# Byron Shire Council: The Byron Model

*How do we want to make democratic decisions in Byron Shire Council that can be widely supported?*

## Recommendations Report

# Introduction

The Byron Model consists of three aspects of the community: residents, stakeholders and councillors.

The citizens' panel is a group of 18 randomly selected individuals representing a broad cross section of the Byron Shire Community. The citizens' group met on six occasions over a period of three months to address the following question:

***"How do want to make democratic decisions in Byron Shire that can be widely supported"***

The stakeholders group consisted of representatives from five different organisations: Byron Chamber of Commerce, Brunswick Heads Chamber of Commerce, Destination Byron, Community Alliance for Byron Shire and the Byron Youth Service. These groups met on two occasions to develop their own answers to the question.

Councillors also met on two occasions to develop their own response to the question.

All three groups meet on two occasions at the end of the process to find common ground agreement on each of the recommendations that are in this report.

In these meetings**,** through group discussion and voting, we identified the strengths and weaknesses of the current council decision-making process and its impact on the community.

The group was a diverse collection of people, and a wide range of views, opinions and ideas were actively discussed. To further inform its decision

making, the group engaged with external stakeholders, representatives from Byron Shire Council, and sought opinions from experts across the fields of Local Government and Political Science

There was a wide recognition amongst the group that the key issues lacking in the current council structure and approach to engage community were:

- Communication
- Trust
- Identity, Culture and Diversity

With this in mind the group identified and developed recommendations across these themes, along with key triggers to determine how, when and what level of community engagement should be undertaken.

The group is satisfied that these recommended triggers and themes offer insight and a practical resolution to improve democratic decision making that is widely supported in Byron Shire.

# Recommendations

# Processes for community involvement and engagement

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Incentives for community participation |
| **Rationale** |
| <ul><li>Improve current levels of community participation in engagement/decision making processes</li><li>Enhance community participation rates and increase diversity of respondents with the aim of reflecting the Byron Shire demographic</li><li>Intrinsic examples - personalised 'thank you' email, follow up communication regarding outcomes of consultation, publishing of names of consultation participants</li><li>Extrinsic examples<ul><li>Participation in surveys - tip voucher, go into draw for a voucher</li><li>Attendance at consultation meeting - catering, door prize</li></ul></li></ul> |
| **Source of evidence** |
| <ul><li>Example Byron model - provision of catering and $400 reimbursement</li><li>Example Blues festival ticket draw in current Tourism survey</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Project timeframes are factored in to engagement process |
| **Rationale** |
| <ul><li>Early engagement as policy for community consultation to enable the community to have enough time to make considered decisions/opinions</li><li>Timeframe for consultation must be flexible and reflect nature of project</li><li>Quality community engagement rather than rushing</li><li>Considerations must be made for emergencies eg environmental catastrophe, disasters</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Council to implement location specific consultation when project/issue impacts on specific area local residents and stakeholders have consultation priority over other groups and more weight in final decision |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| <ul><li>Efforts should be made by Council to engage on a village model where appropriate</li><li>EG monthly village meeting in the halls initially facilitated by BSC with community lead chair to discuss planning issues coming up in the village and larger area as well a communal meal. There will be a focus to educate and politicise the local community and to provide an opportunity for empowerment and individual input into council planning decisions.</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Council to be obliged to engage community on a project or concern raised by three progressive thresholds of x # of Shire residents that will lead to different levels of engagement. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| Public initiation of projects, innovation or existing issues of high interest or high impact on community<br><br><ul><li>Benchmarks can be established in council for high public interest.</li><li>That the council discuss with the broader community the possibility of providing that service.</li><li>Thresholds, methods and outcomes are to be developed by in further consultation with the Byron Model Panel.</li></ul> |

| **Recommendation** |
| --- |
| We retain the Community Roundtable as is (residents' groups)<br><br>Council to merge the current 'Business roundtable' and 'Community services roundtable' into a single forum.<br><br>Council to conduct a 'combined' roundtable at least once per year – inviting participants from both the 'Residents roundtable' and the 'Business and Community Services roundtable'.<br>That a 'Code of Conduct' be implemented for all roundtables. |

| **Rationale** |
|---|
| We would like to see a new 'Community Services roundtable'.<br><br>The aim is to aggregate the collective wisdoms and aspirations of members of each silo to participate in scheduled brainstorming forums. The exact way that these emerge can be determined by Council in collaboration with the different roundtables.<br><br>At a maximum, there are to be 9 meetings a year (to ensure Council/Councilors attendance). 4 x Community Roundtables, 4 x Community Services and Business Roundtables, 1 x Combined Roundtable.<br><br>Prepare a 'Code of Conduct' for all council roundtables to improve meeting participation and productivity. It's perceived that the 'Community Roundtable' is currently working well, the others aren't - due to the '*amount'* and '*quality'* of participants… as well as how the agenda is set and meeting moderated. The code of conduct helps build respect within the groups.<br><br>The 'Code of Conduct' should cover:<br>- How the code itself is communicated and agreed to by all attendees in advance of meetings.<br>- How each meeting agenda is formed (i.e. its structure) and how it's communicated in advance.<br>- How a meeting is to be facilitated, focusing *only* on educating and informing participants on the agendas topics in order to facilitate solutions-based dialogue, and when to interject and steer the conversation to a solution for the agenda item.<br>- How to target meeting participants in a democratic, unbiased manner. |

| **Recommendation** |
|---|
| Replicate the Brunswick Heads Chamber Meeting with GM with the other Chambers where they have a regular meeting. |

| **Rationale** |
|---|
| Format is that each of the Chambers have a regular meeting with the GM (noting requirement for Mayor or Councillor).<br><br>This should be replicated across the Chambers (dependent on each Chamber agreeing that this is a useful process). |

| **Recommendation** |
| --- |
| Stakeholder involvement in the pre-budget process. |
| **Rationale** |
| Format is that Council forms and invited stakeholder group that takes specific line items and helps specifically target further stakeholder engagement.<br><br>Small stakeholders meeting looks at pre-budgetary meetings, then that goes to staff and they create proposals that go to community conversations that contribute to the discretionary spending.<br><br>The stakeholders to be invited are both business and non-for-profit organisations, but the aim should be a 'small' conversation between council staff and stakeholders.<br><br>Stakeholders commit to *helping* Council communicate the budgetary process.<br><br>It is important that this is seen as an iterative process. |

| **Recommendation** |
| --- |
| Engage a local consultant where practical or appropriate but, if a Consultant from outside the Byron Shire is engaged by Council they must have access to a selection of knowledgeable locals to ensure the Byron Shire culture is maintained and preferably enhanced. |
| **Rationale** |
| The community has many useful resources for advice that should be preferred over external sources. Local knowledge is undervalued. |

| **Recommendation** |
| --- |
| Development and Review of Council's policies that relate to vulnerable groups and actively collaborate with necessary stakeholders throughout the process. |
| **Rationale** |
| Youth and other stakeholder involvement provides the valuable insight of a demographic that is often hard to reach.<br><br>Making engagement and policy meaningful and useful to vulnerable groups. |

# Recommendations to improve:
## Trust

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Council should have measures in place to evaluate organisational performance |
| Process of independent auditing to be communicated to public. |
| **Rationale** |
| <ul><li>Unbiased</li><li>Provide accountability</li><li>Project evaluations</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Transparency on wins and losses |
| Communication by publishing in media the wins and losses |
| **Rationale** |
| <ul><li>To have the information online so people could access each individual project and the results</li><li>Quarterly radio show - engagement</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Include trustworthiness in Council's values |
| Published commitment to trustworthiness |
| **Rationale** |
| Council publishes a commitment to demonstrate trustworthiness in dealings with community. Commitment is made available in public spaces, online and in print. |
| This could be implemented in the marketing strategy. |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Every project should end with a formal Project Implementation Review to build trust |
| **Rationale** |
| <ul><li>To prevent similar mistakes or errors of judgement happening over again</li><li>Increased transparency leads to increased trust</li><li>Decrease costs - human resource and other (eg community time, consumables)</li><li>Will set precedents leading to increased critical analysis skills and generation of innovative concepts & ideas</li><li>Note that this recommendation is designed to improve project efficiency overall and not engagement specifically</li></ul> |
| **Source of evidence** |
| E.g. Bangalow paid parking and Lighthouse roundabout art |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Mayor and GM 'meeting diary' published online, after the fact. |
| **Rationale** |
| After the fact, list of Mayoral and GM meetings for transparency. This would be located on the website. |

Recommendations to improve:
## Communication

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Clear communication of what is a State-level or Local Government decision |
| Rationale |
| <ul><li>Explanation of the decision, who owns it and what agencies are responsible.</li><li>Unique identifier / watermark on each DA or project</li><li>Clear communication using current methods.</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Build an app / online platform for engagement and deliberation and incentive people to use it |
| Rationale |
| <ul><li>Wider cross section of the community to be reached</li><li>Notifications on current issues you are interested in</li><li>Access to contact certain people</li><li>Modern way to communicate with people</li><li>Local business incentives - cross promotion, advertising</li></ul> |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Timeliness in engagement and closing the loop |
| Rationale |
| Allows gathering of feedback before decision making process begins, during the process/ending with post project review to improve transparency and trust. |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Council to implement and publish project trackability |
| Rationale |
| Implementing the use of a broad range of mediums to primarily improve engagement and trust.<br><br>Improved online platform/app to be backed up with other mediums like letters, rates notices and hard copy information.<br><br>Trackability means the Council are prepared to update information as processes continue.<br><br>Based on the existing model in BSC's YourSay portal. Include project milestones and opportunities for community engagement (with emphasis on level of engagement). |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| The website should be redesigned for ease of access and readability to the wide audience who use it. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| This recommendation relates to the use of good clear communication, plain language and marketing as highlighted in other recommendations and include things like search engine improvement and foregrounding the more important information, the use of more tiles, a consistent view across devices etc.<br><br>E.g.<br>   - Tweed Shire Council Website https://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/<br>   - The TSC website has many more links on the home page to more detailed information.<br>   - They have more links in the header and footer so that information is more readily available without multiple clicks. |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Council to integrate select Marketing initiatives into its business processes to improve:<br>1. the *style* of information shared*,*<br>2. the *distribution* of information,<br>3. the *access* and *understanding* of this information. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| Councils 'reputation', 'level of community engagement' and 'level of community understanding' will benefit greatly from applying council resources (by way of marketing sub-contractors or employees) to:<br><br>1. the *style* of information it shares…<br>-    Simplified language and tone across all of council's public facing content, and across all distribution channels.<br>-    Consider sending 'segment specific communications' (e.g. tourism operators) to improve engagement by special interest.<br>-    Audit and simplify consumer path to information across all channels.<br>-    Brand continuity across all marketing/communication efforts.<br><br>2. the *distribution*, *access* and *understanding* of information….<br>Improved frequency and use of a variety of communication channels to broadcast key |

messaging… including Website, Social Media, Radio, Emails, Print, Post and Digital advertising.

Recommendations to improve:
**Identity, Diversity & Culture**

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| A commitment to engage across Shire demographics |
| **Rationale** |
| Council should engage marginalised groups like the youth, elderly, homeless, unemployed, people with disabilities, mental health issues and people without access to information or skills to access information. |


| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Use of Plain Language |
| **Rationale** |
| Byron Shire Council should improve its communication by using the principles of plain language across all methods of communication with the community, and internally, to ensure accessibility, including:<br><br>● Knowing and writing for the intended audience<br>● Using an active voice<br>● Simple and clear formats<br>● Clarity in the message<br>● Using key messages<br>● Using diagrams and images where relevant<br><br>This is an area where Byron Shire Council should undertake training. |
| Source of evidence |
| See 'Checklist for Plain Language' https://plainlanguage.gov/resources/checklists/checklist/ |

| Recommendation |
| --- |
| Social events to build cohesion and connection in communities |
| **Rationale** |
| Council and Community come together to build cohesive and positive relationships in a social setting.<br><br>This reinforces connection, acceptance and positivity.<br><br>These events are an opportunity to raise awareness and engage the community on upcoming projects. |

# Community Involvement and Engagement Framework

The following pro forma is proposed to be used of part of every council project to determine the appropriate level of community engagement for every council undertaking.

It consists of the following components:
- Engagement score (pro forma)
- Engagement level (scale)

This process will enable evaluating the level at which the community need to be involved in the council's deliberations and decisions.

The pro forma is created to determine who is impacted and what level of impact the project has on the community based on a software calculated score.

The "engagement scale" outlines at what level the community should be engaged.

5 levels of engagement:

1. INFORM
   Provide the public with balanced and objective information to help them understand solutions, alternatives, opportunities and/or problems.

2. CONSULT
   Collect people's opinions, understand people's wants, create trust and transparency.

3. INVOLVE
   Achieve a deeper understanding of people's concerns and aspirations through feedback.

4. COLLABORATE
   Partner with the public in each aspect of definition including the development of alternative and the identification of the preferred solution

5. EMPOWER
   Place final decision in the hands of the public. To create the opportunity for byron shire community members to participate in democratic decisions.

| Score (% calculated by pro forma) | Engagement |
|---|---|
| 0 - 20 | INFORM<br>Ex: website, letters, etc. |
| 20 - 40 | CONSULT<br>Ex: surveys, deliberative polling, crowdsourcing |
| 40 - 60 | INVOLVE<br>Ex: Mini-publics with only advisory power<br>("Kitchen table" meetings) |
| 60 - 80 | COLLABORATE<br>Ex: Mini-publics ⇒ people's<br>recommendations/propositions/solutions |
| 80 - 100 | EMPOWER<br>Mini-publics<br>Vote, referendum |

**Conditions:**

- No empowerment can be given to community without first going through deliberative/collaborative stages. For example: there cannot be a referendum without first having a mini-public of some sort organized.

- If the pro forma shows a strong LOCAL-level impact rather than SHIRE-level impact, community involvement need to be be prompted on a local level.

**Pro forma**

Each person assessing the project need to fill out the pro forma (there cannot be only one assessor).

It is recommended that the pro forma has to be filled by at least 2 independent staff members. This is to ensure accountability and transparency.

The completion of this proform needs to be accountable and transparent and the mechanisms for this will be determined through further consultation with the Byron Model Panel.

**Trackability and Review**

Review of the pro forma score needs to happen at regular intervals on a project timeline to determine the status and level of engagement necessary at identified project milestones.

Ongoing publication of project process, milestones, project pro forma and Project Implementation Review for each project will improve trust and accountability for each council project. Project Management outlines and milestones can also be implemented into this published timeline - refer to the recommendation on trackability.

**Triggers**

Categories that require active engagement seem to be linked to Finance, Tourism, Health, Arts/Culture, Development, Vulnerable groups and past mistakes/learnt lessons.

Triggers agreed upon were:

- Level of community concern
- Environmental impact, long and short term
- Public health
- Impact on local culture, arts & creativity
- Impact on 'place making'
- Cost of implementation
- Indigenous focus
- Commercial, residential development and growth
- Known concern or contentiousness of issue
- Local economic impact

Pro forma draft:

| Trigger | Impact level |
|---|---|
| Level of concern and/or contention of the project/issue/matter to the local community. | Low / Medium / High |
| Environmental impact, long and short term. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact on the health and safety of people. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact on local culture, arts & creativity. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact on 'place making' in the local community. | Low / Medium / High |
| Cost of implementation. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact of development on commercial, residential and rural areas of the Byron Shire. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact upon/interest to the Arakwal people and Bundjalung nation is a trigger for a specific type of engagement. | Low / Medium / High |
| Impact on the local economy. | Low / Medium / High |
| **TOTAL:** | |
| Score in percentage: | |

**Community Review**

Note that this suggested pro forma is an incomplete mechanism and requires further development from council in order to determine metrics and criteria. Subsequent to this, it is recommended that the pro forma be subject to a community review process prior to implementation.

This review should include evaluating each trigger individually to consider relevance and criticality, and the final pro forma should weight each trigger according to the determined community value. The thresholds also need to be tested.

# Trigger mechanisms for community engagement

Below are trigger mechanisms for consideration in the proforma (see below).

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Level of concern and/or contention of the project/issue/matter to the local community. |
| **Rationale** |
| This is a trigger for community engagement. If BSC can recognise that an area where decision making is required is an area where the community is likely to be concerned and/or divided then community engagement is required.<br><br>The Byron Shire is home to many diverse people who can have competing interests, views and values. We have seen many issues divide the community.<br><br>BSC can reflect on past experiences, lessons learned from other projects and decisions, reflect on values and if possible, identify that the issue will cause widespread concern or contention and engage the community.<br><br>Projects that are perceived to be contentious, have significant complexity, or where similar projects have previously attracted controversy or improper levels of community engagement should be accordingly prioritised to have a higher level of Community Engagement.<br><br>This recommendation includes the risk of repercussions <u>to the project</u> if the community is not engaged. E.g. Bangalow paid parking. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Environmental impact, long and short term. |
| **Rationale** |
| The community values the special environment we share so, any project that strongly affects it needs community consultation. Will the project enhance or be detrimental to the habitat and health of our native vegetation and wildlife? The health of the humans is intrinsically intertwined with the health of the environment.<br><br>An example is Council staff using Roundup on the verges. Community consultation was needed and has changed the system. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact on the health and safety of people. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| Does the project/issue/matter impact the health and safety of people in our community? What known or potential health issues does/could the project present? |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact on local culture, arts & creativity. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| Each area in the shire has a unique regional culture and identity that needs to be valued and preserved.<br><br>Priority / inclusivity given to local artists through a process of local village panels.<br><br>A preservation of the identity of the shire.<br><br>If a decision to be made has a significant cultural impact on the community, the community needs to be involved. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact on 'place making' in the local community. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| Considered and thoughtful community involvement in 'place making' is an opportunity to create stronger relationships between the community and Council. These are often the most visible decisions.<br><br>We acknowledge that the stories of Byron Shire and the cultures of Byron Shire need to be honoured in place-making projects. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Cost of implementation. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| This trigger should consider:<br><br>1. Initial costs of the project<br>    a. Benefit to community<br>    b. Funding costs to community<br>    c. Ongoing costs to community<br>2. Costs of planning<br>    a. Council/project managers/architects etc.<br>3. Costs of doing the project<br>    a. Project costs/actual<br>4. Maintenance of the project<br>    a. Day to day<br>    b. End of life costs<br>5. Project benefit to community<br>    a. If income generating<br>    b. Who pays and benefits |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact of development on commercial, residential and rural areas of the Byron Shire. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| This relates to both Council and external developments.<br><br>● Overdevelopment is a concern in our community.<br>● Different locations and suitable developments for these area eg, tourism, tiny communities, farming, businesses etc.<br>● Projects have to sympathetic to our core values in the Shire<br>● Considering the environment, culture, different demographic sectors, social wellbeing, and community groups.<br>● Byron Shire brand - integrity, protection of dilution.<br>● Understanding the developer contributions and seeing the impact of them in the community.<br><br>By the council investing time into these different cohorts it will improve the general public relations in regards to these types of projects. The project should always have the underpinning of the brand and community values involved. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact upon/interest to the Arakwal people and Bundjalung nation is a trigger for a specific type of engagement. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| ● If the project is going to be of interest or concern to the local Indigenous people.<br>● Consideration is paid to all developments, interests to community and the Indigenous are respected - to ensure they are not trivialised, marginalised or disadvantaged. |

| Trigger |
| --- |
| Impact on the local economy. |

| Rationale |
| --- |
| ● Transparency<br>● Benefits to the community<br>● Safety<br>● Money to be fed back into the community<br>● How many years does it take to put this back into the community<br>● Tourism benefit<br>● Actual<br>● Perceived<br>● Reviews to be done regularly - stages<br>● Outcomes<br>● Community involvement in sale of assets.<br>● Caveats to be implemented into any major development. |