The Byron Model

Briefing book, January 2019

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

www.yoursaybyronshire.com.au

Byron Shire Council

Executive Summary

Around the world, more and more people are trying to find ways to improve democracy - to make it more representative and clearly deliberative, with structures that restore trust.

We know our community is passionate about the culture and lifestyle which makes Byron Shire unique, and that you want to be involved in decision-making about the things that impact this culture and lifestyle.

Only 15% of people consider that our system of government 'works fine as it is'
2016 Scanlon Foundation survey

The Byron Model builds on the success of the recent Community Solutions Panel (where we developed infrastructure priorities for the next four years) in an attempt to continue doing something different – to show you that we value your input, your expertise, your willingness to work with and alongside us to make decisions that affect all of us.

What is the question?

Fundamentally, the Byron Model aims to answer the question:

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

How do **you** want to be involved in decisions?
What can we do **more** of?
What should we do **less** of?

We've heard that people want more opportunity to be involved in decision making and to partner with Council. Feedback through our Community Strategic Plan and Community Solutions Panel highlighted this. We need to do better when it comes to involving people in the decisions that fundamentally affect us all. This means involving people from the beginning, sharing the challenge, and being open to any answer.

In answering the question, the panel will take into account how the community wants to be engaged in decision-making, what factors influence the community's trust and perception of Council, and how we can improve our decision-making to increase support from the community on the final outcome.

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1. Welcome from the General Manager

Congratulations on your appointment to the Byron Model Panel. Firstly I want to acknowledge the valuable contribution everyone makes each time they share opinions and ideas with Council through the many engagement and communication channels we already have in place.

What we've heard through last year's Community Solutions Panel, and previous engagement around our 10-year Community Strategic Plan, is that people want the opportunity to partner with Council in its decision making.

What we want to tackle is… how?

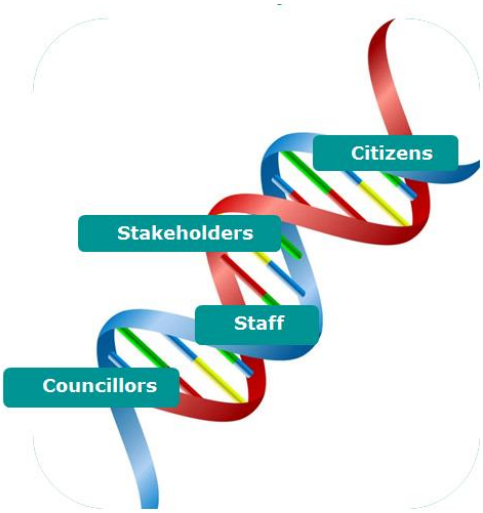
We know there isn't a one size fits all approach. A public notice will work in some instances, and a citizen jury will work in others. And there are lots of different methods in between. We want to unpack the range of topics and projects and how we can engage and partner with our community and stakeholders on these.

Key to the success of processes like this, is that the Panel comes to the topic with an open mind and uses critical thinking to make informed recommendations. In our modern society, inaccurate urban myths can quickly become social fact and it is important that we, as a whole community, commit to making informed decisions based on evidence, just like a citizen jury does in a court matter.

As part of the information gathering, we are inviting every community group, every local expert, everyone who has a point of view, idea or request to share them with you. This information is provided to you without editing. This, together with the information provided by staff and Councillors, along with any further information or explanation you request, will help you make informed recommendations.

Our question to you is about decision making.

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



How can we make informed and inclusive decisions? What type of engagement works? How can we partner together on certain topics? Are there some projects that Council can "get on and do" without engaging the community?

This time around we are holding four separate panels that will come together at various points like a helix – 24 randomly selected citizens, nine representatives from our stakeholder groups, Councillors and staff. Each one of us will tackle the question in a different way and what's important in this process is that we each deliberate on the question and solutions, and importantly consider all different points of view. Hopefully then we will be able to come together and develop a framework that will provide guidance for how we can make decisions moving forwards.

We appreciate that digesting this booklet, and this process, will require a lot of work and effort on your behalf. We have confidence that, as a group, you will carefully consider all the information, weigh up and balance the competing needs and priorities, and reach considered recommendations on behalf of the whole community. That is all we ask of you - to do your best, bringing your individual experience, skills and knowledge.

Our commitment to you is that we don't just value your informed recommendations, we as a Council and the Byron Shire community are going to be shaped by them. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I do know Councillors and staff are committed to connecting to our community more, listening to our community more and empowering our community more. This project does that.

This is an incredibly exciting process that we are undertaking together and I thank you for being a Panel member.

Mark Arnold
General Manager

2. How does it work?

Your role as a panel member

The Byron Model Panel is a form of deliberative democracy, which relies on everyday people gaining a deeper understanding of complex and sometimes contentious issues and finding common ground on what you wish to convey to Council.

Members of the Panel are given time and access to information and support to explore the issue so that they can make recommendations to Council. This process of involving the wider community in decision making has been tried and proved successful.

Deliberative:

When hearing from people on difficult issues we like to use deliberative methods that focus on equal access to information and equal share of voice. It develops thinking from individuals, to smaller groups, then to the whole group. Issues are weighed up and discussed in various exercises, aimed at approaching the problem from different ways, and given plenty of time before final recommendations are made. Time is a crucial factor for the deliberation, it is at the core of arriving at considered public judgement.

This is different to how public engagement is often done. It shifts the focus from hearing opinions to uncovering considered public judgment.

What to expect

To assist discussion, you will be provided with a range of information sources:

The briefing book:
The briefing book is your base information. It has been prepared by Council staff and provides information on the process, the question the Panel is being asked, and background information on our community, Council, and our decision-making framework. It has also been prepared with input gathered at a deliberative staff panel.

In-person presentations:
You will have the opportunity to request presentations from experts of your choosing to address areas where you feel you want more information. This will be decided on and agreed as a group at each meeting.

You will be encouraged to question and discuss different perspectives about democratic decision making.

If at any time you feel you require additional information to inform your discussion, please ask.

The Panel meetings will be led by a skilled independent facilitator and supported by representatives of newDemocracy. They will help you if you are not used to working on a task like this.

No minutes will be recorded during the sessions, therefore it is important to take down notes throughout the discussions to help you prepare the final report.

Who will be working with you?

The Byron Model Panel is being designed and operated by the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF). nDF is an independent, non-partisan research and development organisation. They are a not-for-profit organisation, not a consultancy.

They aim to discover, develop and demonstrate alternatives which strengthen and restore trust in public decision-making. They conduct real world trials using random selection and deliberation as a central process.

nDF is not a think tank and holds no policy views. They also commission independent third-party research to explore and capture the potential for improvements to existing democratic processes.

Program Manager – Kyle Redman

Your main contact with nDF will be Kyle Redman, nDF's Program Manager. Kyle can be contacted via kyle.redman@newdemocracy.com.au and 0417 468 350.

More information on nDF and other projects is available from their website at https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/

Facilitator – Marcia Dwonczyk
Director, Creativma

Marcia has over 25 years of experience in senior executive roles in private and public sectors, across Australia and overseas. She is currently Director of Creativma where she works as an independent innovation and change specialist with a focus on partnership and engagement. An accomplished facilitator, Marcia has conducted national, state and regional community and stakeholder engagement strategies to inform policy reform and planning. She will be an independent voice and mentor to help you through this process.

Facilitator – Scott Newtown
Senior Project Manager, KJA

Scott manages KJA's new Innovation Hub - a key pillar of the company's 5-year Plan that will help grow their capacity to identify and deliver fresh, strategy-led engagement solutions for their clients, in partnership with key subcontractors.

Critical thinking

You will be participating in a deliberative process. Deliberation involves both dialogue and debate and requires access to a wide array of information as well as an equal share of voices.

The Panel deliberation will be built on a foundation of critical thinking.

nDF has worked extensively with processes like this Panel to achieve deliberation and knows it is a successful way to foster learning, discussion and deep consideration. The deliberation is the complete opposite to an opinion poll. Instead of a four-minute telephone call, you will be involved in an in-depth, in-person process with a group of randomly selected members of the community to consider your given topic and provide recommendations to Council.

In Australia and around the world, these processes have become recognised for their capacity to deliver outcomes that are trusted by the broader community. They work because they can convey to the wider community that everyday people like them are being given complete access to information, are studying detailed evidence and hearing from subject-matter experts of their own choosing.

In criminal trials, community trust is placed in a jury's verdict, without every citizen looking at each piece of evidence, because a trusted group of citizens was given sufficient time and access to information – and was free from outside influences (or even the perception of such influences).

You will generate the same trust in your task by applying critical thinking, and that is something we all do on a day to day basis, perhaps without even realising it. Your challenge will be to bring that same skill set to your time as a Panellist, thinking about clarity of information, its relevance to the issues and the depth it goes into. You will need to consider the accuracy of materials, and whether the information you have is broad enough to address the question; and of course, whether it is all logical to you.

We will spend time in the first Panel session exploring some ways that you can, as a group, ensure you are applying critical thinking in your approach, and we'll provide you with materials that will support you throughout the process.

Your recommendations

As a group, you are responsible for developing recommendations to Council. Your facilitators can help with this task, but you will hold the pen.

At the end of the process, the Panel will produce its own report. The format, structure and means of presenting your recommendations will be up to you, but it is important that your recommendations are clear, measurable, actionable, realistic and timely.

Your unedited recommendations will be published by Council on its website and formally considered by Council.

Meeting dates and times

When?	Where?	Who?	Why?
Wednesday **6 February** 5:30pm – 8:30pm	Cavanbah Centre, Ewingsdale Road, Ewingsdale	Citizens Stakeholders Councillors	Introduction, critical thinking and principles
Friday **15 February** 2.00 – 5.00pm	Cavanbah Centre	Stakeholders	Mayor and staff presentation
Saturday **16 February** 9.00am – 5.00pm	Cavanbah Centre	Citizens	Mayor and staff presentation
Thursday **7 March**	Committee Room	Councillors	Problem explanation
Saturday **9 March** 9.00am – 5.00pm	Cavanbah Centre	Citizens	Participants hear from the speakers nominated by them
Thursday **21 March** 4.00 – 6pm	Committee Room	Councillors	Recommended actions
Friday **22 March** 2.00 – 5pm	Cavanbah Centre	Stakeholders	Finalise thoughts, find common ground, write their draft solution
Saturday **23 March** 9.00am – 5.00pm	Cavanbah Centre	Citizens	Finalise thoughts, find common ground, write their draft solution
Saturday **6 April** 9.00am – 5.00pm	Cavanbah Centre	Citizens Stakeholders Councillors	Final recommendations delivered together from each of the independent streams
Wednesday **10 April** 5:30pm – 8:30pm	Cavanbah Centre	Citizens Stakeholders Councillors	Return to their report for finalising their recommendations and polishing

Practical information

Accessibility: All meeting venues are accessible and inclusive.

Meals: Meals and refreshments will be provided at Panel meetings. This includes dinner for the evening sessions and morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea for the day sessions. If you have particular dietary requirements please contact newDemocracy Foundation. Water, tea and coffee will be available throughout the meetings.

3. How to read this document

The information presented here has been developed to provide knowledge and understanding to the group to help make informed recommendations and decisions throughout the rest of the process.

The information has been informed by Council's Communication and Media section and a staff panel that participated in deliberative activities (much like what you will experience) to get their insight into community engagement and democracy. Some of the views and experiences represented throughout this document result from the staff panel as well as combining research from across the industry to provide to you an unabridged insight into Council's decision making framework.

Information provided by newDemocracy is in purple.

We ask you to challenge the information, consider the **prompting questions (in orange),** and think critically about ways we can improve democracy and restore trust between Council and the community.

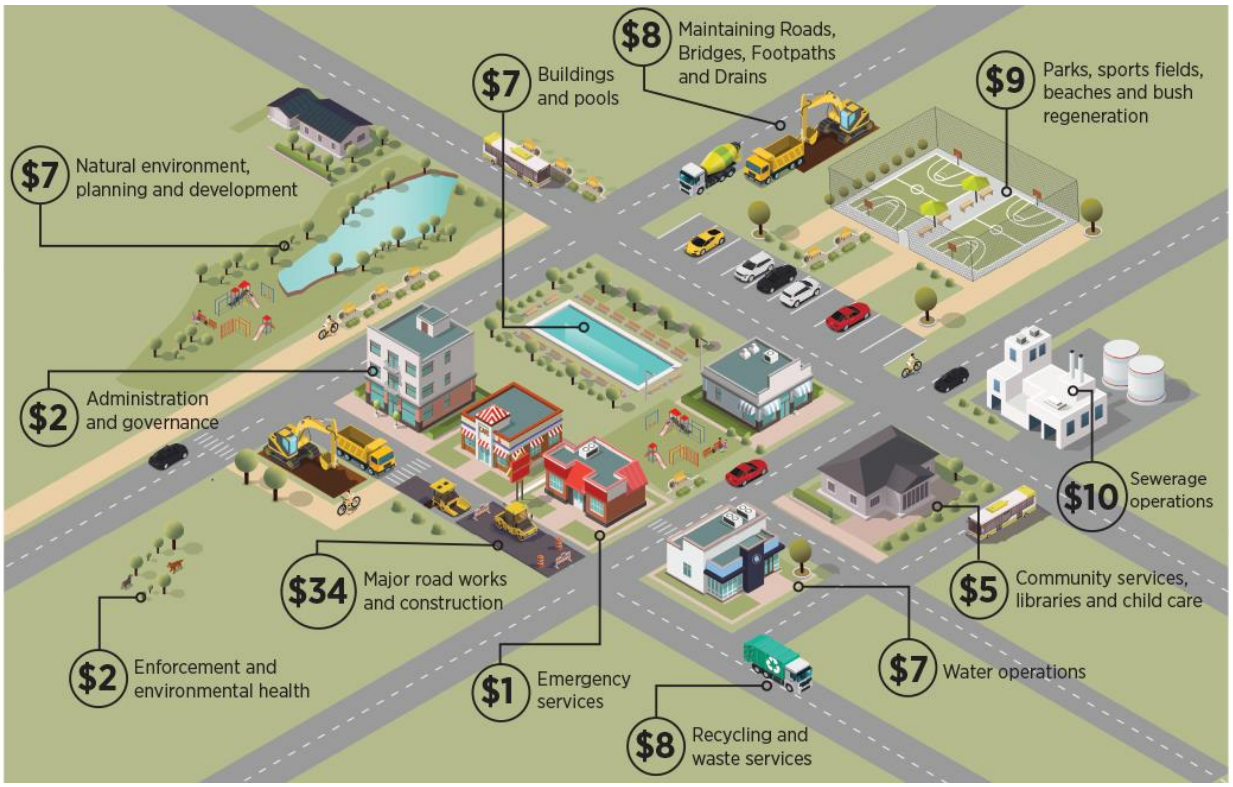
Further information is included as appendices and highlighted in ***bold italics.***

While you are reading, think about who you would like to hear from during the workshops, write down any questions you have for us, and identify any further information you might require to help make informed recommendations.

4. Context

a. What does Council do?

Council provides a range of services, projects, and programs to the community; some are required by legislation while others are provided to meet the needs and aspirations of our community. As a guide, the following graphic from the *Byron Shire Council Budget Information Brochure 2018/19* indicates that for every $100 spent, Council invests in the activities below:



We're far more than rates, roads and rubbish!

This is a snapshot of just some of the different and diverse functions we deliver:

- Community services and events
  - Aboriginal culture
  - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities
  - Early childhood education
  - Older people
  - People with disability
  - Public art
  - Young people
- Customer service and community engagement
- Economic development
- Environmental and public health services
  - Cemeteries
  - Coastal protection
  - Companion animals
  - Natural environment and biodiversity
  - Zero-emissions
- Governance and corporate planning
- Footpaths and cycleways
- Libraries, community centres, and halls
- Planning and infrastructure
  - Place planning
  - Planning and development services
- Recreation facilities
  - Lifesaving
  - Playgrounds
  - Public toilets
  - Skate parks
  - Sporting fields
  - Swimming pools
- Roads and bridges
  - Parking management
- Tourism
  - Caravan parks
- Waste management
  - Landfill
  - Recycling
  - Waste collection
- Water and sewer

Councils have no authority in matters that fall outside the mandatory or discretionary powers conferred by legislation.

Council's functions

The *Local Government Act 1993* (Act) outlines that a council may provide goods, services and facilities, and carry out activities, appropriate to the current and future needs within its local community and of the wider public, including:

- Public land
- Water supply
- Sewerage services
- Stormwater drainage facilities
- Environmental protection
- Waste removal and disposal
- Industry and tourism development
- Community health, recreation, education, and information services

Council has a number of regulatory functions to grant approval and issue orders for a number of activities. Additionally, Council has revenue functions, administrative functions, and functions relating to the enforcement of the Act.

While the main functions of councils are provided for under the Act, Council also has functions under many other Acts, some of which are outlined below:

Community Land Development Act 1989	Planning functions as consent authority
Companion Animals Act 1998	Companion animal registration and control
Conveyancing Act 1919	Placing covenants on council land
Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979	Environmental planning
Fire and Rescue NSW Act 1989	Payment of contributions to fire brigade costs and furnishing of returns
Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957	Fluoridation of water supply by council
Food Act 2003	Inspection of food and food premises
Impounding Act 1993	Impounding of animals and articles
Library Act 1939	Library services
Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997	Pollution control
Public Health Act 2010	Inspection of systems for purposes of microbial control
Recreation Vehicles Act 1983	Restricting use of recreation vehicles
Roads Act 1993	Roads
Rural Fires Act 1997	Issue of permits to light fires during bush fire danger periods
	Requiring the furnishing of information to the Rural Fire Service Advisory Council and its co-ordinating Committee
State Emergency Service Act 1989	Recommending appointment of local commander
Strata Schemes Development Act 2015	Approval of strata plans
Swimming Pools Act 1992	Ensuring restriction of access to swimming pools

b. Who is 'the community'?

Part of effective engagement is ensuring that we are reaching the right target audience. It is important to consider the broad demographics that make up our region, and consider ways of reaching people from all walks of life to understand their views and opinions on decisions that Council makes. Some of the statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) below give insight into the diversity within our community.

The median age of people in Byron Shire was 44 years. Children aged 0 - 14 years made up 16.7% of the population and people aged 65 years and over made up 16.9% of the population.

Who do you represent?

68.4% of residents were born in Australia.

People	**31,556**
Male	48.2%
Female	51.8%
Median age	44
Families	**7,523**
Average children per family	
for families with children	1.7
for all families	0.6
All private dwellings	**15,540**
Average people per household	2.4
Median weekly household income	$1,149
Median monthly mortgage repayments	$1,733
Median weekly rent	$400
Average motor vehicles per dwelling	1.8

Of those that reported being in the labour force 42.2% were employed full time, 45.5% were employed part-time and 6.5% were unemployed. Of employed people, 16.8% worked 1 to 15 hours, 14.7% worked 16 to 24 hours and 31.7% worked 40 hours or more.

The most common occupations included Professionals 24.4%, Managers 15.0%, Technicians and Trades Workers 14.2%, Community and Personal Service Workers 12.3%, and Labourers 9.7%.

Transport provides significant challenges to residents living in the Shire. Public transport is limited, and most people rely on passenger vehicles or are restricted in their access to essential services and educational facilities which are often located outside the Shire. On the day of the Census, the most common methods of travel to work for employed people were: car, as driver 59.4%, worked at home 13.4% and walked only 4.2%.

Of people aged 15 years and over, 70.8% did unpaid domestic work in the week before the Census. During the two weeks before the Census, 26.0% provided care for children and 11.2% assisted family members or others due to a disability, long term illness or problems related to old age. In the year before the Census, 25.0% of people did voluntary work through an organisation or a group.

Of the families in Byron Shire, 38.1% were couple families with children, 39.8% were couple families without children and 20.8% were one parent families.

In Byron Shire, 85% of households had at least one person with access to the internet from the dwelling. This could have been through a desktop/laptop computer, mobile or smart phone, tablet, music or video player, gaming console, smart TV or any other device.

Should these statistics influence our engagement activities?

Community groups and organisations

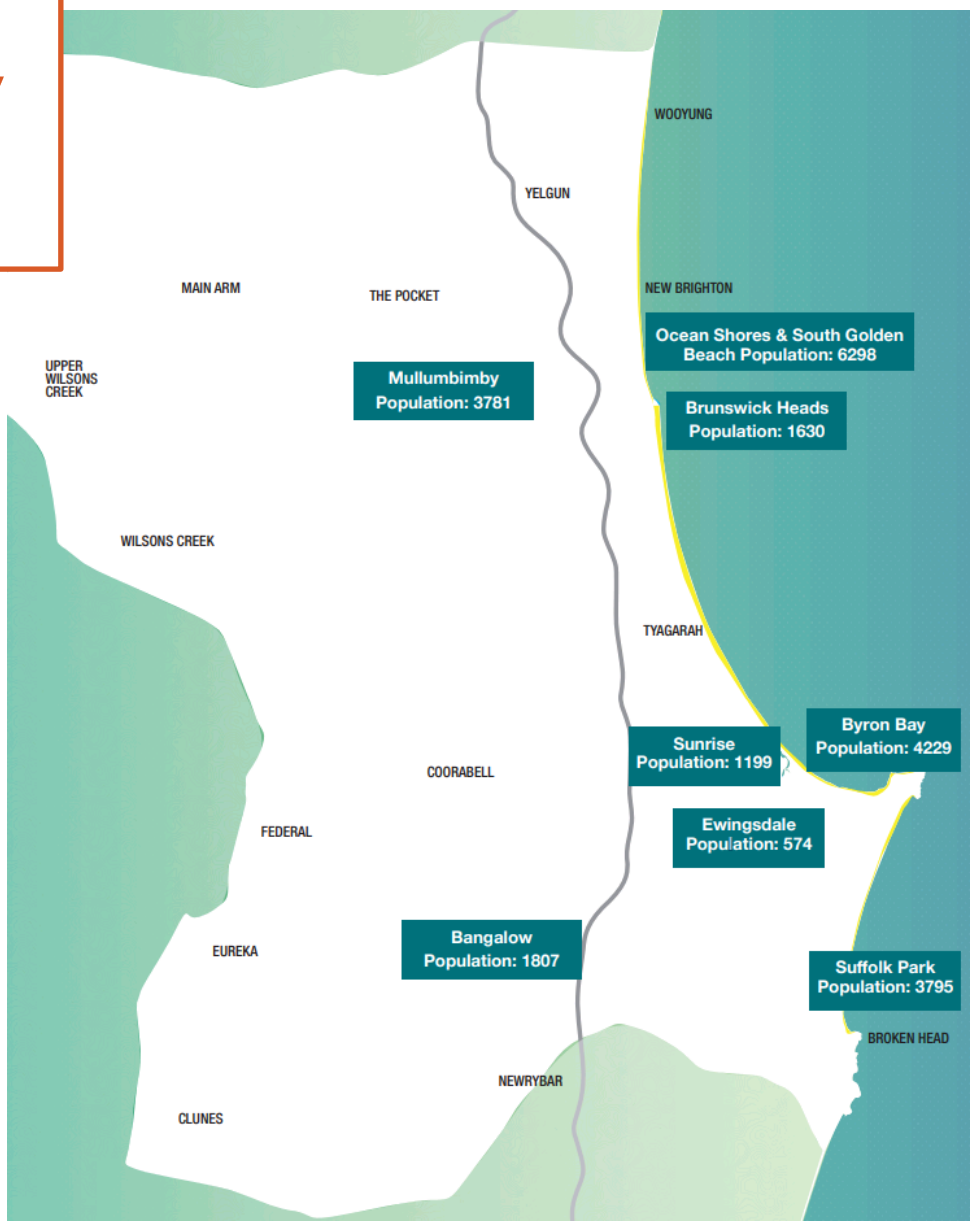
There are a number of existing community groups, organisations, and sporting clubs in the Byron Shire that have mechanisms to reach members of our community that Council may not have regular contact with.

Who are they? How can we leverage these existing networks?

Our region

The Byron Shire community is a diverse and colourful mix of people. Each of the towns and rural villages has its own distinctiveness with a mix of cultural values, embracing both traditional and alternative lifestyles and philosophies.

How might engagement vary in different parts of the region?



c. What decisions does Council make?

decision:

(noun) a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration

The staff panel undertook an activity to prepare a list of some of the types of decisions that are made by Council, which is provided below:

Strategic Decisions

The elected Council sets the strategic direction of the Council through a number of decisions, including:

- Development of strategic plans and policies
- What services are provided to the community
- The level of service provided
- What projects should be delivered
- What commitments Council makes
  for example – sustainability, zero emissions, community-led governance
- What assets and infrastructure get
  - Built
  - Renewed
  - Maintained
- What grants and external funding Council applies for
- What partnerships Council enters into
- What information is made available to the public

Staff and Councillors are also responsible for a number of other operational, financial, and regulatory decisions:

Operational Decisions

- Operational Plans
- Staff employment
- Works programs
- Maintenance programs and levels
- How and when to undertake specific projects
- Timing of projects / events
  - Closures
  - Works programs
  - Time of day
- Procedures
- Public art installations
- Public open space and facilities
  - Acquisition and disposal
  - Facilities provided
  - Recreation
- Community services
- Road closures

Financial Decisions

- Awarding of tenders
- Budget
- Investment of Council funds
- Insurance
- Purchasing

Regulatory Decisions

- Enforcement of legislation
- Activity approvals
- Development Applications – in 2017/18 Council processed 710 DAs (this process is outlined at ***appendix 2***)
- Pay parking
- Leases / licences
- Community safety

What do you trust Council just to do (and not consult on)?

How can we make it easier for staff to make decisions while bringing the community along and involving them in the decision?

d. How do we make decisions for our community?

Broad and effective consultation is required to engage the community in **decisions** made by Council.

How are decisions made?

Strategic Plans
A Community Strategic Plan (CSP) is a plan that identifies the main priorities and aspirations for the future of the local government area covering a period of at least 10 years. The CSP establishes the strategic objectives together with strategies for achieving those objectives. Our CSP, *Our Byron Our Future,* outlines 5 community objectives:

- We have infrastructure, transport, and services which meet our expectations
- We cultivate and celebrate our diverse cultures, lifestyle, and sense of community
- We protect and enhance our natural environment
- We manage growth and change responsibly
- We have community led decision making which is open and inclusive

The full *Our Byron Our Future* plan is online
https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Council/Our-Byron-Our-Future

Other strategic plans
Strategic plans are high level documents that give consideration of long term planning to a number of key priority areas identified by Council and the community. These strategic plans have been developed through consultation with the community and give direction to the Council about aspirations of the community regarding these specific matters.

Policies
Our policies are statements, adopted by Council, which provide guidance on interpreting legislation, outline our responsibilities, and refer to relevant standards and guidelines for determining a decision, process, or course of action. Council places policies on public exhibition and considers submissions prior to formally adopting policies.

Resolutions

A decision supported by a majority of the votes at a meeting of the Council is a decision of the Council. In making a resolution Council can take into consideration any information it considers relevant, for example sometimes this includes a staff report on the matter or representations from the community at the public access session of the meeting. A resolution passed by the council may not be altered or rescinded except by another resolution of Council. There are some things that are required to be resolved by Council such as setting the budget each year.

Delegations

The General Manager has the delegated authority of Council to make decisions on a number of specified matters, in particular decisions of an administrative nature. In turn, the General Manager has delegated a number of these powers to specified staff. Council staff make numerous decisions every day in order to properly discharge their powers and responsibilities. Staff must consider a number of factors including budget, operational plan, and available resources. As an example the General Manager has been delegated the authority to determine tenders up to the value of $250,000. The General Manager's delegations are included at ***appendix 3*****.**

What is democracy?

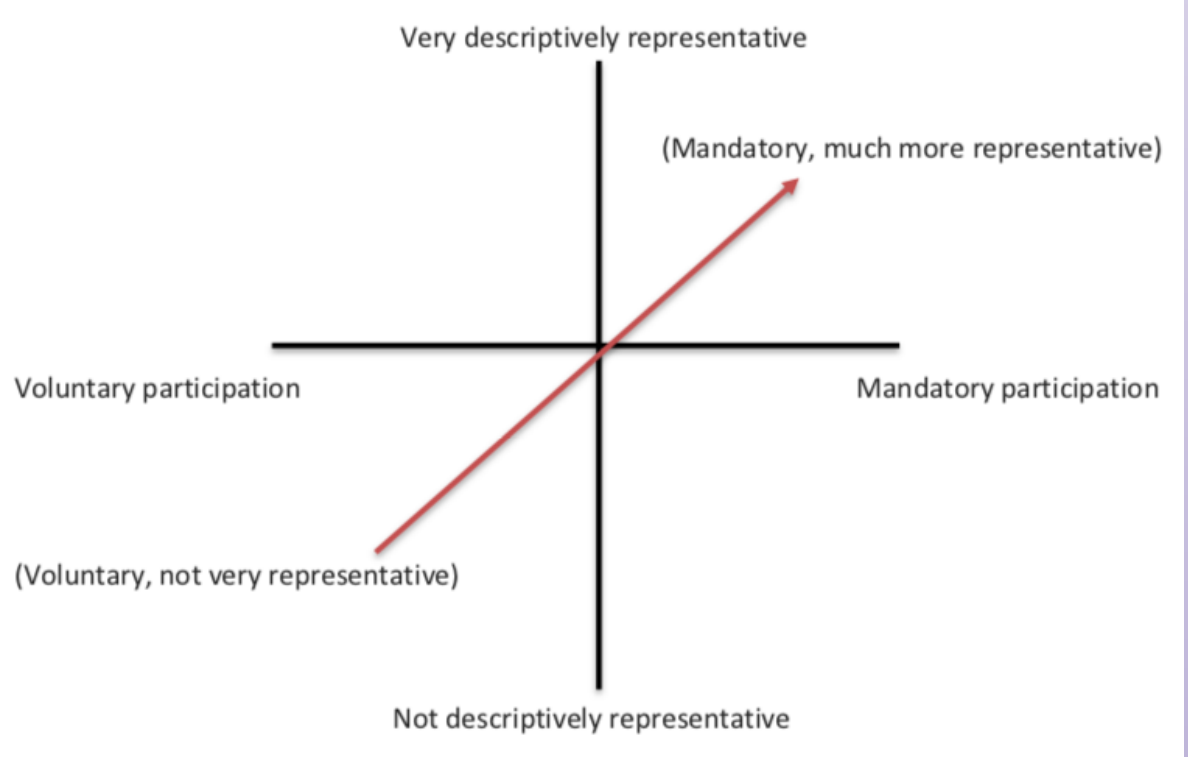
Is it voting? Is it not voting? Is it a more considered interaction between representation, legitimacy, fairness and trust?

Each answer to these questions will help you shape how your local democracy works for you and your community. It reveals which democratic principles might be more important than others and the margins within which your elected representatives and staff can work in collaboration with the community to reach outcomes desired by all.

The simple act of voting is a rudimentary tool tasked with finding the 'general will' of the people. Moving beyond regularly scheduled elections, local councils have many other less formal mechanisms for uncovering this illusive 'will'.

Sometimes something like a community wide vote might be the right tool for uncovering this, while at other times something less costly and more nuanced might be suited to a prickly technical discussion on the merits of different plot ratios and their purposes. Regular, deep consultation and collaboration with the community requires a significant time and money investment. This means Byron Shire Council cannot operate something like a citizens' jury on every issue. However, there may be the occasional instance where this is appropriate.

Making these decisions also means overcoming an impossible expectations gap. Community decisions are trade-off exercises in prioritising resources towards issues and solutions. This means that not everything can be done and requires a nuanced understanding of what is and is not a reasonable expectation of all actors involved in the community.



e. What guidelines and legislative frameworks apply?

Chapter 3 of the *Local Government Act 1993* clearly outlines the principles for local government to enable councils to carry out their functions in a way that facilitates local communities that are strong, healthy, and prosperous.

Guiding principles for councils

Among the guiding principles for councils, there are specific principles relating to decision-making and community participation, as outlined below:

Decision-making

The following principles apply to decision-making by councils (subject to any other applicable law):

- Councils should recognise **diverse local community needs and interests**
- Councils should consider **social justice principles**
- Councils should consider the **long term and cumulative effects** of actions on future generations
- Councils should consider the principles of **ecologically sustainable development**
- Council decision-making should be **transparent** and decision-makers are to be **accountable for decisions and omissions**

Community participation

Councils should **actively engage** with their local communities, through the use of the integrated planning and reporting framework and other measures.

The public notification process for Development Applications is quite prescriptive and is outlined at ***appendix 2***.

f. What is community-led decision making?

Future of Local Government Declaration

The *Future of Local Government Declaration* prepared by the Municipal Association of Victoria outlines that many Australians are losing faith in our basic democratic institutions and withdrawing from active participation in a civic and cultural life. The Declaration seeks to explore a new model of governance, based on a re-energised civil society that draws on the strength and resourcefulness of people working together in diverse local and regional communities.

How can these principles guide our thinking?

In March 2018, Council endorsed the Future of Local Government Declaration and committed to embed the 'key principles' into the development and delivery of community engagement and services. The aim is to assist Council to 'play a valued and effective role in a new system of community-based governance' to meet the needs and challenges of the community in the 21st century.

Key principles

- Have the courage to embrace the future and take informed risks to bring about necessary change
- Learn how to be community led, making space for communities to take action themselves, and responding positively to local initiatives
- Deepen their understanding of communities, listening to all their people and engaging with them in new and different ways that reflect community diversity
- Empower citizens through participatory and deliberative democracy, including community boards, precinct committees, cooperatives, citizens juries and others
- Embrace new ways of working to ensure that local needs are met through joined-up planning and services
- Forge more local and regional partnerships that address issues and drive change at community, state and federal levels
- Promote local networks, co-production of goods and services, and moves to 'reclaim the Commons'

Community Solutions Panel

In 2018 Council undertook a bold new democratic exercise and ran a Community Solutions Panel. The Panel was a representative group of people, picked at random, to directly influence Council's decisions on infrastructure priorities for the next four years. The panel was provided time, free access to information, a clear authority, and ideas from community members and stakeholders. After 28 hours of deliberations, two Council briefings, a review of a 120-page briefing book, consideration of 41 submissions from the community, and requests for 17 extra information pieces underpinned their determination.

The 31-person panel delivered a succinct report detailing its considerations and decision making approach which informed Council on its four-year delivery program considerations. The Panel identified values that should inform our decisions about infrastructure into the future, including:

Key Consideration 4:

We encourage, support, and facilitate shared ownership of community issues.

Panel Conclusion:

The Byron Shire Community Solutions Panel recommends that Byron Shire Council continue to engage with its community.

Roles:

As outlined by the Community Solutions Panel, there needs to be a shared ownership of community issues, with Councillors, staff, and the community all having their role to play.

Councillors – Councillors are elected to represent the interests of the residents and ratepayers, provide leadership and guidance to the community, and facilitate communication between the community and the Council. Their role is to **participate** as an elected member, **listen** to the views of the community, and **consider** these views when making decisions.

Staff – **organise** and **facilitate** the discussion, **record,** provide **feedback, evaluate** the engagement, and **consider** the community's views when making recommendations to Council.

Community –

What is the community's role?

Community Survey

Every two years Council contracts an independent expert to conduct a statistically representative Shire-wide survey of residents to find out how important different services are to residents and how satisfied residents are with the services provided.

Included in that survey are questions about importance and satisfaction with opportunities to participate in Council decision making and with consultation and engagement.

51% of residents said they were at least 'somewhat satisfied' with their opportunities to participate in Council's decision making, while 88% said this was at least 'somewhat important' to them

Byron Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2018

In the 2018 Community Survey, for Opportunities to Participate in Council Decision Making:

- **51% of people said they were somewhat to very satisfied**
- 88% of people said it is somewhat to very important
- The 'performance gap' (the gap between how important it is and how satisfied people are with it) improved in 2018 from where it was in 2016
- Its rank in terms of most important services dropped from 10th in 2016, down to 13th in 2018

Why do you think some people are not satisfied?

Satisfaction

Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	Not at all satisfied	Not very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
	22%	27%	33%	14%	4%

Importance

Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
	6%	5%	15%	24%	49%

Byron Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2018

64% of residents were at least 'somewhat satisfied' with the community consultation / engagement undertaken by Council, with 93% saying it was at least 'somewhat important'

In the 2018 Community Survey, for Community Consultation/Engagement:

- **64% of people said they were somewhat to very satisfied**
- 93% of people said it is somewhat to very important
- The 'performance gap' (the gap between how important it is and how satisfied people are with it) improved in 2018 from where it was in 2016
- Its rank in terms of most important services dropped from 11th in 2016, down to 16th in 2018. (The top 5 most important services in 2018 were roads, planning, recycling, coastline management and garbage services.)

Satisfaction

	Not at all satisfied	Not very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Community consultation/ engagement	14%	22%	43%	17%	4%

Importance

	Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Community consultation/ engagement	5%	3%	15%	24%	54%

Byron Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2018

g. How do we involve community in decisions?

At a very broad level, community members participate in decisions by electing Councillors, who then make decisions on their behalf. At a much finer level, when and how community members participate in Council decision-making is guided by the Community Engagement Policy (***Appendix 1***).

The level of community involvement should correspond to the potential **level of community impact or concern**, and should be tailored to the nature, complexity, and impact of the issue, plan, or policy.

What type of decisions should community and stakeholders be involved in? What should they NOT be involved in?

Community participation in decision-making, 'community engagement' or 'community consultation' are terms that are often used interchangeably but they can be different.

'Community consultation' broadly refers to the different methods, approaches or tools that can be used to 'engage community' members in the decision making process.

It is important to note:

- Not all projects involve decisions but they may still require ‘community engagement’.

  For example, carrying out resealing works on a road, the decision to do the work has already been made by Council but still needs to engage the community in the project to help minimise impacts during the road works, and that could involve for example a letter box drop to residents in the street where the works are being carried out.

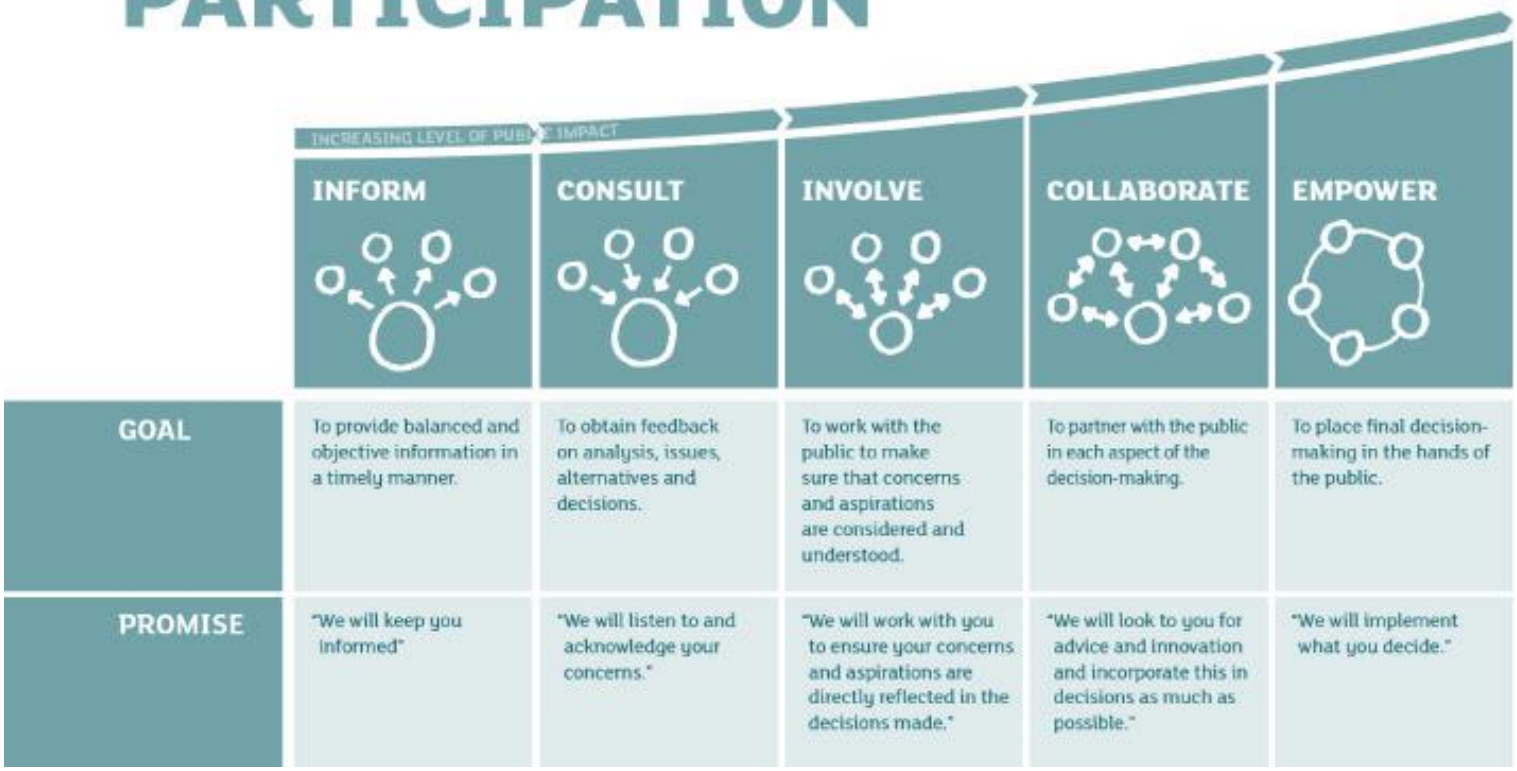
- Not all decisions require ‘community engagement’.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum show that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level (International Association for Public Participation, 2018). The IAP2 Spectrum is the internationally-recognised, best-practice tool (used by hundreds of councils in Australia) to guide engaging community in decision making. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is a good starting point for understanding the different levels of community engagement available.

Council subscribes to the IAP2 model of public participation, with a number of staff trained in the implementation of the principles.

Once the level of community participation in the decision or project has been determined using the IAP2 Spectrum, staff plan the community engagement activities. The engagement activities depend on the goals and objectives of each of the projects or decisions, based on who the engagement needs to reach and how best to do that, and the best methods of enabling residents to have a say, provide feedback and make a meaningful contribution to the decision-making process.



Useful resources:

There are lots of places to read about ideas, but resources for *good* and *tested* ideas are often hard to come by. A starting point should be the work of organisations from the international network Democracy R&D: https://democracyrd.org/our-work/

Below are examples, and links to further reading on various innovations in community consultation that could be utilised at varying levels of local council decision making.

Participedia is a good resource for finding innovative ideas:

- https://participedia.net/en/browse/methods/

  Participedia does not filter for methods that are ideas and those that are trialled or tested processes, so it is best to scroll to the bottom of each page and look for example projects in the resources section of each page.

Online voting tools:

- https://newvote.org/
- https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/2018/11/15/the-city-of-madrid-citizens-council/

  The advice provided to Madrid City Council by newDemocracy covers important details on *when* to use online voting and how it is useful in specific situations. There are some decisions that it is suited to and others where it is not.

NewVote
what do you think?

Citizens' Juries:

- https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/projects/

  Citizens' Juries involve random selection and deliberative democracy to find common ground in a community on any number of policy issues. They have been used in Ireland on marriage equality and abortion law reform as well as here in Australia.

Planning Cells:

- https://participedia.net/en/methods/planning-cells
- http://www.cipast.org/download/CD%20CIPAST%20in%20Practice/cipast/en/intro_1.htm

Planning cells are distributed groups of citizen juries where their informed considerations give the sponsoring government a broad understanding of a single issue spread out of an entire state or country (i.e. Planning Cells in Germany).

Participatory budgeting:

- https://participedia.net/en/cases/city-greater-geraldton-deliberative-participatory-budget
- https://www.cgg.wa.gov.au/your-council/having-your-say/-changescgg-community/community-panel-10-year-capital-works-plan.aspx

Participatory budgeting involves members of the community engaging in deliberation on budget priorities and principles. These are specific deliberative exercises that provide advice to councils on where to spend money.

Planning Review Panels

- https://participedia.net/en/node/4594

Planning Review Panels are long term deliberative bodies where randomly selected members of the community consider planning issues and provide advice on a number of different issues over a period of 1-2 years. The Toronto Planning Review Panel is a good example of a long-term body that addressed many different planning topics.

Toronto Planning Review Panel, 2018-2019

Expert Advisory Panels

- https://participedia.net/en/methods/expert-advisory-panel

Expert Advisory Panels are bodies of experts put together to provide advice to government. They are subject matter experts typically used to advise on specific technical policy issues.

h. What are some examples of community involvement in decision making?

Below are some examples of

- community involvement in decision making in projects; and/or
- community engagement across the IAP2 Spectrum from no involvement through to delegating the decision to community.

Where we can, examples have been provided where the feedback received from community about the decision has been positive as well as critical, and in all cases lessons have been learned from the experiences.

No community participation in decision

Example 1:	Durrumbul Causeway Temporary Closure
Cost	Nil
Time	5 hours
Decisions	• Temporary but immediate closure of causeway – meaning the road was closed and affected residents with vehicles were stuck on either side and unable to cross other than on foot. The causeway collapsed and there was no other choice but to close it pending urgent assessment. • Immediate detailed assessment to determine next step. • Reopen causeway within a few hours after the detailed assessment identified a suitable alternative access.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Nil – Once Council had received advice that the causeway was an immediate danger to safety it had to temporarily close it to assess that risk in detail.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – Keep affected residents and road users (eg schools and school bus services) and online information updated.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Priority was given to staffing the required actions first, then staff provided information once actions were underway. Information for the community was changing quickly as the assessments were being carried out ie by the hour. Criticism was received about Council not giving any warning of the closure or potential for closure and not providing adequate or clear information to all residents or users in a timely way.

Example 2:	Buying and Recycling Defence Force Bridges
Cost of Decision	5 Bridge program > $3Million
Time	>3 Years
Decisions	• 5 bridges in the Bangalow area needed to be replaced immediately because of structural problems. The only other option was to close the bridges meaning closing road access to some people's property, potentially exposing Council to more costs. • Replace these 5 bridges as the priority over other bridges in the Shire. • To reduce costs it was decided that Council would use recycled Australian Defence Force bridges rather than build new concrete structures. This was the most cost effective because there was limited available funds. • How to program the bridge replacement works.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Nil. Council had to replace the bridges and had to do so as quickly and cost effectively as possible.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform - affected landowners, emergency services, bus operators and public of road access interruptions Consult - with emergency services, bus operators and affected landowners to identify issues and make minor adjustments and works to minimise impacts where possible.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Whilst the closure of the bridges was staggered there was considerable inconvenience to the local community with some people required to take detours adding significant travel time in some cases. Council informed and consulted with affected residents to identify their needs and accommodate them where possible (and providing feedback where not possible) resulted in increased resident support. Regular updates (provided every two – three weeks) over eight months also ensured people were kept informed about the progress of the bridge replacements. An intense and personal communication campaign over many months resulted in generally positive feedback and even those people with negative comments/questions commented they were pleased to receive fast responses.

Community involved in decision making processes

Example 1:	Pedestrian Access and Movement Plan (PAMP)
Cost	$5,000 for the engagement activities
Time	6 months for the engagement
Decisions	How pedestrian access and movement is going to be managed What are the pedestrian priorities over the next 10 years
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Consult – asking for everyone's and specific interest group's feedback, issues, suggestions and ideas. Involve – committing to incorporating the feedback into the decisions (ie into the PAMP) as much as possible.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform, consult and involve everyone. Diverse engagement opportunities eg traditional advertisements, on-line and social media engagement, media, visual branding of project, video material, surveys and workshops etc.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Excellent engagement: - Facebook post reach: 7,773 people - Video views: 6,944 - Video reactions and comments: 144 - Online visitors: 1,582 - Survey responses: 865 - Email registrations: 465 - Workshop attendees: >120 Positive feedback received from community on community engagement activities.

Example 2:	Pay Parking Bangalow
Cost	$75,000 ($17,000 engagement)
Time	15 months
Decisions	• Management of car parking in Bangalow. Expert report identified 2 options – trial time limits then introduce pay parking if trial didn't drive improvements or introduce pay parking to improve parking. • Whether to trial changed time limits (and incur additional cost and time) or proceed with introduction of Pay Parking to improve parking.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Involve - reports to Council, discussion at meetings with Roundtable and Business Chamber, and telephone survey of residents in Bangalow was undertaken to understand community views. Feedback was neutral and with relatively little public reaction.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform - businesses of works program, community of works program, design and introduction of pay parking.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	• Bangalow community rallied and opposed introduction of pay parking. They organised media, social media and public rallies calling for Council to change its decision. • Due to the volume of the feedback Council did change its decision and went with trialling the change to the time limits first and monitoring results prior to further consideration of introduction of pay parking. • Feedback received was that Council had been unclear in its intentions about the introduction of pay parking and should have proceeded based on the expert advice with the 2-step process or provide more evidence-based information on why missing the first step was a better way to go.

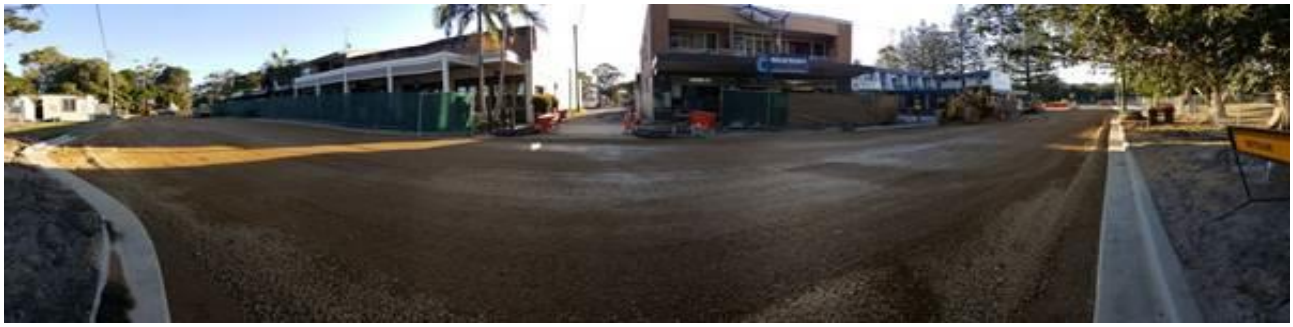
Example 3:	Blindmouth Creek Causeway
Cost	Less than $10,000 on engagement As a result of the engagement activities the project was amended at an additional cost of $169,000 Total project cost $1.48 million project
Time	Estimated 12 months (additional design time)
Decisions	Whether to: - close the road entirely during construction causing a 20 minute detour over a road in poor condition (with social and economic impacts); or - build the causeway in two halves or construct a 'side track' to keep the road open one-way (under traffic lights) during works - spend any project budget savings in Main Arm village.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Consult - with affected residents and road users to seek feedback and input. Consult - with DPI Fisheries which resulted in approved construction of a side track through the creek which was the more cost-effective option of the two alternatives.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – affected residents and road users of timeline for the construction work. Consult and involve - affected residents and road users. This resulted in a commitment to funding a construction method that kept the road open and it also identified some resident concerns about road matters in Main Arm village.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	There was a small amount of savings from the project (due to efficiencies achieved by staff) and this allowed for some minor parking and safety improvements in Main Arm village. The decision was made to do those works at the same time as the causeway was being built. There was a lot of positive feedback received from road users and Main Arm residents.

Example 4:	North Byron Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan
Cost	$1,600 (engagement only)
Time	6 weeks
Decisions	None – purely a research exercise to gather information.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Not applicable.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – everyone of what the project is and why Council is doing it. Consult – get as much personal feedback as possible from people living in the north of the Shire on their experiences with flooding, in particular the first-hand experiences of the 2017 flood event.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Engagement focused on a narrow geographic area and leveraging community leaders and networks in that area to 'spread the word' and reach as many residents as possible. Demographics of the area were taken into account in designing engagement activities. For example, because many residents in the area are elderly alternatives to computer-based options were promoted. Traditionally Council has received survey response rates below 200 for this type of research. This engagement received 339 completed surveys which provided a great amount of additional data that had previously not been obtained. Collecting manual information from older residents proved invaluable, however, the time it would take consultants to digitalise that information was underestimated.

Other examples:

The Terrace Road Upgrade Project (July 2017)

The Terrace Road upgrade project was designed and ready to be delivered taking into account Council's works program and considerations like school holidays. However, prior to commencement of work, Council engaged with businesses on the Terrace in new ways, door knocked and spoke with business owners individually to gain an understanding of the impact of the project on these individual businesses. Following the feedback Council staff responded the suggestion that Council vary the hours of the project to start. The work schedules were modified to start and finish later each day so that the businesses' usual morning/breakfast trade would not be interrupted.



Budget Public Meetings

Traditionally, the budget doesn't get community very excited, even though everyone has opinions on where money should be spent. Last year for the first time, Council invited the community to become informed and participate in the budget process. Council's leadership team made themselves available to respond to questions in a 'parliamentary budget estimates' style format. This provided citizens an opportunity to have their questions answered and represent their views about the budget and operations.

Collaboration - some decision-making by community

Example 1:	Bangalow Village Plan – Ideas and Initiatives
Cost	$32,000
Time	3 years
Decisions	Setting the future strategic direction for the Village. What should be included in the Plan. What information the Guidance Group needed to make these decisions.
What opportunity were provided community to participate in the decision making	Inform – the broader community on progress Involve – broader community directly and via the formation and deliberations of the Bangalow Village Guidance Group to invite everyone to provide input and be involved. Collaborate – the 19 community members (with different areas of expertise) on the Guidance Group were guided by their networks and provided feedback and expert advice and information. Together with Council staff, they made recommendations and set principles which were largely adopted by Council in the draft Masterplan which was then placed on public exhibition for broad community feedback.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – everyone to keep them up-to-date with information on the progress of the Plan. Involve – the broad community using diverse methods e.g. surveys, parklets and market stalls. Involve – the Guidance Group through provision of information and meetings to build its capacity and form relationships with project staff to build trust. Collaborate – provide information to and build relationships with the guidance to support them to make decisions.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	The Guidance Group wanted to explore different avenues and information not anticipated. Council staff accommodated requests but did not clearly explain the time delay consequences of meeting each request. The project took three years from commencement to exhibition of the draft plan. Some of this time was due to the Guidance Group's requests for more information and them exploring additional matters. The time it took negatively affected the energy of the Group and caused further delays when Council staff, for unforeseen reasons, changed mid-project, which may not have occurred if the project had been completed sooner. The extra exploration and information helped the Guidance Group reach/make decisions but whether it added value to the Plan in the end is questionable, compared with other masterplan project outcomes that were completed in shorter periods using core information. The development of the Byron Bay Town Centre Masterplan was contracted to a consultancy and, as a consequence, the relationship, rapport and trust was built between community and consultants, at Council's loss. In developing the Bangalow Village Plan it was essential that Council own the relationship and build networks with the community and hence staff managed the project.

Mullumbimby Hospital (2018)

The Mullumbimby Hospital Site Project Reference Group (PRG) was established for a 12-month period to provide advice to Council on the best outcome for the Hospital Hill site, considering the wellbeing of the whole Brunswick Valley community, the environment and future generations.

A participatory planning process was undertaken with the 21-member PRG and included a broad community consultation phase, input from various experts and drawing on the expertise within the group. Key ideas included the consideration of different ideas and perspectives, forming collective knowledge of the group, deep exploration of issues, deliberative debate and critical thinking. The final outcome was a comprehensive set of recommendations and guiding principles for any development on the site which the group reached by consensus.

Example 2:	**Mullumbimby Hospital Future Uses**
Cost	$10,000
Time	12 months
Decisions	• What the former Mullumbimby Hospital Site should be used for in future • Development of a comprehensive set of recommendations and guiding principles for future development on the site.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Involve and collaborate: Involve – a broad consultation phase allowed community representatives and individuals to present their ideas. Advice from various experts was also sought. Collaborate – 21 community members on the Project Reference Group (PRG) guided by their networks, provided feedback and expert advice and, with information from Council and guidance from staff, made recommendations and set principles which were all adopted by Council.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – everyone to keep them up-to-date with accurate information. Involve – engage the community directly and via the formation and deliberations of the PRG, to invite everyone to provide input and be involved. Collaborate – provide information to the PRG to support it to make decisions.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Key learnings outlined in the responses include: • The 12-month process was too long and there was too long between meetings • Better explanation of the planning process was needed – the concepts seemed too abstract and hard to grasp for the group member • The role of PRG members in completing surveys with residents during broader community consultation was exceptionally useful • Exercises to help the group get to know each other contributed positively to the final outcome. • Exercises involving physical interaction were more successful than 'academic' exercises (eg walking on site) • Role of experts is important in helping to form the groups understanding

Other examples:

- Open Space and Recreation Needs Assessment and Action Plan
- Masterplans and Precinct Plans
- Biodiversity Conservation Strategy review
- SES Community Action Teams
- Our Byron Our Future – Community Strategic Plan

Empowering community to make the decisions

Community Solutions Panel (April 2018)

Council chose to work with the newDemocracy Foundation to see if community deliberation could be designed to deliver an informed voice of everyday people. The intent was to undertake a bespoke jury-style process so that a group of randomly-selected local residents could be armed with time, free access to information, a clear authority and given the starting point of possible solutions (prepared by active interests and Council), to reach a shared, considered judgement.

Example 1:	Community Solutions Panel
Cost	$60,000
Time	9 months
Decisions	What infrastructure spending should we prioritise, and how should we fund these priorities if the rates alone are not enough?
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Full delegation to make decision. Council committed to enacting the Solutions Panel's recommendation.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	Inform – everyone. Consult and Involve – community, Councillors and staff on content of briefing book. Collaborate – community had opportunity to make submissions directly to Panel Empower – The Panel of 31 randomly selected citizens via its Panel representatives to make the decision
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	The panel considered a 120 page briefing book prepared by Council, 41 submissions from the community and 17 extra pieces of information collated by Council. The Panel prepared a report which outlines key considerations and a decision-making framework and their recommendations were wholly adopted as a part of Council's four-year Delivery Program. The feedback was positive with many other community members commenting that the briefing book should be circulated to all Shire residents.

Example 2:	Community Halls Run by Council Committees
Cost	Around $300,000 pa (across a number of community halls in the Shire)
Time	Ongoing
Decisions	• How to run and look after the halls. • What maintenance works to spend limited budgets on.
Opportunity to Participate in Decision	Full delegation to make decisions within the allocated budget, Code of Conduct and terms of reference of each Committee.
IAP2 Community Engagement Level	None. Any engagement is at the discretion and carried out by the Committee.
Observations, Lessons Learned, Feedback Received	Most halls run very smoothly most of the time and communities benefit greatly from the many 100's of hours the volunteer committee members commit to decision-making on behalf of communities. Occasionally some constructive feedback is received about particular decisions of Committees, eg to allow the refusal of a group to use a facility at a particular time.

Other examples:

- Northern Shire projects chosen to be funded from income generated from sale of land in Ocean Shores
- Residents' poll on Stronger Country Communities Grant options
- and of course …… this Panel!

What type of decision?

With newDemocracy, all deliberative processes enable the participants to prepare their own thinking and report 'from scratch'. We do not provide a draft position for review or ask for comments on a pre-prepared document. This is allowing people to review the evidence, discuss and dialogue about the options, actively negotiate with each other, and finalise a shared solution for their report.

Not all decisions need to be blank page reports. They take time to write and require significant resources to provide the appropriate time and information to those writing them.

The Byron Model (2018-2019)

Council originally planned to commence the Byron Model deliberations in late 2018. The wheels had been set in motion, with invitations being distributed to over 18,000 subscribers and plans commenced for the process. During the initial call for registration there was mounting feedback from the community that this time of year was already too busy with competing priorities making it difficult for many to contribute or participate. At the same time, Council was also engaging with the community on a number of other strategic programs.

It was important to Council that all members of the community felt that they could all equally contribute to the process, so we listened and rescheduled the project to the new year.

During recruitment the second time, there were over 400 registrations. This was particularly notable, as at the same time, Council was receiving extensive negative feedback via social media.

5. The tricky question

Our question to you is about decision making:

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

How can we make informed and inclusive decisions? What type of engagement works? How can we partner together on certain topics? Are there some projects that Council can "get on and do" without engaging the community?

We need...

- Willingness from community
- Different ways to reach people
- A community principles checklist
- To know the community's expected level of engagement for different types of decisions
- The community to understand the impacts of their choices and identify ways to fund their required level of engagement for different types of decisions.

We can...

- Match engagement to outcome
- Identify whether the engagement process is open or closed and design the process accordingly
- Not ask if something can't be changed or influenced by the community
- Consider every contribution, it doesn't matter if it is over the phone, on social media, face to face, or by whatever means possible, if a community member expresses a view it should be captured and counted
- Give feedback to participants and the wider community

Your task is to consider which types of involvement are suitable to which types of public decisions that affect us all.

a. How could/should we engage?

Communication and transparency

For democratic processes to be widely trusted, they need to be clearly and regularly communicated and operate transparently. This fundamentally starts with sharing the challenges and the goals that community decision making is trying to resolve.

Communication Techniques

- Traditional methods of communication
  - media releases
  - advertisements in the newspaper
  - radio
- Online engagement allowing people to use their phones, tablets and computers
  - Council's website www.byron.nsw.gov.au
  - www.yoursaybyronshire.com.au engagement platform
  - Social media; including a growing community of 4617 engaged on Facebook
  - Video content which is easily and heavily consumed by our digital audience via social media
- Surveys (online and hardcopy)
- Direct communication
  - Email
  - eNews - our electronic eNews goes out fortnightly to a subscriber base of 9,000
  - Letters

80% of Residents were most interested in keeping informed about Council news and activities via local newspaper, 63% via rates notice newsletter and 55% via local radio.

Byron Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2018

Have you used any of these? Did they work for you?

Have your friends and family used any of these?

How do you prefer to receive information from Council?

Engagement Methods

Through the staff panel activity, insight has been given into what staff have considered can be effective / not effective methods of engaging with the community. However, the staff group noted that engagement methods need to be appropriate to the type of decision being made, statutory requirements, and the amount of funding and time available.

Effective

- Drop in sessions
- FAQs
- Farmers Markets and event stalls
- World Cafés
- Charrettes
- Workshops
- Verbal communication
- One-on-one opportunities
- Pre-lodgement development advice
- Customer Services information
- DA advertising / notification
- Surveys
- Working with community organisations

Not Effective

- Written communication can be misinterpreted
- Traditional public exhibition (where statutory requirements do not apply)
- Town Hall style public meetings
- Small sample surveys
- Site inspections with objectors, applicants and Councillors

What are your preferred methods of engagement?

“Engagement that is tailored to outcomes you want to achieve”

“Solutions focused and constructive”

“Providing opportunity for input early before options solidify”

64% of residents were at least ‘somewhat satisfied’ with the community consultation / engagement undertaken by Council, with 93% saying it was at least ‘somewhat important’

Is there too much engagement? Or not enough engagement?

b. What are some barriers to effective engagement?

Resources

- Competition for time and space
- Money / funding
- Staff time
- Community time
- Timing
- Suitable venues

Expectations

- Expectation that things can happen instantly
- Lack of understanding that engagement takes time and slows things down
- Limited understanding of processes
- Impact of legislation
- Setting and understanding parameters
- Community consultation does not always result in people getting their preferred outcomes
- Understanding who can provide the desired outcomes (is it Council or someone else) and whether desired outcomes can be achieved
- Community divide
- Differing views - someone is always going to be disappointed
- Unwillingness to compromise
- Conflicting outcomes between Council and community and within communities

Target audience

- Getting to the people that need to know
- Knowing who the community influencers are to engage with them
- Reaching a broad range of demographics
- Reaching isolated small communities

Trust

- Misinformation
- Assumptions
- Mythbusting
- Politics
- History
- Perceptions of Council/ staff/community

Only about 38% of people trust local government even 'a little bit'

University of Canberra Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis 2016 survey

How can we resolve these barriers?

How can we be more transparent about these barriers or the limitations on community involvement?

c. What do we need to consider?

Information:

What does someone need to know to make a reasonably informed decision? Off-the-cuff opinion is often selectively informed. This is often not intentional, it is just how people selectively choose what they do and do not read or who they hear from on specific issues. When making public decisions it is important that we hear from a balance of views, weigh up their pros and cons through critical thinking and then reach a decision.

We can do this with the use of detailed, in-depth information provided to citizens to help them understand the dilemmas. Throughout the information we will prompt with questions that encourage the read to critically think about the topic (much like in this briefing booklet). Not everyone needs this information, but so long as it is available to those who do need it (namely those involved in making decision) the quality of each decision will have dramatically improved.

Who:

Typically, government hears from the more concerned voices regarding an issue. This is obvious, those directly impacted (usually negatively) or vocally concerned by a decision are more likely to take the time to interact with government. If I am ambivalent about a decision or otherwise happy, I'm unlikely to seek out the council staff member responsible and convey this, but if I am unhappy or negatively impacted then I'm much more likely to speak out. Sometimes, government should hear from beyond that circle, namely to reach a more balanced view of the issue. This emphasis on balance should also be thought of in the sequencing of *when* government hears from different points of view.
engagement by government does not hear from a representative cross section of the community. A random sample of the community can do this by using simple demographic filters (age, gender, location). However, you may also want to hear from only a specific section on the community on an issue that acutely affects them.

Time:

How soon must a decision be made? Some issues have the benefit of a long-time window that allows a slower and more lengthy community consultation process, while others arrive with no notice and require a quick decision. The same type of engagement cannot be used for both – but there is a considerable middle ground where either could be used, and you must decide how much time should be used on one issue when compared to another (lengthy considered engagements often cost more money, another trade-off you need to consider).

In addition to managing staff time on engagement activities, we need to consider the community's time. There are a number of factors that might influence the level of community involvement in an engagement activity, such as time of day, day of week, events and activities that on at the same time, and other competing priorities.

What is your preferred timing for engagement activities? Consider time of day, day of week, time of year, project status

What does it cost?

Communication and engagement comes at a cost, for example design advertising, staff time and professional consultant (i.e. facilitators) costs.

Each communications and engagement plan takes into account the general cost of projects, including staff time, graphic design, if required, and advertising with the budget varying according to the amount of money and resources available.

Just a few examples:

- Depending on the newspaper and day, a quarter page advertisement can cost between $250 to $700 each time is run
- Depending on the type of work required, graphic design can cost between $70 to $200 per hour.
- License fees for online engagement platforms are around $20,000 per annum
- Facilitator costs can be in the vicinity of $280 to $350 per hour

As a general rule, the more engagement that is required the more money it costs and the longer the project will take. Project leads need to consider the cost of communication and engagement and factor it into their budgets and either:

- adjust the project timeframes and budgets to include engagement.
- adjust the engagement program to match the project timeframes and budgets.

If more engagement is required, where does the money for it come from?
Thinking about where rates get spent, what are you prepared to compromise?

Which types of involvement or which decisions are more important and should be given financial priority?

d. What does success look like?

What does success look like to you?

Evaluating success is done in different ways, for example the number of responses received, the number of people attending workshops and events, the number of dissatisfied customers, improvement in trust and confidence in what Council is doing, and/or the positive relationships we have built with individuals and community groups during our engagement.

Success can be hard to quantify, particularly for high profile projects like the construction of the Bayshore Drive roundabout which caused unavoidable disruption to some businesses and residents. Rather than judge the success of this project on customer satisfaction or engagement, the focus was on making sure they were aware the disruption was coming and being prepared for it.

Measures of success

Quantitative data could include:

- website and social media traffic
- online engagement platform data
- workshop participation rates

Qualitative measures could include:

- increased trust
- active and constructive feedback
- people feeling like they have been involved in the decision

What would make you believe that your opinion has been incorporated into the decision.

How can we give feedback to the community about their contribution?

What will give you comfort that you have been involved in the decision making?

How can we reach the silent minority?

It is important to remember that not everyone gets their preferred outcome.

Further Reading

Byron Shire Council – www.byron.nsw.gov.au

Our Byron Our Future - www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Council/Our-Byron-Our-Future

Byron Shire Economic Profile – https://economy.id.com.au/byron

Australian Bureau of Statistics - www.abs.gov.au

Council Comparative Data - www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/my-local-council/yourcouncil-website

Something to Talk About - https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Council/Media-centre/Community-newsletter

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Community Engagement Policy

Appendix 2 – Development Application Process

Appendix 3 – General Manager's Delegations