of the rules and regulations on the removal of trees.

Mr McIntosh is simply a fan of big trees and was inspired to create the register 10 years ago after seeing a similar register in the USA.

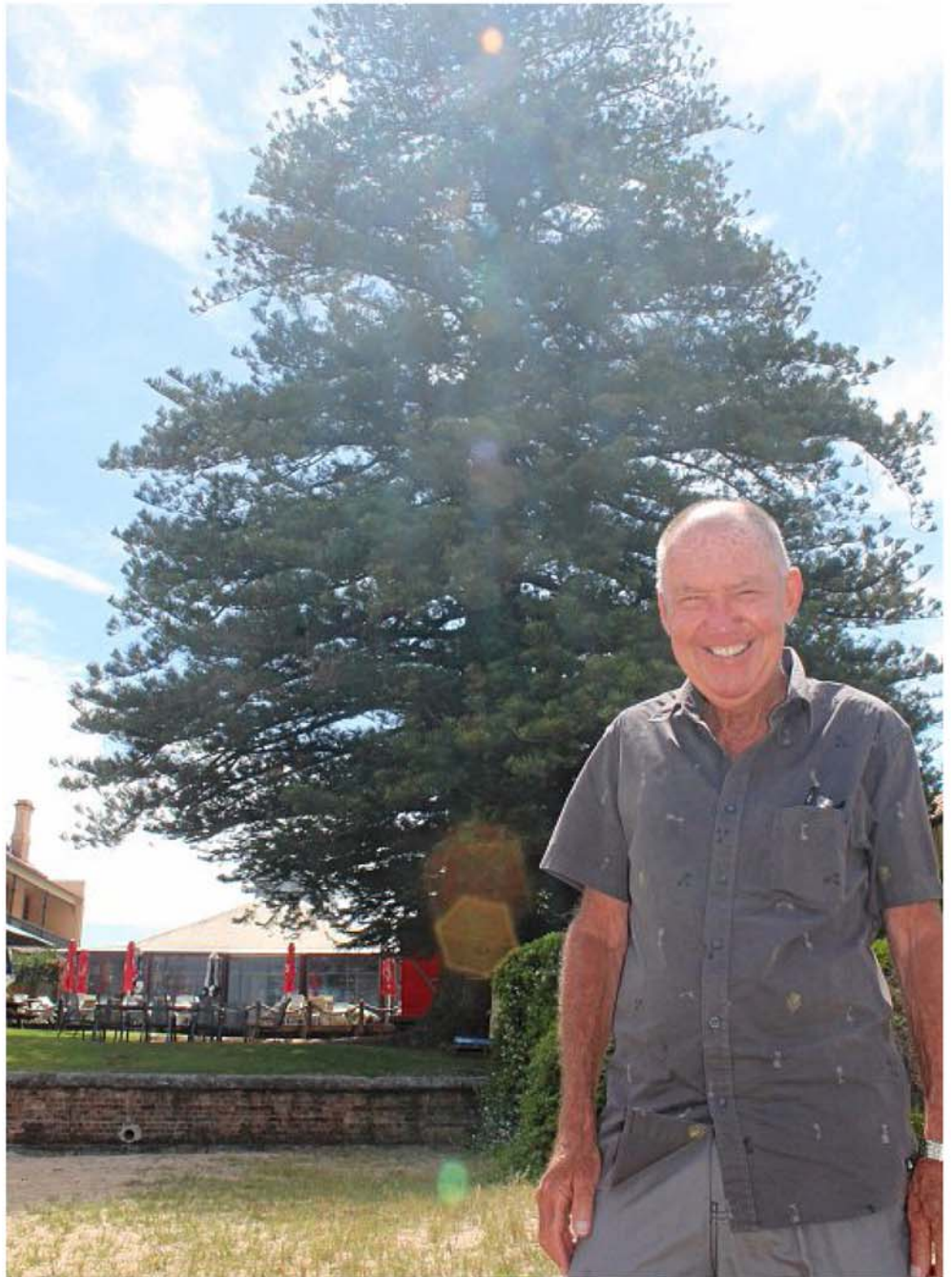
He said big trees have a certain “majesty”.

“When I touch old trees, I think about what they've been through and survived, and the magnificence of them,” he said.

“Trees are items of great beauty.”

The former real estate developer has no botanical qualifications, but said he relies on “expert supporters that advise on the botanical aspects of the nominated species”.

The register works on a points system, taking into account the height, trunk circumference and crown of trees of particular species.



CHAMPION TREE: Licensee of the Shaws Bay Hotel, Brendan Byrne, with the Norfolk Pine that has been listed as an Australian champion tree. PHOTO: GRAHAM BROADHEAD

He said if the points are within 5% of other trees, they share the title of the “champion”.

Anyone can nominate a tree for inclusion in the register.

The nominator for the Shaws Bay tree, Brian Myers, happens to be a member of the Australian

branch of the International Dendrology Society, which met in Ballina in October.

The conference delegates visited the Shaws Bay Hotel and discovered the tree.

Licensee of the Shaws Bay Hotel, Brendan Byrne, welcomed the listing.

He has used the height of the tree in trivia

competitions.

As for the specs: the tree is estimated to be 110-years-old; its height is 38m; the circumference of the trunk is 6.66m; and the crown of the tree is 25m.

For more information, see the website nationalregisterofbigtrees.com.au.