



# LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

## Mossman Gorge Commissioners' report

This year – our tenth as Local Commissioners in Mossman Gorge – has been spent guiding and supporting our mob toward self-determination and better health. We have sought to ensure that education is a priority for our children in order to provide better employment opportunities for a sustainable future.

At present there is a dark cloud that hangs over our heads. This cloud has been caused by the uncertainty around our future as Local Commissioners. It seems the leaders of our nation have made some decisions for our people despite never having set foot on our country. This has made us very unhappy. We consider our role is vital to encouraging our mob to continue on the road to wellbeing and responsibility. In spite of the cloud hanging over us, we intend to continue to encourage our community members on that road until we are no longer able to do so.

Mossman Gorge community has seen many improvements over the past 12 months with home renovations and the start of a major civil works upgrade project. The 'Kickstart Community Infrastructure Upgrade' includes roads, water, sewerage reticulation, stormwater drainage and service relocations. The project has been funded mainly by the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet with further contributions from the Queensland Government Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and the Department of Housing and Public Works. The program has provided training and employment opportunities for community members and aims to improve municipal infrastructure and create individual lots at Mossman Gorge to enable home ownership.

In April 2017 Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Apunipima) took over the operation of the Wellbeing Centre (WBC) from the Royal Flying Doctor Service and began servicing the community. It has been a long, hard road for Apunipima staff working to gain the acceptance and trust of community members. A lack of qualified counsellors to support local staff members has made this task even harder. Good news came in June 2018 with the appointment of a new female counsellor. We are hopeful that a male counsellor specialising in substance misuse will also be employed in the near future to fill this gap in service.

The Queensland Health Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs (ATODS) group therapy and individual counselling services have not been operating in the community during 2018, leaving a further gap in service where there is a high demand. Unfortunately, it is a lack of support services available for clients that has led to a reduction in the number of case plan referrals to the WBC over the past year with only six referrals for this financial year compared to 20 for the prior financial year. In addition to the WBC, the Apunipima medical clinic has provided crucial support for parents, offering information and awareness in relation to common health problems including scabies which is associated with school absences. As Local Commissioners we encourage community members to attend the clinic for help when required.

Cape York Partnership (CYP) MPower referrals (five this year) have remained largely consistent with last year. We have found that most clients who have been referred in the past are still engaging in some manner with the service. Unfortunately we are seeing an end to the CYP Strong Families Parenting Program in Mossman Gorge, but we look forward to the replacement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services to be provided through the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

Primary school attendance for Mossman State School has increased from 72.4 percent in term 2 2017 to 82.5 percent in term 2 2018 for Mossman Gorge identified students. Unfortunately high school attendance remains problematical with enrolments of FRC Mossman Gorge identified students reducing at the school over the 2018 school year. At the beginning of term 1 2018 the Commission was advised that there were six pupils whom the Commission identified as Mossman Gorge students enrolled at the Mossman State

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High School. By term 2 the number of students had reduced to four, with students disengaging and some students reaching the non-compulsory school age of 16 years. We can report that the school's Community Education Counsellor has been engaging well with families to improve school attendance.

Mossman State High School was funded for an Indigenous Pathway Support Program in 2018. The program targets mostly disengaged students in years 10 to 12 to support a pathway towards achieving a Queensland Certificate of Education. Although the program is offered to Mossman Gorge students, and those in the wider area of Mossman who are in years 10 to 12, the program coordinator is flexible in engaging students from lower grades. We have been collaborating with the program coordinator and parents of students to assist with engagement and attendance in the program as we see great value in it.

A matter of continuing concern to us, and one which we have repeatedly raised in our Local Commissioner year in review articles, is that of visitors to Mossman Gorge who are disrespectful of our community values, engage in loud parties and drink alcohol on premises that are dry houses. Their actions compromise the tenants occupying the houses which they visit who say they have little if any control over their actions. We have asked time and again for assistance in gaining some authority over these temporary guests in order to support our own mob.

Notices related to domestic violence orders and domestic violence breaches have increased over the past two years from 21 in 2016-17 to 33 in 2017-18. These matters range from low to high levels of violence and are addressed in conference. Unfortunately there are limited domestic violence support services available and we have therefore requested that these clients engage with the Men's Groups in Mossman Gorge and Mossman. In September 2017 Mossman police advised that domestic violence incidents in the region, when looking at the number of incidents per head of population, were significantly high and on par with Aurukun. They reported a number of contributing factors including increased reporting due to improved relations between the police and community, and being in a tourist area which can contribute to domestic violence incidents. Each year we continue to support the White Ribbon event in Mossman, and this year we sponsored bottled water for the attendees of the event.

The long awaited approval for reduced hours on the sale of cask wine was granted through the Liquor Accord in early October 2017. This approval was welcomed after the concerted effort of the wider community of Mossman and Mossman Gorge over many months to reduce anti-social behaviour and public space intoxication. To our disappointment, however, in April 2018 the approval ceased as some hotel publicans in the area did not support the approach.

On 14 November 2017 Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Aboriginal Corporation held their Annual General Meeting in Mossman Gorge to elect a new Chairperson following the resignation of Karen Gibson. Karen stepped down to focus on her new role with CYP as an Empowered Communities Engagement Officer. Unfortunately Local Commissioner Gibson's new CYP role has meant that we have been unable on many occasions to conference independently of Commissioner Glasgow. Our FRC Act states that if we do not have three Local Commissioners presiding at a conference, the conference must be constituted by the FRC Commissioner and two Local Commissioners. We have been very grateful, however, for the support we have received from Commissioner Glasgow who continues to mentor our efforts as Local Commissioners.

Heading into the next financial year, we are determined to continue meeting the challenges facing our community including the challenge of improving high school attendance and accessing programs for substance misuse and domestic violence for our community members. Our job is not finished and we will continue our journey for our mob.

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