

Byron Shire Council: The Byron Model

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

Citizens' Recommendation Report

Introduction

The Byron Panel is a group of 18 randomly selected individuals representing a broad cross section of the Byron Shire Community. The 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”

In these meetings, through group discussion and voting, we identified the strengths and weaknesses of the current council decision-making process and their 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

Community Involvement and Engagement Framework

Recommendation
Engagement score (proforma) and engagement level (scale)
Rationale
<p>This process will enable evaluating the level at which the residents need to be involved in the council's deliberations and decisions.</p> <p>The proforma is created to determine who is impacted and what level of impact the project has on the community based on a software calculated score.</p> <p>The "engagement scale" outlines at what level the community should be engaged.</p> <p>5 levels of engagement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. INFORM To 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.4. COLLABORATE To partner with the public in each aspect of definition including the development of alternative and the identification of the preferred solution5. EMPOWER To place final decision in the hands of the public. To create the opportunity for byron shire residents to participate in democratic decisions.

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

Conditions:

- No empowerment can be given to residents 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 proforma shows a strong LOCAL-level impact rather than SHIRE-level impact (ex: bangalow paid parking), community involvement needs to be prompted on a local level (ex: mini-public with Bangalow residents)

Proforma

Each person assessing the project need to fill out the proforma (there cannot be only on assessor).

The proforma has to be filled by - at least - 2 staff members from different departments within the council.

The assessors add their name and signature to the proforma. The results need to be published publicly after the proforma has been finalised; it contributes to re-enforce transparency and trust between council and residents.

Triggers

Categories that seem to 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:

- Arts/culture/lifestyle/health
- Environmental impact
- Local economic impacts
- *Public initiation of projects*
- Indigenous focus
- Commercial, residential development + growth
- Risk to project (operational risks)
- Known concern/contentiousness of issue

Proforma draft:

Trigger	Impact level
Arts/culture/lifestyle/health Is the project related to Culture, Arts or resident's lifestyle or health?	Low / Medium / High
Environmental impact What's the environmental impact?	Low / Medium / High
Local economic impacts What's the impact on the local economic situation?	Low / Medium / High
Public initiation of projects?	Low / Medium / High
Indigenous focus What the impact of the indigenous community?	Low / Medium / High
Commercial, residential development + growth What's the impact on the commercial and residential areas and their growth?	Low / Medium / High

Risk to project?	Low / Medium / High	
Known concern/contentiousness of issue	Low / Medium / High	
Is the project's topic or location known to generate tension and division in the community?		
TOTAL:	Score in percentage	
Source or evidence:		
IAP2 Framework.		

Trigger mechanisms for community engagement

Recommendation
Concern and contention of the issue is a trigger.
Rationale
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Projects that are perceived to be contentious, 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.</p>

Recommendation
Environmental Impact, Long and short term, is a trigger.
Rationale
<p>The community values the special environment we share so any project that strongly affects it should trigger community consultation. Will the project enhance the habitat and health of our native vegetation and wildlife?</p> <p>If not, how will it affect it? How does the environmental impacts of this project affect human health and wellbeing? An example is Council staff using Roundup on the verges. Community consultation was needed and has changed the system.</p>

Recommendation
Culture, Arts & Creativity and impact on well-being are triggers.
Rationale
<p>Cultural engagement transforms a community's health and well-being. Agency is critical to involvement, attitudes and behaviours. 'Culture' defines who we are. We are the culture. It is demonstrated by our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. It aligns with our values and tells our story.</p> <p>A community's involvement in any cultural impact decisions is paramount to the ongoing and future community health of the Shire.</p> <p>If a decision to be made has a significant cultural impact on the community, the community needs to be involved.</p>

Recommendation
The costs of implementation of the project is a trigger.
Rationale
<p>This trigger should consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial costs of the project <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Benefit to community b. Funding costs to community c. Ongoing costs to community 2. Costs of planning <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Council/project managers/architects etc. 3. Costs of doing the project <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Project costs/actual 4. Maintenance of the project <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Day to day 5. Project benefit to community <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If income generating b. Who pays and benefits

Recommendation
Perceived Community Risk should be a trigger for Community Engagement.
Rationale
<p>This recommendation is about the risk of repercussions <u>to the project</u> if the community is not engaged. E.g. Bangalow paid parking.</p> <p>Projects that have significant complexity or require extensive external consultation should be prioritised for a higher level of community engagement.</p>

Recommendation
Impact of development on commercial, residential and rural areas of the Byron Shire is a trigger.
Rationale
<p>This relates to both Council and external developments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overdevelopment is a current concern in our community. ● Different locations and suitable developments for these area eg, tourism, tiny communities, farming, businesses etc. ● Projects have to sympathetic to our core values in the Shire ● Considering the environment, culture, different demographic sectors, social wellbeing, and community groups. ● Byron Bay brand - integrity, protection of dilution. ● Understanding the developer contributions and seeing the impact of them in the community. <p>By the council investing time into these different cohorts it will improve the general public relations in regard to these types of projects. The project should always have the underpinning of the brand involved.</p>

Recommendation
Council decisions for impact upon/interest to the Arakwal and Bundjalung nation is a trigger for a specific type of engagement.
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If the project is going to be of interest or concern to the local Indigenous people. ● Allowances and inclusiveness of minority groups. ● Consideration is paid to all developments, interests to community and the Indigenous are respected - to ensure they are not trivialised, marginalised or disadvantaged.

Recommendation
Council to be obliged to engage community on a project raised by x # of Shire residents.
Rationale
<p>Public initiation of projects, innovation or existing issues of high interest or high impact on community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benchmarks can be established in council for high public interest. ● Budgetary constraints need to be published by council ● We are asking council for a committee to be formed after demonstration of above public interest. ● Project development cells to generate innovation in the shire, manned purely by a jury of citizens. ● Council must deliver a clear document to show the outcomes to the community and those involved.

Recommendation

If a project is going to have a significant impact on the local economy.

Rationale

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

Processes for community involvement and engagement

Recommendation
Incentives for community participation
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Improve current levels of community participation in engagement/decision making processes● Enhance community participation rates and increase diversity of respondents with the aim of reflecting the Byron Shire demographic● Intrinsic examples - personalised 'thank you' email, follow up communication regarding outcomes of consultation, publishing of names of consultation participants● Extrinsic examples<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Participation in surveys - tip voucher, go into draw for a voucher○ Attendance at consultation meeting - catering, door prize, Byron Council pen & pad
Source of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Example Byron model - provision of catering and \$400 reimbursement● Example Blues festival ticket draw in current Tourism survey

Recommendation
Lessons learnt
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prevent similar mistakes or errors of judgement happening over again • Increased transparency leads to increased trust • Decrease costs - human resource and other (eg community time, consumables) • Will set precedents leading to increased critical analysis skills and generation of innovative concepts & ideas
Source of evidence
E.g. Bangalow paid parking and Lighthouse roundabout art

Recommendation
Project timeframes are factored in to engagement process
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early engagement as policy for community consultation to enable the community to have enough time to make considered decisions/opinions • Timeframe for consultation must be flexible and reflect nature of project • Patience is prioritised where possible(act in haste repent at leisure) so that sufficient and quality community engagement can take place • Considerations must be made for emergencies eg environmental catastrophe, disasters

Recommendation
Location specific consultation
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When project/issue impacts on specific residential/business/industrial area residents and stakeholders have consultation priority over other groups and more weight in final decision• Efforts should be made by Council to engage on a village model where appropriate

Recommendations to improve: Trust

Recommendation
<p>Council having measures in place to evaluate performance</p> <p>External organisation / consultant to write the pro-forma for evaluation</p>
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unbiased • Provide accountability • Project evaluations.

Recommendation
<p>Transparency on wins and losses</p> <p>Communication by publishing in all media the wins and losses</p>
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have the information online so people could access each individual project and the results • Quarterly radio show - engagement

Recommendation
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.

Recommendations to improve: Communication

Recommendation
Better communication of what is a State level or community issue
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation of the issue, who owns it and what agency are available. • Unique identifier / watermark on each DA or project • Better communication utilising the current methods already used.

Recommendation
Build an app / online platform for engagement and deliberation and incentive people to use it
Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider cross section of the community to be reached • Notifications on current issues you are interested in • Access to contact certain people • Modern way to communicate with people • Local business incentives - cross promotion, advertising

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
Project trackability
Rationale
<p>Implementing the use of a broad range of mediums to primarily improve engagement and trust. Improved online platform/app to be backed up with other mediums like letters, rates notices and hard copy information.</p> <p>Trackability means the Council are prepared to update information as processes continue.</p>

Recommendations to improve: Identity, Diversity & Culture

Recommendation
A commitment to engage across Shire demographic
Rationale
Council should be encouraged to facilitate engagement with 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
<p>BSC 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowing and writing for the intended audience ● Using an active voice ● Language ● Simple and clear formats ● Clarity in the message ● Using key messages ● Using diagrams and images where relevant <p>This is an area where BSC should undertake training.</p>
Source of evidence
<p>For EG see 'Checklist for Plain Language' https://plainlanguage.gov/resources/checklists/checklist/</p>

Recommendation
Social events to build cohesion in good times
Rationale
When things are running smoothly in Council and Community, come together to build cohesion and positive relationships. This reinforces connection, acceptance and positivity.