



# Community operations

***FRC operations in Mossman Gorge were undertaken by Local Commissioners Karen Shuan, Loretta Spratt, Karen Gibson and George Ross-Kelly, supported by Local Registry Coordinator Sandra Rye (assisted by Acting Local Registry Coordinator Josephine Pinder). A report of their operations during the reporting period follows.***

## **Mossman Gorge Local Commissioners' report**

The year has passed like the wind in a cyclone. We have paused to look back over a year of change, a year that has seen some unusual occurrences which have prompted us to consider new and innovative ways to tackle the existing social problems in Mossman Gorge. It is important for us to sustain the momentum we have gained since 2008 to face new and existing challenges. We are committed to creating a positive future for generations to come. We have a heavy responsibility to the members of our community as Local Commissioners, to support the rebuilding of socially acceptable behaviours and to keep our children safe, allowing them to grow and blossom in a supportive nurturing environment. This is by no means an easy task we face each year, but we know we can lean on one another to share some of the burden when life gets a bit tough, and to keep our motivation going.

A long-awaited valuable addition to our team has been the appointment of a new male Mossman Gorge Commissioner, George Ross-Kelly. Commissioner Ross-Kelly brings with him a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the Mossman Gorge community. We know George will bring some balance to our team. His contribution as a male Commissioner to support our men with 'Men's Business' will be greatly valued.

The annual FRC School Awards joined in with a new tradition for Mossman Gorge; we were invited to participate and present the school attendance awards at the 2019 Christmas Fair which was held at the Mossman Gorge Centre. The event had great community attendance. We handed out prizes and certificates to students who had improvements in school attendance and/or had demonstrated a good attitude toward education. An award was presented to the highest attender along with a \$250 deposit into their Student Education Trust Fund account. Mossman State School Principal, Randal Smith, and Deputy Principal, Sharon Case have consistently shown their ongoing dedication to the families of Mossman Gorge by attending the awards each year. This year they presented academic and attendance awards encouraging students to attend school every day, expanding opportunities for their future. The event continued into the afternoon and community members enjoyed the live entertainment and barbeque prepared by the hospitality team. Children were entertained by a jumping castle, a visit from the fire brigade with their popular fire truck on display and when the heat got too much, swimming down the rapids.

One of the revised strategies we have used to encourage better school attendance is acknowledging the efforts of the parent/carer to form new habits and teach their children the importance of education. We want the community to see that we are here to support them to get past the difficult times. Each quarter we deliver a gift hamper to two families in recognition of their efforts toward improved attendance.

English is a second language for many of our Elders and there is a need for the younger generation to learn the Kuku Yalanji language and traditional culture which can be taught by the Elders of this community. Language is a barrier for some of the Elders and ideally if our local service providers learnt some basic terms of the language it would be helpful to communicate and understand the issues which affect them. We do not see the consistency that is required to

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address their social and emotional needs. There is a gap in the delivery of programs to occupy young people in our community, and the health and wellbeing of the Elders is also being impacted by a lack of local activities and stimulation. We are pleased now that the Mossman State School has incorporated the Kuku Yalanji language into their learning program. Teachers at the school have reported a noticeable reduction in break-ins at the school and improvements in behaviour which resulted in only one suspension during 2019.

Although the 2020 school year commenced in a similar vein to previous years, the end of Term 1 and beginning of Term 2 were compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created a wave of anxiety through community and many parents were reluctant to send their children to school. The community worked with Mossman State School and set up a Learning Hub in the old Training Centre. Parents were thankful for the Learning Hub, however, attendance did not prove to be consistent and once restrictions eased and schools opened, the idea was abandoned.

Each year we look forward to the Local Commissioner Development Week. This year we participated in a Local Commissioner Planning Week instead which was held in September 2019. It proved an excellent opportunity to share information, workshop new ideas and enhance our leadership skills. Mostly, it was a time to connect with our brother and sister Commissioners from other communities. We heard their stories and they heard ours. We understood the challenges that each of us face regardless of our separate communities, and we went home feeling strengthened, refreshed, confident and ready to tackle the next challenge.

In September 2019 Commissioner Williams met with DATSIP Deputy Director-General Kathy Parton, who agreed to visit Mossman Gorge and observe an FRC conference being conducted. Deputy Director-General Kathy Parton held true to her word and took up the opportunity to observe a Mossman Gorge conference in action. We appreciate visitors who take an interest and acknowledge the unique way we lead our community to address unsocial behaviours.

As reported in our last year's annual report, Mossman Gorge has been undergoing a protracted period of major civil works. One of the changes that has occurred during and after the major works has been the transfer of housing properties from Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Aboriginal Corporation (BBNAC) Housing to the Department of Housing and Public Works. Home Assist and occupational therapist assessment services were made available for residents with mobility issues. To improve living standards for Mossman Gorge residents it is essential that culture is understood, and all future initiatives are planned with a community voice ensuring their beliefs and traditions are considered and incorporated.

It has been a year of change. We have seen improved community housing, new connections, welcomed a new Commissioner to the FRC family and said goodbye to those leaving. We have drawn on our knowledge of the past and we are building on new strategies for the future with a new-found motivation. We look forward to another year and improved social changes for our people.

In a final word, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to Local Commissioner Karen Gibson who has decided to step down from her role as a Local Commissioner to focus on her passion and talent for art. Commissioner Gibson has given many years of dedication to the Mossman Gorge community and to FRC clients and staff. We will miss her valuable knowledge, strong leadership skills and gentle approach. No-one is more deserving of being happy and reaching their dreams. We wish Karen the best of luck in her future endeavours.