

It's tree-mendous

Prince St fig is one of biggest and best



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WHAT'S green, 26m tall, 12.6m round, more than 130 years old and makes its home near the river end of Prince St, Grafton?

Anyone hoping for some kind of jolly green giant is out of luck – it's the magnificent fig tree near the corner of Prince and Victoria Sts which has now joined about 500 other "champion" trees from around Australia on the National Register of Big Trees.

The register is an ever-growing online listing of some of Australia's largest trees and was created by Derek McIntosh of Balgowlah, NSW.

Members of the public are encouraged to submit tree nominations which are given a point score generated by adding its trunk circumference, height and average crown spread.

Nick Rogers from Essential Energy Grafton nominated the fig tree in Grafton – a Ficus virens or white fig which was awarded a score of 610 points.

Mr McIntosh, who operates the register using his own

time and money, said the idea was to map and record some of Australia's largest or "champion" trees.

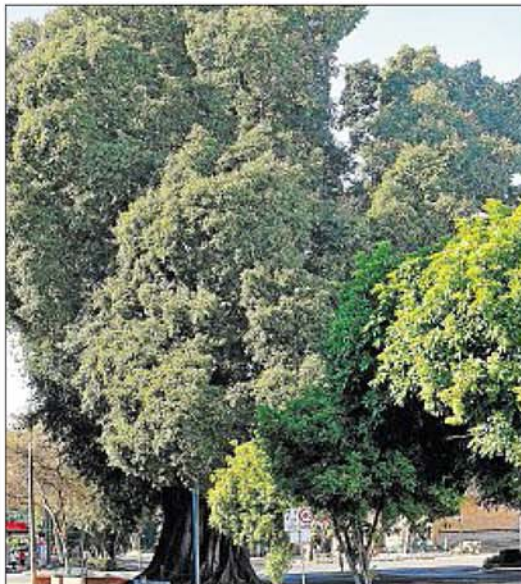
"I've always had a great interest in trees – I grew up in South Africa and moved to Australia a long time ago – driving around looking at some of the trees here, I often wondered which were the biggest?" Mr McIntosh said.

Mr McIntosh discovered the United States Forests Department operated a similar system and modelled his register on that. Since launching the register just over two years ago, he said the response had been great with just under 500 trees noted so far and more entries coming in all the time.

He said apart from being a useful and interesting reference, the register was also aimed to make people more aware of the trees around them.

"It's got a ripple effect – people become more interested in trees, they appreciate them more I think and it's a lot of fun too, it's the sort of thing I hope in time, kids will get involved in," he said.

Mr McIntosh said so far only three jacaranda trees from the entire country had



GREEN GIANT: The enormous fig tree on the corner of Prince and Victoria Sts, Grafton, has been entered into National Register of Big Trees.

been logged on the register so he encouraged Clarence Valley residents to get out there, find the largest jaca they could and nominate it.

To nominate trees or to browse some of the champion specimens already listed visit www.nationalregisterofbig-trees.com.au.

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Help map biodiversity through the living atlas

By **DOMINIC ZIETSCH**

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WHEREVER you live in the Clarence Valley you're surrounded by thousands of species of plants and animals and a new initiative needs your eyes and ears to help document them all.

The Atlas of Living Australia is a joint initiative between the CSIRO, government departments, universities and museums around the country.

According to Dr Kevin Thiele, a botanist involved in creating the atlas, the project was designed to provide a better picture of Australia's biodiversity.

"There are huge gaps in our knowledge of Australian biodiversity – the best estimate we have for the number of Australian species is 570,000, and nearly three quarters of these are unknown or undescribed," Dr Thiele said.

Although a lot of work had been done mapping the location and density of different species in Australia, project director Donald Hobern said members of the public were now needed to help fill-in the gaps.

"We're calling on Australians to re-engage with the natural world. We want them to report on their neighbours – not their human neighbours but on the plants and animals

in their gardens, nature strips, paddocks and parks," Mr Hobern said.

"Everyone can help to build a better picture of Australia's biodiversity by contributing sightings and photos to the atlas website. Even a sighting of a common bird in your backyard, neighbourhood or paddock may increase our understanding of how that species is distributed across the country.

"The species may not have been recorded before in that location, or it may not have

been recorded there for a long time or its distribution may be changing."

Mr Hobern said anyone who wanted to get involved can report a plant or animal living near them by visiting www.ala.org.au and following the instructions.

He said sightings and photos already uploaded by people in the local area can be viewed by entering a postcode or area name which can give residents a snapshot of the flora and fauna living in their area.



COMMON SIGHT: The magpie is just one of the thousands of species of animals and plants which call the Clarence Valley home. A project called The Atlas of Living Australia is asking for the public to upload sightings and photos of different species to build-up a better picture of Australian biodiversity.

PHOTO: MAX FLEET