

Draft Community Engagement Strategy



BYRON
SHIRE
COUNCIL



Acknowledgement to Country

Byron Shire Council acknowledges
Traditional Owners of lands in Byron Bay,
the Arakwal of the Bundjalung and pays its respects
to Elders past and present. Council extends that
respect to the Midjungbal people to the north
and the Widjabul Wia-bal people to the west
and to all Aboriginal people.



Byron Shire Council Vision

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



Mayor's foreword

There really is nowhere else in Australia (or the world for that matter) quite like the Byron Shire. I say that with great affection because the Byron Shire is, hands down, one of the most naturally beautiful and biodiverse parts of Australia with its stunning coastline and beach breaks, pristine rivers, and lush hinterland villages.

With a population of around 36,100, a ratepayer base of 16,000 and visitor numbers topping more than 2.4 million per year (before COVID), Byron Shire is also renowned for its strong community spirit, opinions, and activism. Our vision is to be a meeting place where people can come together to connect, share, grow, inspire, and create positive change – and we need input, ideas, and a continuing dialogue with our community to make this a reality.

The Community Engagement Strategy is our guide to creating and maintaining effective relationships with a community that wants to be part of the conversation and decision-making process. The strategy honours the community's strong interest in Council by embedding a best-practice approach to consultation using the globally recognised International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) model; strengthened by our recent experiences with deliberative democracy.

The strategy acknowledges the importance of finding ways to reach and engage with the widest possible cross-section of the community. Our goal is to create an inclusive and accessible culture that welcomes and considers all voices and opinions – not just the loudest ones. We look forward to working with our community to achieve this.

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, which appears to read 'M Lyon'.

Michael Lyon
Mayor



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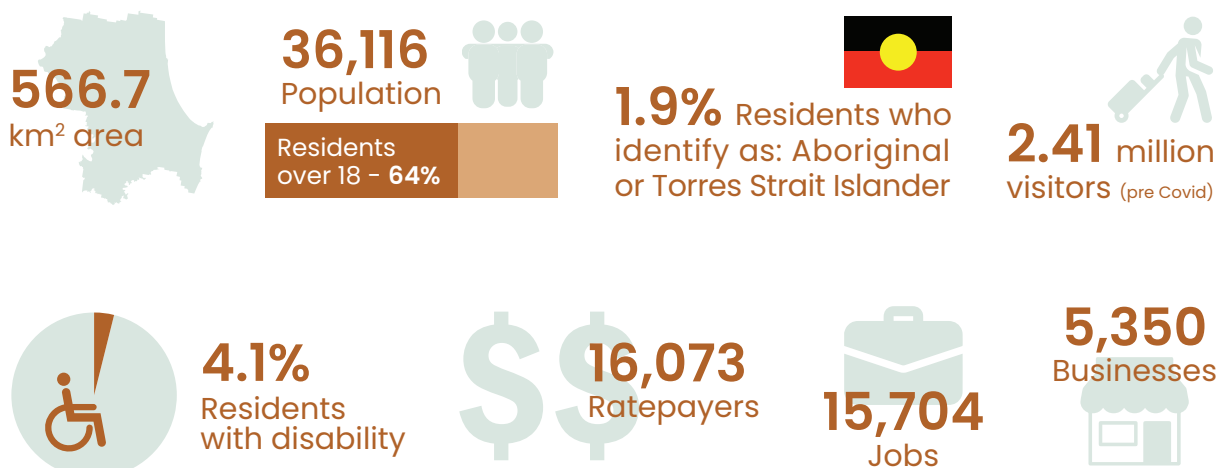
This Byron Shire Council Community Engagement Strategy will be reviewed at the end of the term of the Council as part of a broader review of the Community Strategic Plan.

Principles

In keeping with the Council's Community Participation Plan, which explains how we engage with our community on planning matters in the Byron Shire, there are principles and values that are common to both documents including:

- People's right to be informed about matters that affect them.
- Accessible and appropriate information in plain language that is easy to understand and accessible in a format to suit different needs.
- Open and transparent consultation and engagement.
- Ongoing and meaningful consultation and engagement.
- Early and genuine engagement and consultation.
- Inclusive and representative consultation and engagement.

About Byron Shire



Note: information is from the 2021 Census and ID profile.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a broad term that means different things to different people. It can be as simple as informing people about roadworks, seeking feedback that can set the direction for a Council project or process, or handing over decision-making to the community.

We are fortunate to serve a community that is interested in Council's activities and keen to be involved in decision-making processes. Time and again residents and stakeholders have demonstrated their passion, enthusiasm, and ability to come up with imaginative and innovative ideas and solutions to a wide range of issues.

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

Byron Shire Council sees community engagement as an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to contribute to, and shape, decisions that may affect or interest them. It is also about making sure they can guide and influence the present and future of the Byron Shire, the place many of them call home.

Community engagement is about building strong relationships with people; relationships that are built on trust, transparency, honesty, and respect.

It is about working with the people who live here, work here, visit here, and do business here. To strive to preserve, maintain and plan for a future that reflects the colourful, vibrant and passionate Shire we are.

Community and stakeholders

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

- Communities of place such as residents of Bangalow or Mullumbimby.
- Communities of interest such as arts, sport, or environmental etc.
- Communities of affiliation such as schools, sports clubs, business.
- Communities of culture such as the Bundjalung of Byron Bay Arakwal

Stakeholders are individuals, groups of individuals, organisations or political entities directly affected or involved with the outcome of a decision or the impact of a strategy or project.

Our stakeholders include:

Stakeholder type	Groups of stakeholders included in this type
Traditional Owners of lands in the Shire, the Arakwal, Midjungbal and Widjabul Wia-bal peoples and the organisations that represent indigenous stakeholders, including:	• Bundjalung of Byron Bay Aboriginal Corporation (Arakwal) • Widjabul Wia-bal representatives • Tweed Byron Local Aboriginal Land Council • Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council • Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Council

Stakeholder type	Groups of stakeholders included in this type
Residents	All villages
Businesses owners and their staff	All villages
Chambers of Commerce representing:	• Byron Bay • Bangalow • Mullumbimby • Brunswick Heads • North Ocean Shores
Residents' groups including:	• Bangalow Progress Association • Mullumbimby Residents Association • South Golden Beach Community Association • Brunswick Heads Progress Association • Byron Bay Community Association • CABS (Community Alliance for Byron Shire) • Suffolk Park Progress Association • New Brighton Village Association • Ewingsdale Progress Association • Skinners Shoot Residents Association • Belongil Residents Association • Brunswick Heads Foreshore Protection Group • Main Arm Residents Association • Federal Masterplan Group • Ocean Shores Community Association
Rough sleepers and homelessness services including:	• End Street Sleeping • Fletcher Street Cottage
Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre	
Byron Community Centre	
Young people	Byron Youth Service, Local primary and high schools
Sporting clubs and associations	
Northern Rivers Joint Organisation and neighbouring councils including:	Tweed, Lismore, Richmond Valley, Kyogle and Ballina and Rous County Council
Australian and NSW Government agencies and departments	Member for Ballina, Richmond
Local and national media	

Stakeholder analysis

Council does a stakeholder analysis early in planning for an engagement. This allows us to map out and establish the appropriate level of communication with different stakeholders relative to their influence and interest in the projects.

This helps ensure we are reaching the right people, consider sensitivities and challenges and carefully select meaningful methods of engaging.

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

- Rough sleepers – Council employs two Public Space Liaison Officers whose job it is 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 Liaison Officer – Our Aboriginal Liaison Officer has strong ties with our Indigenous community, ensuring Council consults with cultural knowledge holders and cultural practices and protocols are recognised and considered in Council projects and processes.
- End Rough Sleeping Collaboration – Council is working with the End Rough Sleeping Collaboration to end rough sleeping by 2030.
- Youth Council – We run a regular program with local high schools where staff and students work together over five to six weeks with the aim being to teach students about local government and for students to talk about issues and projects of importance to them.

Community engagement, values, and principles

The social justice principles of equity, access, participation, and rights underpin community engagement in the Byron Shire.

Engagement with our community is a part of our day-to-day operations, from road works, drainage maintenance and waste services, to planning and community facilities to the development of medium and long-term programs, strategies, and projects.

We use a wide range of engagement techniques to provide our community with information. These include:

- Website
- Direct communication with residents and stakeholders
- Social media
- Online engagement via Your Say Byron Shire, www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire
- Media releases
- Newspaper and radio advertising.

Our communication and engagement activities stretch from the simple and immediate to the complex and long-term and they are equally important.

We also know the importance of 'closing the loop'. This means 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.

Opportunities and risks

Genuine and meaningful communication and engagement means better outcomes for stakeholders, residents, ratepayers, Councillors, and staff. 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 we 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.
- Better outcomes for everyone because Council values and prioritises working with a proactive community.

We recognise that community engagement does not replace appropriate decision-making by elected representatives, and sometimes community aspirations or projects are not able to be realised because of other factors such as overarching legislation, budget, or safety.

The reality is that some decisions and actions of Council will not be supported by people but a strong, transparent, and honest relationship with our community enables us to provide the context and rationale behind those decisions.

Similarly, a robust relationship with our community means we, as an organisation, must be prepared to accept that sometimes we get it wrong and must do better.

IAP2 – International Association of Public Participation

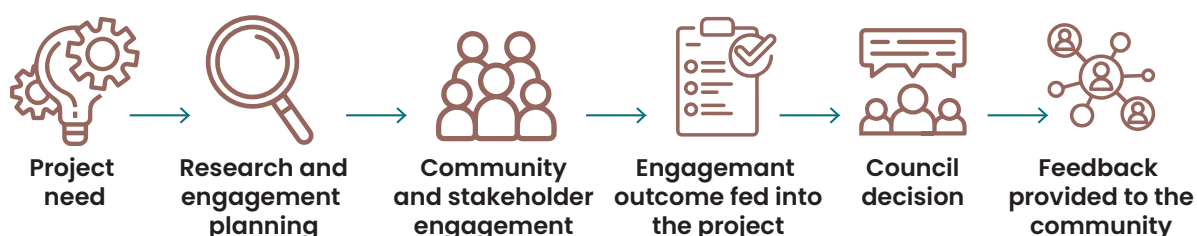
Our approach to community engagement is based on international best practice including the spectrum of engagement developed by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

The spectrum defines the public's role in any community engagement program we do. The five levels of participation reflect our promise to our residents and stakeholders. They are:

- **Inform** – this normally means a decision has been made or an action is needed so people are provided with information.
- **Consult** – people can provide feedback on issues, options, ideas, and decisions.
- **Involve** – people's concerns and feedback are reflected in decision-making.
- **Collaborate** – the community and Council partner in decision-making towards a common goal.
- **Empower** – the community and stakeholders have final decision-making power.

The engagement process

Planning for engagement 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 in the project. The requirements for public participation are also considered including exhibition timeframes to ensure the community has an opportunity to have a say.



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 our projects and processes. Using the IAP2 principles of engagement, the following table demonstrates how we engage and consult with our community.

Council staff have strong, personal, and robust relationships with many community groups. It should be noted that engagement and consultation for many projects go beyond the level of participation prescribed by IAP2.

Participation	Channel	In Practice
Inform	Website and social media	Information is provided via our social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) and the Council's website. Council's website, including Your Say Byron Shire, complies with national accessibility standards.
	Media releases	Regular distribution of media releases to all media outlets informing of projects, information etc.
	Letters, advertisements, signs, email	- Advise of a project, issue, or matter that may be of interest - Invite the community to participate in engagement - Provide information on how people can find out more information - Advise how to make a comment or be involved - Outline the timeframe for consultation.
	E News	Council's E newsletter with information about projects and work is distributed every two to three weeks.

Participation	Channel	In Practice
Consult and Involve	Online engagement Your Say Byron Shire	Council's online engagement section, Your Say Byron Shire, allows the community to find out and provide information, opinion, and commentary about the wide range of Council projects and activities.
	Community stakeholder groups	Regular meetings with community groups and other stakeholders provide an opportunity for valuable two-way conversations and direct feedback about a range of Council projects and activities
	Youth Panel and school engagement	Council has a regular program designed to seek feedback and information from school students about matters of interest to them. Council also has relationships with high school and primary schools in the Shire.
	Workshops, drop-in sessions	Workshops, drop-in sessions and forums with community and stakeholders provide opportunities to work through issues or to gather feedback on projects etc.
	Public exhibitions	Council's 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	Staff and consultants use this method to gather information from a wide cross-section of the community.
	Stalls and parklets	This provides an opportunity for staff to engage directly with community members to provide information, answer questions or gather information about projects and issues.
	Citizens Lottery	The Citizen's Lottery is comprised of 400 people who nominated to provide feedback and opinion on Council matters.
	Pop-up stalls, market stalls	These are held to engage directly with community members as a way of informing people, gathering information, or providing feedback.
	Community Roundtable	The Community Roundtable consists of representatives from community groups who meet with Council's Executive team and staff four times a year to discuss broad issues across the Shire.

Participation	Channel	In Practice
Collaborate and empower	Advisory Committees	These committees are made up of community members, stakeholders, and Councillors. There are 14 Advisory Committees: • Arts and Creative Industries • Arakwal Memorandum of Understanding • Audit, Risk, and Improvement • Biodiversity • Climate Change and Resource Recovery • Coast and ICOLL • Floodplain Management • Heritage • Housing and Affordability • Infrastructure • Local Traffic • Moving Byron • Business and Industry • Water and Sewer • Communications Panel • Finance
	Community and stakeholder reference groups, committees, and Boards of management	Groups of community members and stakeholders that meet with staff and/or Councillors to discuss projects, policies, hall management and relevant plans: • Byron Bay Town Centre Masterplan Guidance Group • Place Planning Collective • Federal Masterplan Group • Bangalow A&I Hall section 355 Board of Management • Bangalow Parks (Bangalow Showground) section 355 Management Committee • Brunswick Heads section 355 Management Committee • Durrumbul Community Centre section 355 Management Committee • Marvell Hall section 355 Management Committee • South Golden Beach section 355 Management Committee • Suffolk Park Community Hall.
	Deliberative processes and citizen juries	Council sometimes uses deliberative processes and citizen juries to help resolve complex problems. Recent examples include: • Sustainable tourism • Infrastructure prioritisation • How to improve decision-making.

When we engage

Community engagement methods will 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	Why	What for	Exhibit
Council's long-term plans including: - Community Strategic Plan - Delivery Program - Community Engagement Strategy	Involve	Website information Social media Media releases E news Advertising Your Say Byron Shire Workshops Drop-in sessions Online meeting	Gauge community feedback on Council's long-term plans. In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback.	Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Min 28 days

When	Level	How we may engage	Why	What for	Exhibit
Council plans and strategies	Consult	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.	Gauge community feedback on Council plans and strategies. In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback.	Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Min 28 days
Council's Annual Operational Plan and budget	Involve	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.	Gauge community feedback on Council's long-term plans. In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback.	Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Min 28 days

When	Level	How we may engage	Why	What for	Exhibit
Council's key policies	Consult	Website information Social media Media release E news Advertising Your Say Byron Shire Pop up stalls	Gauge community feedback on Council's key policies. In addition to statutory requirements ensure stakeholders are informed and are given the opportunity to provide feedback.	Acknowledge community feedback so it can be considered by Council in its decision-making process.	Min 28 days
Maintenance, capital works, general initiatives, and proposals	Inform	Letters Door knocking Signage Website information Social media Media release E news Advertising.	To alert the community and provide information about upcoming work.	To provide information to the community and stakeholders to let them know of work and factor in potential disruption or impacts.	Min 5-7 days in advance of planned work
General initiatives and proposals	Involve	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.	Gauge community feedback on general initiatives and proposals not identified in this table.	Acknowledge community feedback and ensure it is considered in the final reports or plans.	Min 28 days

Roles

Councillors

A Councillor's role in community engagement is to participate as an elected member, listen to the views of the community, and consider these views when making decisions at Council.

Community engagement provides valuable opportunities for Councillors to hear and understand the voice of the community and ensure that this voice is accurately represented when Council meets and makes decisions that impact the future of the community.

Council Staff

A Council staff member's role in community engagement is to organise and facilitate the discussion, record, provide feedback, evaluate the engagement, and consider the community's views when making recommendations to Council.

Decision Making

Feedback

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

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

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

How we use community feedback including petitions and form letters

When Council actively seeks community input and feedback this information is collated and reviewed with staff considering things such as key themes, suggestions, and ideas. Where relevant and possible this is reflected in the final documents, strategies, and proposals.

Depending on the project and issue, 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.

Evaluating success

Community engagement is not a one size fits all concept. It is nuanced and is 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 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 and outcomes of the project.

We factor in evaluation into every engagement plan. Depending on the project's overall engagement objectives, some may only require a tracking of activities such as number of media release or social media posts. Others may require a mix of methods using qualitative (for example strengthening relationships) and quantitative (for example number of survey responses) methods.

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.

Staff from the Media and Communications team meet regularly with Councillors on the Communications Panel to discuss and evaluate the success, or otherwise, of projects. Monthly reports on the activities of the Media and Communications team are also provided to the General Manager and the Executive team.

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 techniques.

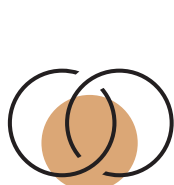
The most important thing is for the community to have confidence that engagement and consultation is at the core of our business; that people know that opportunities to feed into process and projects are, and will always be, available.

It is about being consistent, educating people on where to find information and how to contribute.

Conclusion

Recognising that communication is a two-way process, our commitment to our community is to do our best to give every opportunity to people to provide feedback and information to Council on a wide range of projects, plans and issues.

Meaningful communication and genuine engagement mean better outcomes for communities, residents, ratepayers, stakeholders, Councillors, and staff.



Connect



Share



Grow



Inspire



Positive Change

For further information

Byron Shire Council
70 Station Street
PO Box 219 Mullumbimby NSW 2482
E: council@byron.nsw.gov.au
P: 02 6626 7054
www.byron.nsw.gov.au



Traditional home of the Bundjalung People