



Media release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Special treatment for two grand old dames of the Clarence

HOW do you move a 77-year-old, 18 tonne rusting and fragile relic that's been in the one spot for 38 years without breaking it?

That's the question facing Clarence Valley Council project manager, Justin Menzies, as he contemplates how to relocate an old sugar cane barge at Ferry Park, Maclean, to the Lawrence Museum.

He hasn't found the answer yet, but one thing he does know is that 'carefully' will figure prominently in any considerations.

Until the 1970s the barges were a common sight on the lower Clarence River and its tributaries as they carted hand-harvested sugar cane to the Harwood Sugar Mill for processing.

But now there is only one left; the only physical reminder of a bygone era of Clarence Valley agriculture and it has fallen into disrepair. The council is working with the volunteers at the Lawrence Museum to give it a safe new home.

Perimeter safety fencing will be installed on Thursday and on Friday Mr Menzies will join an engineer, a draftsman and shipwright on site at Ferry Park to start what is expected to be a fairly lengthy planning process for the vessel's relocation.

To minimise possible damage they will use a vacuum excavator to dig around the hull to investigate its structural integrity and the best way to move it, and hope to be able to design a cradle that can go under the vessel so it can be lifted in one piece.

If it can, Mr Menzies said it was hoped a cradle could be designed that would support the structure of the vessel so it didn't collapse while being lifted.

"If that all goes to plan we'll then need to load it onto heavy transport one afternoon when there's light, but we'd have to move it under police escort in the middle of the night when the traffic is light," he said.

"It's 5.5 metres wide, so transporting it through the day would cause quite a disruption to traffic."

Mr Menzies said the vessel was too big to go on the Lawrence Ferry, so would have to go over land – probably either up the Pacific Highway and back through the Summerland Way or south along the highway and then along the Gwydir Highway and finally along the Summerland Way.

“I think this is the last journey it will ever make,” he said. “And it’s going to be one of the hare and the tortoise with, hopefully, the tortoise winning the race.”

Mr Menzies said the ferry at the park named in its honour would also be relocated and it, too, was going to be an exercise where many heads would be used to get the right result.

“It is in a serious state of disrepair and will need to be dismantled,” he said.

“We’ll salvage whatever we can and transport that to the Lawrence Museum to be rebuilt.”

Lawrence Museum vice president, Roz Jones, said getting the barge and ferry on site was part of a long-term plan to develop a museum for Clarence River vessels because, currently, there is none.

She said the museum’s volunteers would restore or, if necessary, rebuild the vessels and would be seeking grant funding to help with the project.

She said the museum already had a heritage-listed flood boat that was currently being restored through grant funding and was hoping to secure a tug, The Beardmore, which towed the cane barges around the Clarence and its tributaries.

“It won’t be a quick process,” she said.





Captions:

A tug and cane barges in Sportsmans Creek, Lawrence, in the 1960s.

The decaying cane barge at Ferry Park.

Release ends.

For media inquiries contact Clarence Valley Council communications coordinator, David Bancroft, on 6643 0230 or 0429 104 118.