# newDEMOCRACY

*The Byron Model*


*Design Together. Deliver Together.*

*Democracy Co-design Process*

*1. Why a co-design model?*

There are few, if any, "right" decisions for a government; instead, the ideal decision is simply one which reflects a position of informed support from a wide cross-section of the community. In two different jurisdictions, completely opposite decisions could be taken with each potentially being a 'good' decision if it acts on the informed view of those affected by it.

As such, democracy is informed by context and community.

If this is accepted, then that community must be involved in making decisions for a governance design. Byron is in the nearly unique position of having a highly dynamic active community sector who carry a powerful and influential voice. Critically, many in this group have been part of a small-scale experiment in rebalancing and reshaping the nature of information-sharing, time, and use of 'outsider' voices that provides a valuable platform upon which to build and embed the positive aspects thus far noted by Council.

The democratic design task requires exploring how 'best' to distribute agenda setting powers, input and decision making, both in terms of information and advocacy. 'Best' in this sense must explicitly acknowledge the tradeoffs in efficiency and cost which citizens are prepared to bear. Not every decision needs a Royal Commission.

newDemocracy have traditionally started from the point of view of establishing a role for randomly selected citizens due to the traditionally vast gap in including this voice in public decisions. This process is radically different – this design at its core is a balanced role for **everyone**.

The co-design model will include stakeholders, community groups, councillors, council staff and citizens in a joint project to design around each other's key contributions and requirements to improve the quality of the process and, ultimately, **trust in the final decision**.

By having all involved in a single process we aim to move the **'democratic ask'** on Council from a (frequently unattainable) wishlist standard of involvement to one that reflects informed trade-offs. Council cannot engage deeply on all matters all the time: our suggestion is to let this wide range of interests set the standard for what Council does in a given set of circumstances within a pre-agreed set of parameters (time and budget).

This co-design model has emerged from a trial that was done under time pressures but has produced significant learnings that will help shape the next step in democracy for Byron. Building on Byron's own experience in deliberative public decision making, we will be able to combine specific learnings from a local trial with newDemocracy's own principles from trials nation-wide.

Byron has a unique opportunity. We hope you choose to partner with us to deliver the next step in citizens' aspirations for how democracy should work.

*2. Context*

Byron has a reputation for highly engaged community groups which can, at times, make it difficult to establish community-wide perspectives and lead to public discourse which is highly fractious. Making trusted public decisions is arguably harder in Byron than in almost any other council across Australia. Apathy is not a problem we need to fix here.

More broadly, democracy around the world is under stress, as people misunderstand the need for trade-offs, instead craving easy answers. It is easy to fall prey to this – taking tough public decisions is increasingly difficult in any context.

Uniting these two themes, we see an opportunity to jointly develop a much wider collaborative model of democracy that is much more appropriate for Byron but expected to be of interest far more widely. Designing a model of public decision making that takes into account the active and passive voices in the community and the broad context of the community will improve trust in decisions and the effectiveness in which the local council can act.

Our guiding parameters are a set of principles that we believe are core to a strong and fair democratic model and which have now been experienced firsthand by those in and around the Community Solutions Panel. The principles of representative balance, deliberation, authority, time, and diversity and depth in information being considered.

In developing a co-design process that focuses on these principles, newDemocracy and the Byron community can develop a trusted and contextualised model of democracy that will apply the lessons learned from the Community Solutions Panel.

**This co-design process will involve sectors of the community in a process that fits within council parameters for budget and timelines which will be set from the outset.**

Importantly, this is not another Community Solutions Panel. Instead, it is applying the lessons learned and using them to develop a model jointly with key stakeholders and community groups to let the positives Council experienced become the norm, not the exception.

*3.  Key principles*

The Byron co-design process will be principles-based, centred on the points outlined below. While the principles can be challenged, explored and added to, all participants will be asked to use principles as the foundations for the co-design.

**Representativeness**
A threshold test for any democratic decision is whether it involves a representative group of citizens. There are a number of ways to consider 'representativeness': communities of interest, discursively (viewpoint based), statistically, descriptively. Participants will be required to test their model against a simple threshold question of whether a process is fairly representative.

It is worth noting that the group of elected representatives provides a universal fallback: where the group cannot find agreement then the status quo will prevail.

newDemocracy holds the view that at least some participants in deliberative initiatives should be randomly selected to broadly reflect the local community (demographics from Census data). All participants should be local residents but not necessarily ratepayers, and it may be appropriate in some circumstances to also involve local workers or business operators who reside in neighbouring communities. As a starting point, selection should match to age, gender, locality and education level to ensure a suitably diverse range of participants in each initiative.

A subsidiary issue within this principle is one of **Rotation**. Participants should give thought to how the system refreshes itself to avoid the inadvertent creation of a de facto aristocracy.

**Time**
For a given style of decision, the co-design participants will be required to factor in what is a reasonable time to resolve the issue. For example; 4 weeks to resolve a freeway alignment is unreasonable; equally, 2 years to approve a building is also unreasonable.

Secondly, we note the importance that even in a 'fast' decision that it is frequently preferable to give people some time to consider information (even if just a few fact points) before rushing to a decision. We note with interest the consideration of traffic lights vs roundabouts. Citizens will have a view on which they prefer; of greater interest to us is their view when they consider cost of construction and maintenance for each, comparative accident/safety statistics and local amenity concerns. Time to include consideration of an appropriate amount of information and diversity of perspectives is the critical balance to be struck.

**Information**
There is no single font of truth (which is often an unrealistic expectation placed on government): the principle we seek to apply is the input of diversity of sources.

Paired with this principle is the value of asking citizens and stakeholders for question before asking them for answers – e.g. what piece of information would be most influential to you to make a decision on whether Council should do X or Y?

Frequently, active groups in the community have the capability to generate additional questions, answers to questions and solutions but the structures of government make it challenging to incorporate this in a timely way due to the centralised nature of much consultation (council being at the centre, creating a resourcing issue of its own). Resolving this is a core design need in this co-design exercise.

Participants in a democratic decision should be given a chance to focus on identifying what else they need to know, and who they trust to inform them. Hand in hand with this, participants should be supported in developing and applying critical thinking skills and understanding biases (which we all have) as they explore, deliberate and contribute.

**Having a Clear Remit**
A plain English question, phrased neutrally, is essential.

Governments are often criticised (often fairly) for survey questions which are heavily slanted toward a preferred result. Ensuring shared ownership of the questions being shared with the wider community is a key principle for the co-design group to resolve. Again, it should be noted that Council's red-line parameters regarding time and cost will be front and centre for participants: this is a practical and pragmatic exercise and not something which creates new, unaffordable obligations on Council.

**Upfront authority**
To encourage everyday people to make a considerable time commitment to participate (in varied ways), they need to know that the recommendations will be given serious consideration by bureaucracy and decision makers. It was clear that the upfront authority given to the Community Solutions Panel was crucial in making the project successful - as voiced by Panellists when they reported that the authority they were given was a key motivator.

Agreeing a reasonable level of devolved authority for a set of types of decision will be explored by this Co-Design group.

If possible, Council should aim to provide *indicative* guidance in this area as an additional parameter for the Co-Design group. It is worth noting that the participation of councillors and council staff in the Co-Design group allows for this to be an evolving conversation.

**Partnership**
While Council as an organisation will have carriage for implementing the resulting democratic process (the design), the whole approach should embrace and reflect the idea that Councillors,

Council staff and the community (individuals and organisations) are equal partners in its successful operation. This is not an "us-and-them" situation and will allow Council build on the strongly pro-partnership sentiment voiced through the CSP engagement and Community Solutions Panel.

**Communication and transparency**

For the design process to be widely trusted it needs to be clearly and regularly communicated and operate transparently.

As a starting point for consideration, we would welcome local media outlets being actively involved at this co-design stage, and Council should develop and resource a specific communication plan to support widespread awareness of the work being undertaken and outcomes being achieved. Ideally, all meetings of the Co-Design Group should be open to media and community members to attend.

**Fit-for-purpose approaches**

Just as the Community Solutions Panel Report reflected a nuanced relationship between safety, community wellbeing, connectivity and equity, the Co-Design group should embrace the subtle but important relationship between complexity of issue and thus the appropriate tool to consider it. Put another way, a fit-for-purpose deliberative method should be selected for each issue to be referred for deliberation. This could range from 'informed opinion' to single day deliberative polls to more full-scale jury style processes for a major multi-year issue. Council could also consider the use of online approaches in certain circumstances while noting the limits on deliberation and depth of understanding that this may generate. A key part of nDF's ongoing role in the Collaboration will be to provide design advice and input for each deliberation.

*To be successful, the co-design process must embrace the idea that each player – Councillor, Council staff, stakeholder, community organisation and individual community member – has different roles and responsibilities but is integrally involved in each step and each deliberation. Custodian and co-designer, information source, communicator, submitter, observer, supporter and participant: wearing different hats at different times, this is the means through which the co-design process will work most effectively.*

*4.  Who is in the room and why?*

The co-design process will be split into two clear stages.

First, the core design stage (producing a working draft) will involve 12 members from 6 different sections of the Bryon Community. These are:

- Citizens from the Community Solutions Panel
- Council Staff
- Councillors
- Community Groups
- Expert process designers
- State agencies

Each of these groups will nominate two members to the design group.

Secondly, the review stage will involve each of the above groups taking the working draft back to their own communities of interest for feedback and discussion. While it is anticipated there would be ongoing socialisation and sharing of materials and discussion throughout the design phase, this final review period where the whole design is available for consideration is viewed by us as critical.

The groups testing the model will be:

- The entire Community Solutions Panel
- Council Staff
- Councillors
- Community Groups

Each of these groups will test the model internally to assess its appropriateness to their requirements. This can scale very broadly.

Members of the design stage from each of these groups will be tasked with "taking the design to their people" to explain the mechanics and trade-off decisions made to get to that point.

*5.  What triggers what action?*

The Co-Design group must explicitly address the specifics of exactly how the model is **complementary** to the existing public decision-making structures within Byron. Think of this as how and when the Byron Model "plugs in" to how Byron does democracy today. A 'Big Bang' approach is unlikely to be practicable and this issue must be aired at the outset.

In addressing when the model is 'active', the designers must consider where the entry points are for public concern or the necessity of a decision.

newDemocracy can assist with Research Notes and case studies exploring some of the key aspects of international democratic models – e.g. inspiration could be drawn from the Gdansk model that implements thresholds that require public responses to petitions or surveys gathering the requisite public support.

*6.  Facilitation*

Facilitation is fundamental to the functional collaboration of the different groups represented in the design of the Byron model. The costs and overhead for this is marked as an area to be agreed by the Co-Design group.

There are a series of options for consideration when addressing the facilitation of the co-design process:

   a.  Professional facilitator: highest quality solution, but also the most expensive option.

   b.  The upskilling of a local facilitator for various types of specific process (lower cost).

   c.  Staff at different neighbouring councils are trained in the facilitation process and swapped between councils for separate processes (i.e. never facilitate in their home jurisdiction) – can be done at minimal marginal cost if co-design group judges this as a trusted option.

For specifics on the importance of facilitation - see this research note.

*7. Project Outcomes*

Setting objectives and success metrics for a proposed 2-year trial will be the final task given to the Co-Design group.

It is for Council agree the duration of the trial: 2 years is a newDemocracy suggestion to allow for 2x one-year rotations.

Given our emphasis on the value of public trust, we will provide some potential idea as a starting point for discussion by the group.

*External:*
- Decisions are taken by Council with broader public support.
- Deferrals of decisions are reduced.
- Greater breadth in participation and "new to council" contributions.
- There is broad public trust of the process and the model.

*Internally:*
- Attitudinal: Council operating staff view citizen input as positive and constructive
- Functional: model is seen as sufficiently worthwhile to earn long term adoption.