



LOCAL COMMISSIONERS' YEAR IN REVIEW

Mossman Gorge Local Commissioners' report

Along with hardships and occasional tumultuous events during the past year, we have seen progression that has left us proud of the Mossman Gorge community. We never give up on our mob.

Some visitors to community continue to challenge our attempts to support and influence our people toward a better future. We want to see our Elders respected and protected, not abused or neglected. Visitors who float in and disregard the common rules of a welfare reform community challenge our work as Local Commissioners. We may face these tests, but we stay strong together because we care about our people and want to see betterment in their lives.

Alcohol remains a serious problem that destroys the lives of many of our loved ones. Alcohol contributes to the noise levels in our community with loud music playing at parties fuelled by alcohol. In turn, it contributes to our youth dropping out of, or absconding from school due to the late night parties. Alcohol is also causing disagreements and violence in our community. We witnessed an increase in alcohol and intoxicated persons walking around the community in the first half of 2016.

We saw a spike in alcohol consumption and poor conference attendance around two particular events this year, Easter and the State of Origin. For example, only one client attended the conference that was scheduled the day after the first match of the State of Origin series. We would like to see changes to liquor restrictions in the local hotels and further support from the local police. Discussions have begun with relevant stakeholders to develop strategies to tackle the increase in alcohol that has occurred recently in the community. Dry house signs are visible on dry house properties, however, they need replacing frequently. We are currently sourcing a list of properties registered as dry houses to ensure signs are displayed for the residents and visitors to the property. We may need to consider a dry house sign that can be presented in language. Commissioners would also like to see restrictions around alcohol sales, limits on the amount of alcohol and reduced hours of supply.

This year has seen an amendment to the FRC Act whereby the Commission now receives trigger notices from the courts in relation to domestic violence orders. We welcome these changes and the new laws that support police in their role to charge a person without consent of the victim. Receiving these triggers, however, must be accompanied by support to assist families who experience domestic violence. We are waiting to see specialised domestic violence programs to support our referrals, and preferably for all parties involved in a domestic incident. There is no women's shelter in Mossman and victims fleeing in an emergency require transport to travel to Cairns.

Commissioners Karen Gibson and Loretta Spratt participated in the first White Ribbon Campaign to be held in Mossman in November 2015. The event attracted a lot of people for its first year and is proof that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated. We will continue to stand up and speak out for the fight against violence toward women.

On a more positive note, changes in staffing and a new approach to community work at the Wellbeing Centre has seen our mob seeking their support more frequently. We, as Local Commissioners, have a renewed confidence in the Wellbeing Centre which has resulted in us referring more clients to the service. Community members themselves have felt the renewed energy and have revived the Local Advisory Group once again. This is a positive step toward contributing grassroots ideas to the Mossman Gorge Wellbeing Centre and to the community.

Stakeholders are working collaboratively to promote empowerment and wellbeing in community, although there is room for improving engagement and information sharing. Confidentiality is a sensitive issue, but we must be able to work together to serve our clients' needs and also protect their privacy.

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The Opportunity Hub continues to provide programs and hold competitions in regard to home improvements and money management upskilling to support community growth. The 2015 Best Garden competition was judged by ABC personality Costa Georgiadis. The competition attracts a number of participants and this year Commissioner Loretta Spratt won 'Best Edible Garden' for her hard work in the garden.

Primary school attendance has been consistently high with up to 80 and 90 percent attendance in terms 1 and 2. This is extraordinary progress, and we commend parents for their continual efforts to send their children to school and giving them an opportunity to become leaders of the future.

This year has seen many young people head off to boarding school. One young person in particular found it hard to leave his family for boarding earlier this year and returned to community after term 1. This young person went back to the local high school only to realise he may have missed an opportunity to further his education outside the community. He has now applied to go back to boarding school. We wish him the best of luck for the future.

A major concern for us as Local Commissioners is the increasing number of girls that continue to drop out of high school before senior years. It is becoming the norm that girls believe it is okay to leave school, only to fall into the trap of their parents before them, a trap that contributes to closed doors and opportunities. A core group of stakeholders are working alongside the Commission to address these issues. We are working together to develop strategies that we hope will empower our youth to see the opportunities of the future.

***We never give up
on our mob***

We continue to grow, learn and build strength on a personal level and in our role as Local Commissioners. Earlier this year we came together with Local Commissioners from Coen, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Doomadgee for the annual development week. The week was organised and the schedule was full, learning about new programs and policies from external stakeholders, tools that will assist us in the year ahead and sharing stories with each other. Sharing stories of similar experiences and the ways each of us deal with these experiences has been, and continues to be, the most valuable part of development week. Each year as we develop our strength and learn new ways of working alongside our mob it revitalises us for another year to come.

Mossman Gorge Commissioners Loretta Spratt, Karen Gibson and Karen Shuan

