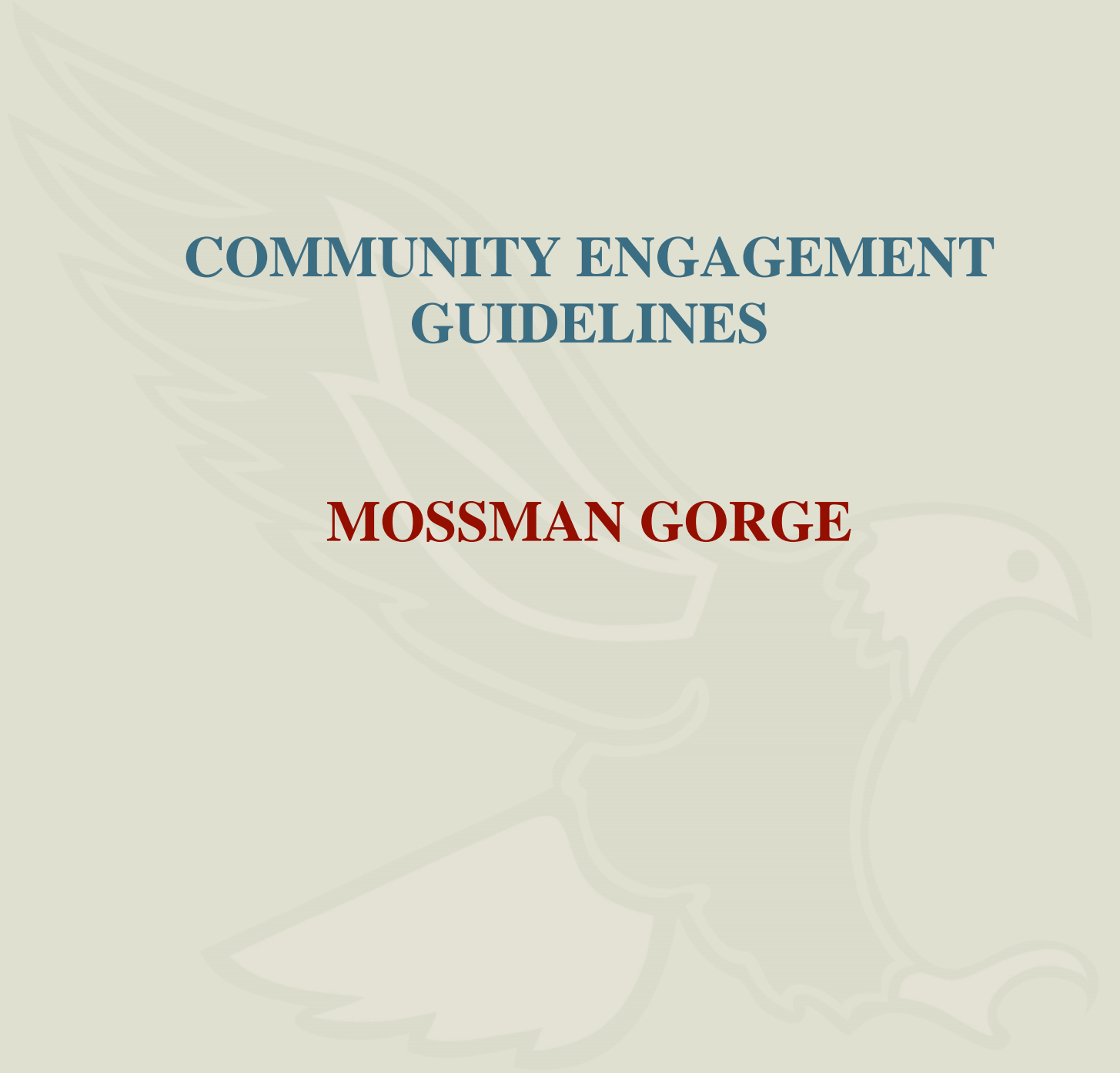





FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES

MOSSMAN GORGE



A large, faint, light-colored illustration of an emu is positioned in the background, facing right. The emu is depicted in a stylized, line-art manner, showing its long neck, head, and large, powerful legs. The illustration is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be read over it.

The Commission would like to thank the Local Commissioners for providing advice and guidance into the development of this document in regard to their specific communities. The Commission also wishes to acknowledge receiving information and support to produce this document from partner Queensland and Australian Government agencies and departments.

The Commission recognises we are visitors to the country we travel across and work in and that many of our Local Commissioners are Traditional Owners and Elders of their communities. The Commission acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Teachers of these lands. To those of the past whose unseen hands guide the actions and decisions of the Commissioners today; to those of the present working for their communities and setting an example for the next generation and to those of the future, the Elders not yet born who will inherit the legacy of our efforts.

COMMUNITY PROTOCOLS

Prior to visiting any community it is important that one has some knowledge of its history along with an overview of how to engage with members of the community. The need for protocols is not solely an Indigenous or Aboriginal issue. Community protocols establish modes of behaviour and communication which demonstrate respect for individual residents and the diversity of other cultures.

The Australian Aboriginal culture differs significantly from the Australian non-Aboriginal culture. It is therefore essential to understand the relevant cultural disparities and protocols in order to gain respect and effectively engage with the community. The appreciation of cultural mores including understanding the position and status of people within the local Aboriginal community assists in successfully engaging with Indigenous peoples.

Additionally cultural protocols may also vary between communities, and between people within communities.

Different cultural groups may have different attitudes towards matters, such as:

- forms of greeting and leave-taking
- use of names and titles
- deference to authority or seniority
- eye contact
- silence
- sexual matters
- modesty
- shaming
- swearing
- physical touch
- directness in speech and in asking questions
- the right to seek and the obligation to impart knowledge

Failure to understand the difference in attitudes may inhibit or prevent effective communication between a visitor and a community member.

OVERVIEW OF MOSSMAN GORGE COMMUNITY

Location Climate and Demographics

Mossman Gorge is situated 75 kilometres north of Cairns and 4 kilometres from Mossman Township in Far North Queensland, adjacent to the Daintree National Park. The area is a notable domestic and international tourist destination, attracting approximately 600,000 visitors annually.

The Mossman Gorge community has an estimated permanent population of 180, although this may increase significantly at cultural gatherings such as funerals and weddings. The residents of Mossman are predominantly from the Kuku Yalanji Clan, whose traditional lands spread to the Wujal Wujal community and the township of Mossman. The community is located on land comprised of an Aboriginal reserve of 27 hectares and a freehold lot of 3,887 hectares within the Douglas Shire Council area.

The environment at Mossman is comprised of tropical rainforests, beaches, offshore reefs and mountain ranges which stretch along the coast between Mossman and the Annan River. The community is located in one of the wettest climates in Australia with a total annual rainfall of over six metres. During the wet season, from December to April, there are frequent heavy downpours.

Maximum temperatures through the wet season range from 27°C to 33°C, with humidity exceeding 80 percent in the wet season. The months from May to September present as drier yet still pleasantly warm, with a maximum temperature of approximately 26°C.

Access

Mossman Gorge community is accessed via a sealed all weather 4 kilometre spur road from the town of Mossman. Mossman township is 75 kilometres North of Cairns and 25 kilometres north west of Port Douglas.

Brief History

In 1915 the Chief Protector of Aborigines obtained unconditional leases for blocks of land that form the current Mossman Gorge community. The land was subsequently gazetted as Aboriginal reserve in 1916 and a Lutheran Church mission established in the early 1920s.

As a result of government determinations and policies in the 1920s, the Kuku Yalanji people were moved to the Mossman Gorge Reserve from their traditional localities at Jinkalmu, Brie-Brie and the junction of the Mossman River.

Mossman Gorge has a community organisation, Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku (BBN) 'Our land from a long time ago', BBN has a CEO and a Community Board of Directors.

Officially opened in August 2012, the Mossman Gorge Centre is a new Indigenous eco-tourism development for the Mossman Gorge World Heritage site. It is the central hub for all things Mossman Gorge and is staffed by local residents with a breadth of knowledge on the area. At the Centre you will find a café, art gallery, gift shop and tour booking desk for the shuttle bus from the Mossman Gorge Centre to the heart of the Gorge and for Dreamtime walks through the Gorge with an experienced interpretive Indigenous guide.

The Mossman Gorge Centre is also includes an accredited training centre, providing Indigenous Australians with tourism and hospitality skills that will equip them for jobs at the Centre and with other employers in the region and across Australia.

Clan Groups and Languages

The residents of Mossman Gorge community are predominantly from the Eastern Yalanji people (Bama) Clan and Kuku-Yalanji (speakers of Yalanji language). There are several dialects of the Yalanji language spoken in the community. The Australian Society for Indigenous Languages has a list of dictionaries for Aboriginal languages at <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3717>.

COMMUNITY VISITS – PROTOCOLS

When planning a visit to a community you should consider the following points:

- Make contact with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Incorporated (BBN) and the Regional Operations Centre (ROC), to inform them of your role and the purpose of the consultation or meeting.
- Trips may need to be delayed as a result of tribal rituals and ceremonies. It is particularly important to respect 'sorry business' following the death of a community member. Sorry business may mean that people cannot be contacted for weeks at a time.
- Have a clear understanding of your role and the purpose of the consultation.
- Consider who the people you wish to consult are.
- Consider whose business it is, according to local culture. Who are the appropriate people/organisations to contact? What is the appropriate way to contact them?
- Consider what positions the people hold.
- Consider whether they are part of the formal elected representatives (council), or another government department, community group, or individual.
- Consider what the relationship is between those you wish to consult and other members of the community e.g. the council, government and non government organisations.
- Consider whether all the major leadership groups are going to be represented or consulted e.g. councillor, elders, justice group, ROC or FRC Local Commissioners.
- Do you know the nature and origin of the issue or problem? Is there a history or background on why you need to consult or negotiate?
- Try to foresee possible questions or contentious issues, and work through possible solutions or options for handling those issues beforehand.

- Consider whether the topic covers one or more agencies' jurisdiction e.g. should the shire council or another government department be involved.
- If other agencies are involved, ensure that they are aware of any proposed visit and what you will be consulting the community on. Perhaps a representative from that agency may wish to attend the meeting.
- Consider what information you can share as a part of the consultation process.
- Remember, those being consulted may not have the same background information as you, so prepare beforehand the information needed to make the consultation valuable and productive to both sides.
- Be prepared to concede or give ground in the consultation/negotiation process. Be mindful, prior to the visit, what potential barriers to specific strategies might arise, so that these can be considered in the negotiation process e.g. government policy, practical environmental matters, legislative constraints and potential areas of conflict with other groups.
- Remember, cultural responses to time concepts are different and sometimes more value is placed on other priorities. Therefore an 'in by 9 out by 5' process is rarely possible. Have a flexible timetable to allow for fluctuating and changing arrangements, which can occur with little or no notice due to a range of community issues you may not be aware of and have no control over e.g. 'sorry business'.

When visiting Mossman Gorge, prior to organising travel arrangements check with BBN as to the suitability of your visit to the community by:

- Inviting the managers and/or administrators of key organisations relevant to the consultation issues e.g. Shire Council, ROC, elders, councils etc to a central meeting place; and/or
- Requesting a meeting at their organisation to discuss the key issues relevant to specific organisations. This should be done initially by telephone. Explain the following when discussing the visits.

- Expected arrival date - for remote communities all visitors should notify BBN. If the meeting is with BBN it would be preferable to arrange the visit to coincide with BBN's normal fortnightly meeting. BBN has considerable demands upon its time, consideration of this fact will greatly enhance relationships.
- Expected departure date.
- How long you will need to talk. Depending on the issue(s) it may require a series of visits over a period of time.
- Why you need to visit.
- Who else you might like to talk to while in the community or the organisation you are visiting.
- Who else is travelling with you.
- Ask permission to advertise your visit (if appropriate).
- Advise all stakeholders within community of your intended visit; and
- Confirm all of the above in writing.

Formal Meetings

Contact the BBN Chairperson and CEO in the first instance to assist with community engagement. Inform the Chairperson and the CEO of what agencies will be attending. The Chairperson and CEO will then ensure that feedback will be relayed to the active community members, the Local Advisory Group (LAG), community council, Binga Binga Group (Old Men's Group), and the Women's Group.

It is unwise to organise a formal meeting if you are not known by anyone in the community. It is vital you establish and then maintain credibility in the community. You should have contacts in the community who can give you guidance on how to organise the meeting without offending important people and community leaders or Elders.

Follow up with other government agencies in relation to their established networks e.g. ROC, Justice Groups, Centrelink, Cape York Partnerships or other government and nongovernment agencies. You may be able to tap into existing processes and avoid duplication.

Planning a Formal Meeting

When you plan a formal meeting you will need to consider the following:

- Introduce yourself prior to setting up a meeting by:
 - Telephone
 - Letter and/or
 - Personal introduction.

With remote communities, telephone contacts are preferred to letter, and personal visits are preferred to telephone.

- Decide whether the meeting needs to be formal or informal, be guided by advice from the community, community contact, or local stakeholders.
- Explain why the meeting was initiated. Include date and time, agenda items, who will be attending and provide any information prior to the meeting that is available to you.
- When selecting a suitable venue, contact the BBN administration to make the initial booking. Discuss the costs of each venue and the cancellation policies applicable. Another option is to utilise the Wellbeing Centre (WBC). In order to book the WBC you will need to contact the WBC team leader.
- It may be preferable to conduct the meeting outside, under a tree or near a river. Be guided by your networks and/or Aboriginal contacts.
- Be punctual, do not make people wait for you, but be prepared to wait for community members. Concepts of time are different!

- Always acknowledge the traditional owners of the land at the beginning of the meeting.
- Take minutes of the meeting including action items. Include the purpose of the meeting, location of the meeting, attendees, apologies and outcomes.
- Keep the meeting brief and to the point, community members may leave if the issue is dragged out.
- Give notice of the anticipated timeframe and schedule breaks in advance if possible. Most importantly, if you know how to speak the local traditional language, do not speak it unless you have been given approval by the traditional owners. It is considered to be very disrespectful to speak the local traditional language without permission, or to use another clan group's traditional language in their community.

When to Hold a Public Meeting

Public meetings should be run in partnership with a local representative. Where possible, seek assistance from local Aboriginal leaders or the Local Commissioners. They will advise you as to when you are able to speak. Do not interrupt or correct the speaker when they are introducing you. If there is a vital need to correct something, do it without embarrassing the other person when your turn comes.

Meetings are not the usual way communities reach agreements. Meetings are used to confirm that agreement has been reached. Actual decisions occur outside the meeting process.

You should treat the meeting as an informative process. Be aware of exceptions, as some communities or agencies may utilise the meetings not only as an information gathering forum but also to make decisions and subsequently advise you of the outcomes.

The timing of the meeting must be mutually convenient. You cannot expect people to assemble when it is convenient for you. People in the community have their own duties to complete, and these are important to them.

It is important that you also consider the following:

- Pay days are usually shopping days and are therefore not convenient.
- There is a cultural practice called 'Murri time'. You may view this as tardiness, lateness, or even a sign of disrespect, however, in Aboriginal culture Murri time is more accurately defined as a different concept of time and values, where there is less value placed on time constraints.
- The number of meetings is determined by the outcomes your organisation and the community desire. That is, meetings could be a one off event, incremental or ongoing.

When Speaking at Public Meetings

You **should not** use public meetings to extract information or make final decisions on issues. You will therefore need to:

- Use your own style of speech. Do not mimic Aboriginal patterns of talk, speech or accents. This is considered condescending. Act yourself and talk with respect.
- Avoid cross-examining any person about their opinions.
- Do not be overly inquisitive or curious. Community members may think you are being invasive.
- Avoid asking a person about their source of information.
- Avoid being too blunt with any situation where there is need to correct what another person has said.
- Avoid personal names and references e.g. "Well John over there reckons this is a good idea" or "I heard people in the community say this is a good idea".
- Avoid direct criticism.

- Avoid causing anyone to suffer a loss of personal dignity.
- Practice being indirect and develop the art of distancing yourself from an idea.
- Indigenous people are visual people, so where possible, show information in a presentation.

Asking Questions at Meetings

Mossman Gorge community members tend to ask public presenters many questions and expect educated, researched and honest answers.

- Research your topic thoroughly before entering the community.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, assure the audience that you will undertake further research and provide the information requested.

Feedback and Follow-up to Community Meetings

It is equally important in promoting and maintaining your engagement with the community to ensure that any issues raised by agency representatives or community members which cannot be resolved in the first instance, or for which you have given an undertaking to resolve, are followed up and a resolution sought in a timely manner. The community should be kept abreast of outcomes reached, and if necessary, given further input into the negotiation process. Avoid making promises you cannot keep. Not following through with something you have promised may not seem of importance to you, but it is likely to be judged harshly by community members.

Be mindful of the need to:

- Provide further information if required and show continued interest in the outcome.
- Recap on important points or decisions reached at the meeting.

- Reiterate the benefits and positive aspects of the meeting.
- Remind members of any upcoming or follow-up meetings and the opportunity for further negotiations if applicable.
- Avoid negative remarks.
- Document action points in the minutes for all parties to be revisited at follow-up meetings.
- Should issues be raised regarding other agencies not in attendance at the meeting which require investigation, ensure those issues are relayed to the appropriate parties for actioning.
- Provide minutes of the meeting to attending parties.
- Demonstrating that outcomes are being effectively sought will ensure that all parties take ownership in the process.

Expected Behaviours Whilst in the Community

It is expected that you conduct yourself in a professional manner at all times whilst undertaking your business. It is important to behave in the following manner when moving around the community:

- Be modest in your behaviour.
- Speak clearly, in a normal tone. Avoid speaking too fast when interacting with community members.
- Walk at a moderate pace and avoid the temptation to take shortcuts.
- Avoid being intrusive in your general behaviour.
- Dress appropriately. Women in particular should avoid wearing too much make-up, high heels or any clothing which may be considered revealing (short shorts/skirts, low cut tops or see-through clothing).

The Commission acknowledges that everyone has the freedom to behave and dress as they wish. However, the above behaviours will show respect and assist you in becoming accepted within the community and therefore hopefully more successful in your desired outcome.

Sorry Business

Strict protocols apply following deaths in Indigenous communities. The mourning period is referred to as 'sorry business'. Sorry business often means that engagement with the community will not be possible for a considerable period of time. Proceed with caution in your dealings during and after sorry business. In the first instance contact the Local Coordinator and Local Commissioners to determine when, under what circumstances and in what manner your meeting in the community can proceed.

Most importantly in some families, the name of the deceased is no longer used out of respect for that person. In many cases any person in the community who shares the same Christian name as the deceased is also no longer called by their Christian name. Instead another name is used from the particular dialect, or their second Christian name may be used. Custom varies between communities, and also varies according to the status of the deceased person.

Taking Photos

There are strict protocols to taking photos in Aboriginal communities.

- Prior to taking any photos you must ask permission.
- If you wish to take photos of the community as a whole you must ask the BBN Chairperson and CEO for permission.
- If you wish to take photos of community people you must seek permission in the first instance from the BBN, and then directly from the individuals involved.
- Prior to any photos being published you must seek and receive permission from the BBN.

Conducting Home Visits

When visiting community member's homes:

- Use BBN as your first point of contact. A message can be left for the community member at BBN advising them of the date, time, reason for the visit and your contact details.
- Provide the person with at least a weeks notice.
- After knocking, stand well away from the door to ensure their privacy.
- It is not polite to enter their home unless you have been invited inside by the individual.
- Most community people will prefer to talk with you outside if you are unknown to them.
- Be aware of dogs whilst walking around the community and when entering property.

Non-Verbal Communication

In face-to-face communication, a significant proportion of what is conveyed consists of para-linguistic or non-verbal communication. Tone of voice, facial expression, eye movement, gestures and posture are all highly significant elements of communication.

Silence

Silence is an important and valued part of communication between Aboriginal persons. It may indicate a desire to think about a matter, or a desire to become comfortable with a social situation. It may simply be a way of enjoying another's company in a non-verbal way.

Sign Language and Gestures

Sign language and gestures are significant aspects of communication in traditional Aboriginal culture. Sign language may be especially important in 'Sorry Business' time.

Many gestures are common to Aboriginal people throughout Australia, particularly those which are intended to identify relatives or other people. For example:

- two arms, crossed over and held in front of the body (as if in handcuffs) means 'policeman'.
- Other, more subtle gestures are also common. In particular, movements of the eye, head and lips may be used to indicate direction of motion, or the location of a person or of an event being discussed.

Communicating with Individuals

The general rules for effectively dealing with community members are comprised basically of two principles, politeness and respect.

To a non-Aboriginal person unfamiliar with Indigenous people, personal and cultural protocols might seem complex and in some cases unfathomable, a person can in most cases be reasonably confident that by treating people with respect and sensitivity they will achieve the appropriate outcomes, and will likewise gain respect from the individual and community.

It will greatly assist to have an Aboriginal person to accompany and advise you if possible. Although as stated, there are no hard and fast rules in personal protocols, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- A visitor should behave as a visitor.
- A visitor should only go where invited or given permission.
- A visitor should respect confidentiality about issues relating to other Aboriginal communities. It must be understood and respected that an Aboriginal person cannot generally speak about and/or on behalf of another person or another person's country or business, unless given permission by the custodians and/or traditional landowner to do so.