



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Mossman Gorge Commissioners' report

We have now dedicated 11 years of our working lives as Local Commissioners with the Family Responsibilities Commission, and we can assure you our commitment and leadership skills are strong and continue to grow with each year. These past 12 months have been hazy. Last year we spoke of the dark cloud hanging over our heads and the unknown future for our roles. Further yarns with officers from DATSIP on the new proposed Local Thriving Communities model have continued during the past year with very little information provided to the grassroots people to explain what it will deliver for our communities. This unknown has caused difficulties for us. The indecisiveness of government has made our roles tougher than usual. During the conference process, when yarning about future goals with clients, we have been hesitant to make referrals, unsure what will happen to the Commission and how that will affect referrals in the future. If referrals are abandoned mid-way it could cause more harm to the already vulnerable clients we see at conference. Government holds the power to change communities. Changes have been made time and again over many decades. We realise change is inevitable and hope that during such a change when considering decisions for our community, our mob will have a vital part to play in the decision-making. Those who live day to day lives in this community are the right decision-makers.

This year has had its challenges. We have seen some of the old dysfunctional social norms coming back. Parties and drinking in the streets, loud music and a lack of respect for community residents has increased over the past 6 to 12 months. Relationships between state housing, local police and the community could be strengthened to address these issues, and although in the past the relationship has been strong, it has weakened over the past 12 months. The new generation are bringing back old habits into our community and we need services, as well as families, to step up and hold people accountable for their anti-social behaviours.

Apunipima Wellbeing Centre has been through consistent staff turnover in 2018, however, 2019 has seen some stability return with the introduction of new strategies to engage with clients. We have spent the past 12 months trialling a reduction in the frequency of scheduled conferencing from once a fortnight to once a month and have found this has created a negative impact on clients. We have noticed that the increased gap between conferences has led to general confusion and aggression amongst clients when bringing up old matters. Conferencing more frequently on current matters has more influence on engagement and a better chance of achieving positive behavioural change.

Our collaboration with the school principal and staff, and the parents/carers of students has remained strong. Mossman State High School has welcomed a new Principal this year, Michelle Lyons, and although we have only met once, a successful yarn has initiated engagement to services in Mossman Gorge and begun a healthy relationship between community and the high school. We look forward to contributing further where we can.

Primary school attendance has continued to be steady for the students reported in the Mossman Gorge community figures with an overall attendance percentage in Term 1 2019 of 79.9 percent. The school attendance for the first term of 2019 was affected by the active monsoon trough which came through in late January causing flooding and preventing families returning home from their holidays. Absenteeism was further affected later in the term by Cyclone Trevor which brought heavy rainfall and flooding to the local area. Some parents kept their children home during the torrential downpour, reporting that the rain left their children too wet and muddy before they had even reached the bus stop.

# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW



Last year our Commission office was moved to an alternative location to allow for the demolition of our old demountable office, and the construction of a new cul-de-sac. The new building has proven to have its own issues; a damaged roof made the building uninhabitable during the wet season. This meant we again were required to move our conference venue to another temporary location while the building was treated for mould. As at the time of writing our report, the roof is yet to be repaired. The wet weather and heavy rain continued after severe Tropical Cyclone Trevor and our scheduled March conference had to be cancelled and the clients rescheduled to a later date.

Mossman Gorge residents have endured ongoing major civil works again this year and have reported they are running out of patience, but looking forward to the completion of the project. The civil works include house renovations, roads, water, sewerage reticulation, stormwater drainage and service relocations. During this time some residents were unable to gain access to sections of roadway and others were unable to access their own driveways. Housing renovations incorporated three houses at a time being renovated, with residents having to relocate. This created some difficulty in locating our clients for the serving of conference notices. The majority of homes have now been completed and final discussions are taking place with the Department of Housing and Public Works in relation to long term leasing arrangements.

Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Aboriginal Corporation (BBNAC) and Mossman Gorge residents have been working toward establishing a more bilingual community that integrates Yalanji language in a variety of new projects such as street signage, a dance and story DVD, family histories and a special hymn book. BBNAC program Bama Brave Strong and Busy placed smiles on the faces of children and their families during the Easter school holiday program with many activities to keep the children entertained. Some of the highlights of the program were fishing and swimming at Port Douglas, attending a pop-up playgroup at the Rex Small Park and teaming up with the Mossman Youth Centre for a Family Fun Day at Lake Eacham. Forty-five youth, including youth from Mossman Gorge, also attended an Indigenous information session for entry into the Navy, Army or Air Force at the Mossman Youth Centre.

The Mossman Gorge Arts Centre Manager is a driving force behind a push to attract more artists to the Yalanji Arts Centre. Yalanji Arts is an Indigenous art centre open to all Mossman Gorge residents, people of Yalanji descent and Indigenous peoples residing in the Douglas Shire region. Yalanji Arts envisages an empowered, united, proud and sustainable community and provides employment and professional training and development to Indigenous art workers, and also supports and advocates for local artists. Since it's re-launch in March 2019, 11 artists have joined the arts centre, participating in various activities including a professional development painting workshop, a ceramic workshop and a screen printing for merchandise workshop. Artists are also working towards producing works for various regional and national art exhibitions.

Our vision for the future of Mossman Gorge is simple. We envision a community where respect for each other is valued; capacity building is present to support our mob toward improved social and emotional wellbeing; opportunities for employment exist in a variety of sectors; our children are attending school consistently and education is valued; there is no violence, loud music or parties; and our Bama people are happy.

**Mossman Gorge Commissioners Loretta Spratt, Karen Gibson and Karen Shuan.**