

Draft

Community Engagement Strategy

2024 to 2028





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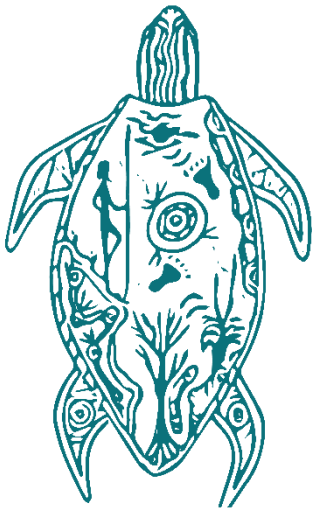
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Acknowledgment of Country

Byron Shire Council acknowledges Traditional Aboriginal Custodians and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and country.

We recognise and respect the Bundjalung of Byron Bay – Arakwal and the Widjabul Wia-bal People’s native title rights and interests within the Shire.

Byron Shire Council also acknowledges the Tweed Byron, Jali and Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Councils under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act NSW 1983.



Byron Shire Council Vision

Byron Shire is a meeting place where people can come together to connect, share, grow, inspire, and create positive change.



About Byron Shire

- Area: 566.6km
- Population: 37,126
- Ratepayers: 16,308
- Residents over 18: 64 per cent
- Residents under 18: 36 per cent
- Residents who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: 1.9 per cent
- People living with disability: 16.8 per cent
- People needing help in their day-to-day lives because of disability: 4.1 per cent
- Jobs: 21,359
- Businesses: 5,888
- Visitors per year: 1.7 million

Note: information is from the 2021 Census and ID profile. This information is available at www.byron.nsw.gov.au.



Mayor's Foreword



It's no coincidence that our traditional owners knew the Byron area as Cavvanbah, or meeting place. For many people, for many centuries, this place has been associated not just with extraordinary natural beauty but with meeting and connection.

When people talk about the 'vibe' here, I think they're referring to the connection they feel to nature, to people and the community.

It's a very 'Byron Shire' thing to be involved and active in the community. Not every Shire is like this. It's something we are proud of.

With a population of roughly 37,000 people and a ratepayer base of 16,000 properties, our community is creative, passionate, vocal and has a strong interest in Council and the decisions we make.

Central to this strategy is the simple premise that Council will consistently do as much as it possibly can to reach and connect with our community.

Byron Shire's Community Engagement Strategy 2024 to 2028 needs to be responsive to what our community demands from us but there will be times when we cannot and do not meet their expectations because of things like legislative, legal, and budgetary requirements.

Through this Community Engagement Strategy we strive to facilitate a culture that welcomes and considers all voices and opinions.

Sarah Ndiaye
Mayor

Thanks for your feedback!

To inform this Community Engagement Strategy we sought people's thoughts and opinions during the consultation process for our Community Strategic Plan.

We also spoke to community representatives across the Shire about engagement. Intercept discussions were held with other individuals.

We met with our Access Consultative Working Group which represents people with lived experience of disability to understand how we can do better with respect to engagement and communication.

The feedback we received has been considered in the development of this strategy. In summary people told us:

- They value transparency and accountability from staff and councillors where community voices are heard and considered as part of the decision-making process.
- The community wants opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process with some interested in Council divesting more decisions via deliberative democracy initiatives.
- When it comes to providing opportunities for people living with disability, we should provide online consultation whenever possible. We should also consider holding face to face consultations at different times and in venues that are accessible and have tables and chairs.
- Efforts to contact the community need to be many and varied across different channels including local media (television, print, radio), social media, electronic newsletters, and face-to-face opportunities.
- We need to be better at telling people how their feedback was used, and the outcome of the consultation process.
- Young people want more opportunities to have their voices heard.

About this document

This Community Engagement Strategy is part of Byron Shire Council’s Integrated Planning and Reporting framework, a suite of documents that guide the planning, reporting and engagement activities of the organisation to meet the immediate and future needs of our community.



Figure 1 Council's Integrated Planning and Report Framework

This strategy outlines:

- How and when we will engage.
- Tools and methods we will use to communicate.
- How the community can participate.
- How community feedback informs the decision-making process.

It is informed by the methodologies and tools developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and is based on the social justice principles of:

- Equity
- Access
- Participation
- Rights

Sitting alongside this strategy is our Community Participation Plan (CPP), a document that details how and when Council engages with the community on planning matters including strategic planning, development assessment (including development applications) and other relevant planning matters.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement refers to the opportunity for the community to give feedback and information to the elected Council for consideration as part of the decision-making process.

Community engagement strengthens our planning and delivery of projects and contributes to the fostering of strong relationships with individuals and groups.

We acknowledge the value of community knowledge and that people in our Shire want community-led governance and to be actively involved in decision-making.

Community engagement – our principles

Our community engagement is underpinned by the following principles:

- Inclusive and accessible
- Genuine and meaningful
- Respectful and supportive
- Open and transparent
- Accountable

Based on these principles we acknowledge our community has the right to be informed about matters that affect them and that we need to provide information

in plain language that is easy to understand and accessible in a format to suit different needs.

Our consultation and engagement should be genuine, ongoing, meaningful, inclusive, and representative.

Our engagement process

Our engagement process considers a range of factors including who the project will impact, how much impact the project will have and how interested the community might be.

1. Project

- What is the project.
- What is the budget.
- Timing or other constraints to be considered.

2. Planning and Delivery

- What is the purpose of the engagement.
- Who are the key stakeholders and what is the level of impact on them.
- What tools and methods will be used for informing and engaging the community.
- Are there any challenges or other factors we need to consider.
- Have we managed community expectations.

3. Review

- Who did we hear from and what did they say.
- Can the feedback be used to improve the planning, implementation or success of the project.

4. Decision-making

- What is our (or the Council's) response to the feedback from the community.

5. Feedback

- Summarising, for the community, the engagement process and how their feedback was used.

Opportunities and risks

Genuine and meaningful communication and engagement results in better outcomes for the community. The benefits include:

- Empowering people to become involved in and influence decisions that affect them.
- Strengthening relationships between the community and Council because of transparency in decision-making.
- By building a better understanding of the community's wants, needs and concerns Council can deliver programs, services, and projects to suit.
- Building a mutual respect for the views of the community and Council's need to make decisions, respond to, present, and assess the future needs of residents and stakeholders.

Some of the risks of poor or ineffective community engagement may result in:

- Decisions made by Council may not meet community expectations.
- Engagement fatigue - too many demands on people to continue to participate in consultation and engagement activities.
- Timing of project delivery/grant acquittal may not align with community expectations.
- Community aspirations or projects are not able to be realised because of factors such as overarching legislation, budget, or safety standards.
- Project delays and/or significant budget implications.

International Association for Public Participation

Our approach to community engagement is based on the spectrum of engagement developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

The spectrum defines the public's role in any community engagement program we do. The five levels of participation (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) reflect our commitment to our residents and stakeholders.

IAP2 Spectrum and the increasing level of influence



IAP2 SPECTRUM	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	To provide information about something where the decision has already been made.	To get community feedback on ideas or projects to progress the decision-making.	To work with the community throughout the process to ensure concerns/aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of options and identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the community.
Our approach	We will keep the community informed about our activities, decisions made and direction.	We will listen to and acknowledge community concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision.	We will work with the community to ensure concerns/aspirations are directly reflected in the options developed and provide feedback on how their input influenced the decision.	We will work with the community so that their advice, innovations and recommendations are included in the final decision that we make together.	Your decisions and recommendations will be taken to the elected Council for approval.
Role of the community	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Decide

Our stakeholders

Our community includes people who live, work, access services, participate or contribute to life in the Byron Shire. Our stakeholders include:

- Traditional Owners of lands in the shire and surrounding shires, the Arakwal, Midjungbal and Widjabul Wia-bal peoples and the organisations that represent Indigenous stakeholders.
- Residents
- Ratepayers
- Businesses owners and staff
- Chambers of Commerce
- Residents' groups
- Rough sleepers and homelessness services
- Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre
- Byron Community Centre
- Children and young people
- Sporting clubs and associations
- Northern Rivers Joint Organisation and neighbouring councils
- Australian and NSW Government agencies and departments
- Federal and State Members of Parliament
- Media
- Visitors



Stakeholder analysis

An analysis of stakeholders is key to establishing the appropriate level of communication relative to their influence and interest in projects and taking into consideration sensitivities and challenges.

Stakeholder identification and analysis is a dynamic process, and we invest in the establishment of relationships with individuals and groups.

We recognise that some sections of our community can be harder to reach, and Council has targeted lines of communication with diverse groups including:

- **Rough sleepers**

Council employs two Public Space Liaison Officers to check the welfare and wellbeing of rough sleepers in the Byron Shire and to work with them to link to services.

- **Access Consultative Working Group**

We work with people with lived experience of disability to better understand how Council can improve access to information, engagement, and community spaces.

- **Aboriginal Stakeholder Engagement Framework**

The Community and Cultural Development team has strong ties with our Indigenous community and representative organisations. Council regularly consults with the Aboriginal community to work with Aboriginal communities to support self-determination and shared decision making.

- **Youth**

Council has identified youth engagement as a priority and there will be a focus on ensuring young people are encouraged to participate in the consultation process. We run a Youth Say program with local high schools, where students discuss local government issues and projects of importance to them. When relevant we also do targeted sessions with children on projects that are important to them.

Citizen Lottery

Council has an established Citizen Lottery which is used to objectively engage with a diverse range of community members when it is appropriate to do so.

People who are registered are randomly selected to participate, get involved and provide feedback on a range of topics and projects. This could include:

- Larger panel-style consultations
- Focus groups
- Smaller surveys

The Citizen Lottery process is designed to be representative to reach people who might not otherwise engage on a particular matter, ensuring diverse and balanced views are able to be heard.

How we engage

Byron Shire Council provides a wide range of opportunities for stakeholders and the community to engage and give feedback to inform and improve projects and processes.

Our communication and engagement activities range from the simple and immediate to the complex and long-term.

We acknowledge the importance of keeping people who have taken the time to engage with us, informed about the status of projects along with the outcomes, decisions, and next steps.

Using the IAP2 principles of engagement, the following table provides examples of how we engage and consult with our community. Engagement and consultation for many projects go beyond the level of participation outlined by IAP2.

INFORM

Channel	Details
Website and social media	<p>We provide information via our website and social media channels (Facebook and Instagram).</p> <p>Our online engagement platform, Your Say, is available via our website.</p>
Media releases	<p>Regular distribution of media releases to all media outlets informing people of projects and providing information. Media releases are also hosted on our website.</p>
Letters, advertisements, signs	<p>Depending on the project/issue we use a range of channels to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the community about projects and relevant matters. • Invite them to participate in engagement activities or have a say. • Provide details about how to find more information or how to contact staff.
E Newsletters	<p>We use multiple E Newsletters. The main Community E Newsletter is distributed every two to three weeks, to let the community know about a wide range of relevant projects as well as development applications, open consultations, and other activities.</p>
Customer Service	<p>People can contact Council in person, via phone, or email to find out information about Council services, projects, or programs.</p>

CONSULT AND INVOLVE

Channel	Details
Your Say, our online engagement hub	Your Say is our online engagement hub where the community can find out about a project or issue, participate in a survey, forum, interactive mapping activity, give opinion, and commentary, and register to be kept informed about a project.
Community and stakeholder groups	Regular meetings with community and stakeholder groups provide opportunities for valuable two-way conversations and direct feedback and sharing of information about a range of Council projects and activities.
Youth Say and school engagement	Our Youth Say program encourages high school students to engage with us on things that are important to them. We also foster relationships with childcare centres, preschools, primary and high schools in the Byron Shire.
Workshops and drop-in sessions	Workshops, drop-in sessions and forums with community and stakeholder representatives provide opportunities to work through issues or to gather feedback on a range of projects.
Public exhibitions	Our public exhibition process allows the community and stakeholders to provide feedback and input on a wide range of plans, policies, and projects.
Targeted surveys and intercept surveys	Surveys and intercept surveys are used to collect feedback from the community.
Market stalls, pop-up stalls and parklets	These provide opportunities for staff to engage directly with a broad range of community members to provide information, answer questions or gather information about projects and issues.
Citizen Lottery	We use our Citizen Lottery, comprised of 400 people, to provide feedback and opinion on Council matters.

<p>Community Roundtable</p>	<p>Our Community Roundtable has representatives from community groups who meet with our Executive team and staff four times a year to discuss broad issues across the Shire.</p>
<p>Public Access at Council Meetings</p>	<p>People can participate in the Public Access session at formal Council meetings..</p>



COLLABORATE AND EMPOWER

Channel	Details
Advisory committees	<p>Our Advisory committees are made up of community members, stakeholders, and Councillors. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts • Biodiversity and Agricultural • Climate Change and Resource Recovery • Coast and ICOLL • Finance • Floodplain Risk Management • Transport and Infrastructure • Water and Sewer
Community and stakeholder reference groups, committees, and boards of management	<p>Members of our reference groups and committees meet with staff to discuss projects, policies, hall management and relevant plans. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 355 Management Committees for Bangalow A&I Hall, Bangalow Showgrounds, Durrumbul Community Centre, Brunswick Heads Memorial Hall, Marvell Hall, South Golden Beach Community Centre, Suffolk Park Hall.
Deliberative processes and citizens juries	<p>We sometimes use deliberative processes and citizen juries to help resolve complex problems.</p>

Deliberative processes

A deliberative process is a structured method that involves community members in decision-making. It allows them to discuss and consider issues in depth before reaching a conclusion.

This approach is designed to ensure that decisions are well-informed and reflect the diverse perspectives of the community.

Council has invested in deliberative processes in the past and will continue to do so where is an identified need.

Key features of deliberative processes

Inclusive Participation: Deliberative processes aim to involve a diverse group of participants, including those from marginalised or seldom heard groups. This ensures that a wide range of views and experiences are considered.

Informed Discussion: Participants are provided with relevant information and evidence from various sources, including experts and stakeholders.

This helps them understand the issues better and discuss them more effectively.

Facilitated Dialogue: The process is often facilitated to ensure that discussions are respectful, inclusive, and productive.

Facilitators help manage the conversation, ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak, and that the discussion stays on track.

Time for Reflection: Unlike other forms of engagement, deliberative processes give participants time to reflect on the information and discussions before making decisions.

This leads to more considered and thoughtful outcomes.

Transparency and Accountability: The process is transparent, with clear communication about how participants' input will be used in decision-making.



When we engage

Much of Council's day-to-day work in the community is operational relating to things such as road maintenance, water and sewer and waste collection.

Engagement with the community varies according to the complexity or nature of the issue, legislative requirements or at the direction of the elected Council. For example:

- Projects that have a significant impact or are deemed important to the community.
- Changes to, or development of, a new project, initiative, plan, policy, or strategy.
- Infrastructure projects.

There are times when we may inform people about something but there will be no opportunity for engagement because there is no scope to change or influence the decision-making process or influence the decision-making process or the outcome. For example:

- When there is an emergency.
- There is risk to health, safety, and welfare.
- We are reviewing internal processes.
- There are legal, commercial, or sensitive constraints.

Community engagement methods vary depending on who is being consulted, the level of public participation and the timeframes and resources required.

A mix of engagement methods is required to cater for different stakeholder needs, preferences and the level of participation Council is seeking to achieve.

Following is a guide to when we engage for a core range of our projects and legal requirements. Because of the breadth of projects and issues in the Byron Shire, some are not listed.

Note: most of the Council engagement falls in the 'Inform', 'Consult' and 'Involve' spheres of the IAP2 spectrum.

When	Level	How we may engage	Purpose	Timeframe
<p>Council's long-term plans including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategic Plan • Delivery Program • Strategic Planning documents 	Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website information • Social media • Media releases • E news • Advertising • Your Say • Workshops • Drop-in sessions • Online meeting 	Seek community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Minimum 28 days
<p>Council plans, masterplans, key policies, and strategies</p> <p>Annual Operational Plan and Budget</p>	Consult Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website information • Social media • Media release • E news • Advertising • Your Say Byron Shire • Workshops • Drop-in session • Letters to impacted residents and businesses • Pop up stalls • Online workshop 	Seek community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Minimum 28 days
Capital works (maintenance	Inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters 	To provide information to the	Minimum five days in

When	Level	How we may engage	Purpose	Timeframe
and repairs, major projects etc)	Consult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door knocking • Signage • Website information • Social media • Media release • E news • Advertising 	community to let them know of upcoming and future projects and work and factor in potential disruption or impacts.	<p>advance of assigned work.</p> <p>Note: notice to stakeholders varies according to the project and wherever possible long-lead-in times are factored into engagement and delivery.</p>
General initiatives and proposals	Consult Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website information • Social media • Media release • E news • Advertising • Your Say Byron Shire • Workshops • Drop-in session • Letters to impacted residents and businesses. • Pop up stalls • Online workshop 	Seek community feedback and ensure it is considered in the final reports or plans.	Minimum 21 days

Roles

Mayor and Councillors

The role of the Mayor and Councillors in our community engagement process is to participate as elected members, listen to the views of the community, and consider these views when making decisions at Council.

Council staff

The role of staff in Council's community engagement process is for project managers/officers to organise and facilitate the discussion, record information, provide feedback, evaluate the engagement, and consider the community's views when making recommendations to Council.



Feedback

When specific community engagement activities are undertaken, feedback is collated, and information is included to inform the direction of projects, plans, and strategies.

Depending on the project, the Your Say platform provides updates of the consultation and the next steps, if relevant.

Formal reports to Council reference how we engaged with the community.

Council accepts submissions and feedback in a range of ways including:

- Online
- Written
- Verbally

When Council actively seeks community input and feedback, information is collated and reviewed with staff considering things such as key themes, suggestions, and ideas.

Where relevant and possible this is reflected in reports for the consideration of Council and in final documents, strategies, and proposals.

Council often receives petitions and form letters as part of the feedback and submission process. Petitions and form letters are each treated as one submission.

Acknowledging community feedback

In response to community feedback, staff will 'close the loop' or finalise the project by:

- Updating the Your Say page on our website to reflect the stage of the engagement process and, where relevant, the outcomes and next steps.
- Email the people who said they wanted to be kept informed about the project, telling them about the next steps or the stages of the decision-making process (e.g. report being written for consideration of Council or decision made by Council).

Matters that are to be considered by the elected Council will include, where relevant, information on community engagement such as the reach of the engagement in the community and a summary of feedback received.

This information will also be on the Your Say page of Council's website.

Following a Council decision, people who wanted to be kept informed will receive an email and the Your Say page will be updated.



Evaluation

Community engagement is not a one size fits all concept. It is nuanced and influenced by many factors, some of which are out of Council's control. What has worked well for one project might not work for another.

Success is often difficult to measure. For some projects it might be receiving a considerable number of submissions which highlight community concerns.

Other projects might receive a small amount of feedback which does not mean the issue is any less important, but it might be that people are happy with the direction of the project.

In our Communications and Engagement Plans we identify metrics to evaluate how successful we were in meeting the engagement objective. This might include:

- Reaching an outcome that community was satisfied with or in support of
- Qualitative methods such as a strengthening of relationships with stakeholders.
- Improved sentiment towards an issue.
- Increasing knowledge about an issue.

In addition, we evaluate the engagement process, for example:

- Tracking activities such as number of media releases published, and social media posts made.
- Participation in engagement activities.
- Quantitative data such as number of responses, reach in the community via the website, or clicks from E newsletters.

Internal evaluation processes include:

- **Audience**
How well did we consider the target audience, and did we seek the best methods/channels possible to connect with this audience?
- **Reach**
How many people were we able to connect with through this engagement.

- **Timing**

Was the timing of the engagement well considered? Were obstacles identified and avoided (i.e. public holidays, school holidays). Was the engagement long enough or too long?

- **Communication channels**

How did we communicate about the engagement and were our methods successful i.e. advertising channels, letters, website, social media, public events, meetings, information sessions etc.

- **Feedback**

How much feedback did we receive? Did the feedback help Council in representing the community's views on a particular project or issue?

- **Cost effectiveness**

Did our approaches represent good value for money?

Broadly, Council undertakes a community satisfaction survey every two years to monitor community sentiment across the Shire in relation to council services including communication and engagement. The outcomes of this survey are reported to Council and back to the community.

Council invests in ongoing training for staff in the IAP2 framework as well as other professional development opportunities to learn about best practice and new and emerging engagement and evaluation techniques.

Review

This Community Strategy will be reviewed within three months of the NSW Local Government elections in September 2028.



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