

A large, bright orange prawn sculpture is mounted on a dark green metal frame. The prawn is curved, showing its head, antennae, legs, and tail. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The sculpture is the central focus of the image.

The Big Prawn of Ballina

By Sam Jackson

To describe Australia as “big” would be a bit of an understatement . Australia is the planet’s sixth largest country after Russia, Canada, China, the USA, and Brazil. At 7,692,024 square kilometres, it accounts for just five percent of the world’s land area of 149,450,000 square kilometres. And even though it is the smallest continental land mass, it is still the world’s largest island.

To add a bit of perspective , Australia is the only country in the world with a military and civil aerospace facility almost the

size of England! The Royal Australian Air Force Woomera Range Complex located in South Australia measures 122,188 square kilometres. In comparison, the whole of England measures only 130,279 square kilometres!

One would expect people with big houses to fill their space with large pieces of furniture, so it might not come as a complete surprise if I were to tell you that this big country called Australia is also filled with “big things” - but not exactly the sort you might expect.

Dotted all over every state and territory in Australia are huge structures, comprising of a mixture of often whimsical architecture and sculptures. There are currently over 200 such structures and many say that no Australian road trip is complete without visiting some of these 'Big Things'. Some highlights include:



THE BIG LOBSTER, 'LARRY', IN KINGSTON, SOUTH AUSTRALIA



THE BIG CAPTAIN COOK IN CAIRNS



THE BIG BANANA, COFFS HARBOUR, NEW SOUTH WALES



THE BIG POO, MORNINGTON PENINSULA, VICTORIA



THE BIG TAP, PHILLIP ISLAND, VICTORIA



Of all these giants, my favourite has got to be The Big Prawn of Ballina in New South Wales.

The Big Prawn was built in 1990 to celebrate the local prawning industry. It was designed by South Australian sculptor James Martin, who came up with the idea for a 27-metre prawn, made of steel and concrete, weighing 33 tonnes. This prawn was to be 30,000 times larger than a real prawn, or twice the size of a humpback whale!

When it was first erected, the Big Prawn did not have a tail, and was situated atop a service station. Locals recall that it had a spiral staircase inside it, and only after you walked up this staircase would you realise that you were

inside the head of the prawn. It had two large eyes made of perspex that you could look out of. Children and adults alike enjoyed the experience of getting fish and chips or ice cream from the shop underneath, and then climbing up the big prawn to look out of its eyes. It allowed them to imagine what it might be like to be a real prawn underwater.

Years passed and business took a bad turn. Many shops began to close. The service station was the last to go in February 2010. By this point, the Big Prawn's colour had also begun to fade, leaving it a mere shadow of its former glory. Some locals began calling it an **eyesore**, a disgrace to the town. The local council even voted for the prawn to be **demolished**.

Just when it seemed that all hope was lost, a local student named Michael Townsend started a Facebook petition to save the prawn. He collected thousands of messages from all around Australia and overseas in support of keeping the prawn. This public pressure eventually saved the prawn from being torn down. And following yet another twist of luck, a multinational hardware store bought some nearby land and along with it, they also bought the prawn. After moving it 100 metres down the road from where it originally stood, they spent a further \$400,000 resurrecting the prawn, even giving it a brand new tail.



The Big Prawn is moved to its new location.



The new Big Prawn receives its first coat of paint after being relocated.



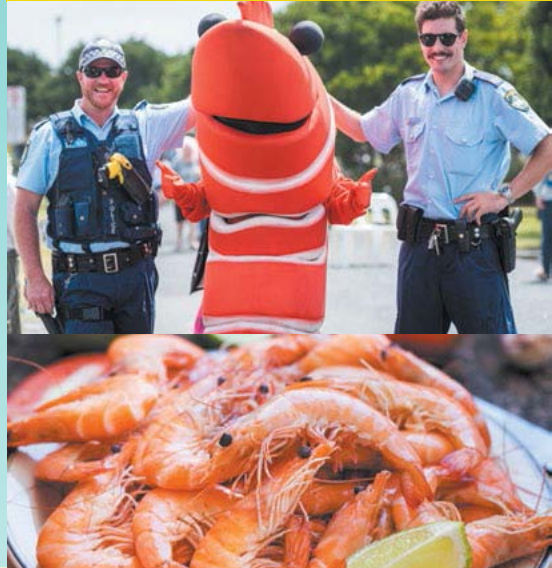
The handsome Big Prawn today.

This decision was made in no small part due to prior knowledge of public sentiment at the time. Saving the prawn was a wise business move as it appeased the locals, and made them warm to the new hardware store more quickly. Today, the prawn stands proudly in the car park of the Ballina Bunnings Warehouse and continues to attract thousands of visitors every year.

The tale of the Big Prawn represents the never ending struggle against **entropy**, inspires hope in mankind, and more importantly, serves as a daily (giant) reminder not to take ourselves too seriously.



The Prawn Festival is a much-anticipated annual event in Ballina.



LEVEL : (C)

understatement (n) – the presentation of something as being smaller or less good or important than it really is.

perspective (n) – a particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.

whimsical (a) – playfully quaint or fanciful, especially in an appealing and amusing way.

eyesore (n) – a thing that is very ugly, especially a building or structure.

demolish (v) – to pull or knock down (a building).

entropy (n) – lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.