Media Release
04/11/2026

Removal of unsafe fig tree at Rex Smeal Park to proceed

Douglas Shire Council is preparing to proceed with the removal of the fig tree at Rex Smeal Park on Monday, 9 November, following the Applicant's decision to discontinue legal proceedings challenging the removal.

The works were previously placed on hold after Council voluntarily agreed to maintain the status quo while the matter was before the Supreme Court.

Mayor Lisa Scomazzon said the decision to remove the tree had never been taken lightly.

"I understand many people feel a deep connection to this tree and those feelings are respected," Mayor Scomazzon said.

"I've been touched by the many stories and memories people have shared. It is connected to special moments in their lives and we understand there is genuine sadness about losing this tree and we share that sentiment."

Mayor Scomazzon said safety remained Council's number one priority.

"Rex Smeal Park is one of our most loved and most visited public spaces, and Council has a responsibility to ensure it remains safe for everyone who uses it," Mayor Scomazzon said.

"While we understand the community's connection to this tree, the consequences of a large branch or canopy failure, particularly above an area used by children and families, are simply too serious to ignore."

The period since the original removal date has generated significant community discussion about the future of the tree and its importance to the community.

"I recognise that many people wanted more time and more information to understand how Council reached this decision and we've taken that feedback on board," Mayor Scomazzon said.

The reports commissioned by Council found fungal decay had "severely compromised the structural integrity of several load-bearing limbs" and confirmed that while "crown reduction" can reduce loading and branch failures, it "cannot restore structural capacity already lost to decay, cracking or delamination, nor can it slow or stop progressive fungal decay".

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Thermal imaging, which detected no wildlife, including birds or mammals last month, also revealed temperature variations, which was identified as being indicative of fungal decay throughout the tree.

"While we recognise the grief and disappointment many people feel, we must also ensure Rex Smeal Park remains a safe place for residents, visitors and families."

Temporary safety measures and exclusion zones will remain in place during the tree's removal. Council is also progressing replacement planting and shade improvements at the park, including an advanced replacement Weeping Fig (*Ficus Benjamina)* and installing shade sails at Rex Smeal Park to help maintain shade and amenity into the future.

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