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| ORDINARY MEETING 20 JANUARY 2015 | 5.3 |
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DAINTREE FORUM #1 – STATUS REPORT

Linda Cardew: Chief Executive Officer

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive and note the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides details the issues raised by the local community at the first Daintree Forum held at Diwan on 28 August 2014, and Council's actions to date in response.

BACKGROUND:

On 3 June 2014 the following Notice of Motion was carried unanimously:

1. *That the Council undertake no less than three (3) community Forums engaging with the communities north of the Daintree River within the term of the current Council;*
2. *The first Forum to be conducted early in the 2014/15 financial year and the second and third Forums to be conducted during the 2015 calendar year.*
3. *That the Forums either be general or specific in terms of the issues the Council may seek to canvass.*

Councillors were in agreement that there are many unique issues affecting the communities living north of the Daintree River, and that there is an opportunity for the new Council to demonstrate that it has a serious intention to respond to and rectify any perception that the community has been somewhat ignored and underserved by the former Douglas Shire and Cairns Regional Councils, and other service providers.

While not all issues are the responsibility of Council to resolve, Council considered that providing a Forum as an opportunity for the communities north of the River to have direct contact with Council would be beneficial, particularly if the new Douglas is to stay true to its objective of providing open, transparent and inclusive government.

A Forum attended by approximately 45 local residents and business operators was convened in Diwan on 28 August 2014 from 10.00am to 1.30pm with discussion generally under the following four sessions:

1. Communication and broad community matters
2. Growing the Daintree economy
3. Environment
4. Disaster management.

PROPOSAL:

The following summarises the issues and comments raised by the community and discussed at the Forum, the action taken by Council to date and the schedule for future work. A detailed issues register is attached.

1. Communication and broad community matters

A range of community issues was expressed, with the need for reliable communication, the provision of Council support and the creation of opportunities to develop sustainable business, and the provision of power by the State Government.

Council actions to date:

a) Daintree Gateway

Following the Forum, work on the first stage of the Daintree Gateway Project commenced, with the planting of entrance gardens, the sinking of a bore, preparation of a Brief for entrance and Ferry artwork by Kuku Yalanji artists and the invitation extended to local artists to make submissions, stakeholders' consultation and the development of interpretative signage, planning for and ordering new and accessible toilets, planning for the rationalisation of street signage and the installation of way-finding signage, planning for the refurbishment of the northern side Ferry noticeboard and bus stop. This first stage of the Daintree Gateway will be completed in early February 2014. Watch the planting of one of the gardens here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwxetu3uKiU>

b) Power north of the Daintree River

On 18 November 2014 Council unanimously adopted a Mayoral Minute proposing Council advocate for the supply of power north of the River and a Notice of Motion on the same topic. A letter dated 20 November 2014 advising Council's policy position was sent to the Premier of Queensland, the Hon. Campbell Newman.

c) Business sustainability

A number of small business tools and support lines have been implemented onto the web site, <http://douglas.qld.gov.au/supporting-small-business/>. Through collaboration with other departments and organisations there is also extensive promotion of workshop and networking opportunities, including webinars, on Council's Facebook site.

The Douglas Card (formerly the Smart Card) has again been implemented including the promotional brochure where participating businesses offer discounts to visitors. The Douglas Card is available from 1 November to 28 February to encourage an increase in visitation. The Card has been promoted in the local papers of neighbouring local government areas and has been promoted widely by Tourism Port Douglas Daintree (TPPD) and the participating businesses.

2. Growing the economy

Specific concerns were raised by the community in this session: the creation of sustainable employment, helping people to help themselves, supporting participation, building capacity across different industries, the development of amenities for tourists, Ferry travel including options for ticketing, the development of Daintree branding and signage, opportunities to diversify business (including the development of a memorial garden) and the impact of illegal camping. The possible construction of a bridge across the Daintree River was discussed, together with some of the advantages and disadvantages, however on balance, the idea was rejected by those at the Forum.

Council action to date:

a) Daintree Gateway

The first stage of the work on the Daintree Gateway is designed to make the visitor experience more interesting and informative, to increase visitation and encourage longer stays, and to offer a greater level of amenity for all, including residents. Council gratefully acknowledges the award of funding in July 2014 from the Department of Local Government to support this work.

In November 2014 an invitation was issued to Yalanji artists to make submissions for the entrance signage at the corner of the Mossman Daintree Road and Baileys Creek Road, and for new Ferry artwork to replace the photo of Palm Cove. This work is also being developed in conjunction with the Traditional Owners of the land. The conceptual designs are in the final stages of selection with the Elders and will then be presented to Councillors and broader community.

The interpretative Daintree Rainforest signage (to be installed in the "kiosk" near the public boat ramp) has been redeveloped with key stakeholders including Traditional Owners, Wet Tropics Management Authority and the Douglas Historical Society. The signage is in the final stages of development and will be ready for manufacture in the coming weeks. (Interpretative signage for Daintree Village will be developed in conjunction with Daintree Village residents and businesses as a separate project).

Directional (street) signage on Baileys Creek Road towards the Ferry is being reviewed and will be rationalised, with only what is required to be retained.

b) Daintree Tourism

Staff will contact the Daintree Co-Op to explore the opportunity of a community market at the newly redeveloped Gateway. At the Forum the community commented that local knowledge and good customer service encourages longer visitation. Council staff have started discussions with TPDD and the Daintree Marketing Coop to determine the support that can be offered. Staff are also investigating working with the local job service providers to offer a customer service course for those employed in relevant industries or who are interested in gaining employment in that sector. Staff will provide information funding information for specific training/activities to anyone in the community who requests the same. General funding information is available on Council's website.

Contact has been initiated with the Chair of the Daintree Marketing Coop regarding attendance at meetings and officers being able to attend to discuss opportunities for future promotion/branding etc. A preliminary discussion has been held with TPDD regarding opportunities for promotions.

c) Daintree Ferry

Questions were raised around the current eligibility of visitors to utilise the Ferry priority lane. Staff are investigating and collating information relating to the original decision of Council and plan to present a report to Council prior to the opening of the priority lane for the 2015 tourist season.

A number of queries were raised relating to ticketing options for travel on the Ferry including but not limited to purchasing online, purchase of fares from other outlets and whether people who book at businesses north of the River may obtain free travel. A comprehensive review of Ferry ticketing operations will be a project proposed to be included in the 2015/16 Operational Plan. To ensure the most beneficial result, staff plan to engage relevant industry professionals if funds are allocated in the 2015/16 Annual Budget.

3. Environment

In this session the community discussed the importance of weed control and identification, feral pig and dog control, and the impact of vegetation close to the main roads, endangering wildlife.

Council action to date:

a) Weed control and identification

Cow Bay has one of the largest infestations in the region with over 300 hectares infested. Council has been treating Pond Apple in the Daintree Lowlands for over 15 years. It is estimated that initial control of the core infestation at Cow Bay would cost >\$500K. Douglas conducted 498 man hours on Pond Apple control in 2014.

The following video shows some of the Pond Apple treatment recently undertaken by Council staff at Cape Kimberley. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUXYF8NFvU8>.

Council presented at the Daintree Biodiversity Forum hosted by Terrain in December 2014 at Cape Tribulation. The Forum had a major focus on pests and weeds, including high priority invasive species, sleeper weeds and weed identification. The attendance at the Forum from the local community was very low / poor.

b) Feral pig and dog control

For the past nine years and in conjunction with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Douglas has funded the Daintree Community Feral Pig Trapping Program, removing over 4500 pigs since the program commenced. A recent community survey regarding Council's Feral Pig management was undertaken at the Daintree Biodiversity Forum held at Cape Tribulation in December 2014. The results showed overwhelming support for the program, insisting Douglas should continue to fund the program with a focus on increasing size and scope. The survey will now also be released to the wider community for input.

Dog issues, both wild and domestic should be reported to Council. Dog traps are available for use on request from Council.

Limiting dog access at the Ferry is not an option at this stage and would require changes to the Local Law and significant resourcing.

c) Roadside vegetation and re-vegetation at Cow Bay

Staff are to undergo further training on operating within the WTMA Road Maintenance Code of Practice. Road side herbicide works are essential to maintain safety site lines and drainage.

Revegetation works at Cow Bay were completed on site 2013. The area suffered minor losses due pedestrian traffic and the dry season. Council will infill gaps to address erosion issues in the 2015 wet season.

d) Boat Ramp at Cow Bay

There have been previous investigation into access onto the beach and this can be revisited; it is unclear what the issues are at this stage. It is however extremely unlikely that a boat ramp would be constructed.

4. Disaster Management

The Forum attendees complimented Council on its disaster event planning, its management of communications, access and recovery following Cyclone Ita. Frequent Facebook posts were particularly well regarded, as was the attention given to residents on the vulnerable persons list. The police presence north of the River was appreciated. The need for a cyclone shelter was raised along with the ongoing difficulties experienced with Telstra landlines in extreme weather events. The poor condition of the helipad was noted.

Council action to date:

a) Telstra communication

The provision of Telstra services to individual properties is a matter between Telstra and its customers. Council does however maintain regular contact with Telstra representatives and can advocate, in general, for improved services.

b) Cyclone shelter north of the River

Officers recommend that Council consider requiring/requesting that any new State Government facilities be built to a suitable standard to serve as a shelter.

c) Daintree walking track

Some investigation and discussion has occurred in relation to the CREB Track and China Camp areas.

d) Unique Post Code for Daintree/north of the River

Council has been advised that the community is pursuing this with Australia Post.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE:

Douglas Shire Council Corporate Plan 2014-2015:

Theme 1: Celebrating our Communities

Goals: 1.2.3

1.2.4

Theme 2: Building a sustainable economic base

Goals: 2.2.1

2.2.5

2.3.4

Theme 3: Improving environmental performance

Goals: 3.1.2

Theme 4: Engage Plan Partner

Goals: 4.1.2

4.2.2

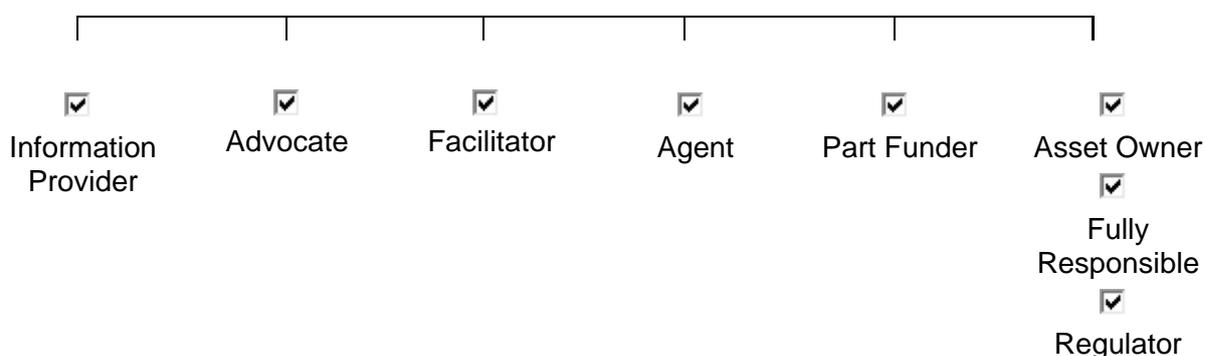
Theme 5: Governance

Goals: 5.2.1

COUNCIL'S ROLE:

Council can play a number of different roles in certain circumstances and it is important to be clear about which role is appropriate for a specific purpose or circumstance. The implementation of actions will be a collective effort and Council's involvement will vary from information only through to full responsibility for delivery.

The following areas outline where Council has a clear responsibility to act:



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| Information Provider: | Providing access to information to assist communities and organisations. |
| Advocate: | Supporting communities and groups by advocating for certain actions from other organisations (usually other levels of government). |
| Facilitator: | Bringing people together to develop solutions to problems. |
| Agent: | Delivering a program or activity for another organisation (usually another level of government). |
| Part Funder: | Sharing the cost of a program or activity with other organisations. |
| Asset Owner: | Meeting the responsibilities associated with owning or being the custodian of assets such as infrastructure. |
| Fully Responsible: | Funding the full cost of a program or activity. |
| Regulator: | Meeting the responsibilities associated with regulating activities through legislation or local law. |

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Daintree Forum #1 was conducted with minimal cost, in a Council owned facility. The actions taken to date have either been funded through Council's approved budget, or in the case of the Daintree Gateway work, funded with the assistance of a State Government grant. Suggestions, programs and initiatives that have not yet been investigated or implemented may need to be funded (if approved) in future budgets. To date, staff and existing resources have been used to respond to proposals.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS:

While all actions carry some degree of risk, there are no substantial risks in any of the actions taken to date. Future projects and actions will be assessed from a risk perspective on a case by case basis.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

ECONOMIC: The suggestions and comments made at the Forum by residents and business operators highlighted the importance of economic sustainability in this remote area of the Shire, and the value of Council support. Some of the initiatives supporting economic development and increased visitation were in train prior to the forum (eg Douglas Card, Daintree Gateway works) while others (eg Daintree River market, business signage and Daintree branding) are yet to be investigated in detail.

ENVIRONMENTAL: A passion for the rainforest environment was the most common reason cited by residents for living north of the River. Some of the many physical and logistical challenges were acknowledged and discussed. This Forum provided a valuable opportunity for Councillors and officers to hear more of the priority environmental issues.

SOCIAL: The Forum provides support for social cohesion, bringing community members together to share ideas and solve problems.

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL CONSULTATION:

The Forum provided the opportunity for the Daintree community north of the River to be consulted on a wide range of issues.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Daintree Forum No 1 (28 August 2014): Issues register

Attachment 1 – Daintree Forum No 1 (28 August 2014): Issues register

| Session 1: Community issues | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|------------------|--|
| | Issue / comments / needs | Action to date | Scheduled | Roles Continuum |
| 1. | The value of efficient forms of communication given that mobile coverage is very limited and landlines are unreliable in the wet season. | Ongoing maintenance of Council website and Facebook | N/A | Fully Responsible |
| 2. | Council to enable projects and opportunities, rather than impose barriers on a community that has been reduced in size. | Noted. | Ongoing | Information Provider |
| 3. | “Push” for NBN is needed to give communities greater success | Refer to Report | 2015/16 | Advocate |
| 4. | Proper signage for business is required, possibly a map for the Ferry, and information at the Daintree Gateway. Signage to be colourful and the branding to be considered in the drafting of the new Douglas Shire Planning Scheme. | Signage issue has been discussed and is proposed to be addressed via the Town Plan review. May require new local law. | 2015/16 | Regulator |
| 5. | Illegal campers are a problem. | Resourcing issues and potential solutions, including budgetary impacts across the Shire are being investigated before the next season. Discussions will also be held with National Parks to identify any resource sharing potential. | 30/4/15 | Regulator (Council controlled land only) |
| 6. | Finding ways to make support business sustainability. | A range of links and information are available on the Council website. | Ongoing | Advocate/Facilitator |
| 7. | Communicating with Council. | Communication with Council can be conducted via telephone, web site, Facebook page, email and in person. | Ongoing | Fully Responsible |
| 8. | Renovation of the bus stop and notice board. | Local contractor engaged in December 2014 to replace the notice boards at the Ferry Bus stop and clean and tidy the existing structure. Work to be completed beginning Feb 2015. | Feb 2015 | Asset Owner |
| 9. | Need new progressive Council with imagination, proposing affordable projects that are supportive of the communities | Noted. Two further forums to be held in the current Council term. | 2015/2016 | Fully Responsible |

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| 10. | More community development and support for community participation and growth. Building capacity across different industries. | Refer to Report | | Information Provider/Advocate |
| 11. | Enabling businesses to develop improved signage for tourists and facilitating consultation regarding the design. | Refer above | 2015/16 | Regulator |
| 12. | Letter of support for the provision of power | Completed. Letter to Premier sent 20 November 2014. | N/A | Advocate |

Session 2: Growing the economy

| | Issue / comments / needs | Action to date | Scheduled | Roles Continuum |
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| 13. | It is illegal to do maintenance clearing north of the River – resulting in a hindrance to drivers and trucks | All maintenance clearing must be within the requirements of the Wet Tropics Management Authority. It is not illegal but must be within the guidelines. Any potential problem areas should be reported to Council for investigation. | Ongoing | Asset Owner |
| 14. | Daintree Gateway should not provide so much information that people will not travel north of the River. | Information is small scale and designed to encourage visitation and increase interest. | February 2015 | Advocate |
| 15. | Toilets are required. | Under construction in Gateway precinct. | February 2015 | Asset Owner |
| 16. | The community and businesses need to be sustainable and with job opportunities to be created, including for the younger generation in industries other than tourism. | Noted. Officers working with job service providers. | Ongoing. | Advocate |
| 17. | Concern expressed that the Mossman Botanic Gardens would not encourage visitors to travel to the Daintree. | Noted. | N/A | N/A |
| 18. | The Job Service Provider is opening new offices on Cape Tribulation Road in Cow Bay. | Noted. Officers to maintain contact with My Pathways staff. | Ongoing | Advocate |
| 19. | WiFi at the Ferry to download a “pod” broadcast/information for visitors travelling north. | This is a possible pilot project with LGAQ. Refer to Report | 2015/2016 | Advocate/Facilitator |

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| 20. | Priority Lane at the Ferry – Council requested to review the rules – options for the sale of tickets online, from other outlets, pre-paid tickets, cheaper tickets and seasonal tickets to be explored. Potential free Ferry passes and priority lane for visitors who book with businesses north of the River. | Staff are investigating and collating information relating to the original decision of Council with the view of presenting a report to Council to determine priority lane use. This report will be presented to Council prior to the priority lane being opened for the 2015 tourist season. A comprehensive review of Ferry ticketing operations will be a project included in the 2015/16 Operational Plan. To ensure the most beneficial result it is envisaged that relevant industry professionals will be engaged and this review will be dependent upon funds being allocated in the 2015/16 Annual Budget. | May 2015 | Asset Owner Fully Responsible Regulator |
| 21. | The construction of a bridge – long term economic factors to be considered. | Community comments noted. No progression of this issue planned or proposed during this Council term. | Not scheduled | Information provider |
| 22. | Construction of an Information Centre at Crossroads Café | Information area provided at Gateway precinct. | February 2015 | Facilitator |
| 23. | Opportunity for a local produce market at the Daintree Gateway near the Information Stand and toilets. The Daintree River Market. | Requirements/permits etc to be explored further and discussed with the Daintree Marketing Coop. | Not scheduled. | Advocate/Facilitator |
| 24. | Reinstatement of the River Train | Not possible. | N/A | N/A |
| 25. | Thornton Beach Café | Soil evaluation and a system design for an Enviro-septic system are being commissioned. Work is subject to reallocation of budget funds and on availability of funds to be completed for tourist season 2015. | June 2015 | Asset Owner Fully Responsible Regulator |
| 26. | Composting Toilets | Difficulties with composting public toilets in this specific location noted. Flushing toilets have been selected and will be installed in Feb 2015. | Feb 2015 | Asset Owner |
| 27. | Allocation of land to scatter ashes or plant a memorial tree to be managed by Council with the profits to go back into the community – a possible location is Forest Creek park. | | Consideration 2016/17 | Advocate/Facilitator |

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| 28. | Illegal camping – remote areas require clean-up - suggestions included free or cheap camping and more policing, wheel clamping, working more closely with National Parks Officers. | Refer above. Area was National Parks responsibility | Review 2015/16 | Advocate |
| 29. | Alexandra Bay school enrolments falling | Noted | N/A | N/A |
| 30. | Visitor stays shorter | To be discussed with TPDD | Early 2015 | Advocate |
| 31. | Reports that Port Douglas accommodation houses do not speak positively about staying in the Daintree | To be discussed with TPDD | Early 2015 | Advocate |
| 32. | Local knowledge and good customer service keeps visitors in the Daintree | Raise opportunity with local Registered Training Organisation (RTO) | Early 2015 | Advocate |
| 33. | Daintree is not advertised in brochures overseas and so accommodation is booked elsewhere. | Discuss with TPDD. | Early 2015 | Advocate |
| 34. | Bed and breakfast accommodation is a point of difference over Port Douglas | Noted. Discuss with TPDD | Early 2015 | Advocate |
| 35. | Need to work with TPDD to brand the area. | Noted. | 2015 | Advocate |

Session 3: Environment

| | Issue / comments / needs | Action to date | Scheduled | Roles Continuum |
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| 36. | Plants need attention at Cow Bay reserve – some erosion at Cow Bay | Revegetation works were completed on site 2013. The area suffered minor loses due pedestrian traffic and the dry season. DSC will infill gaps to address erosion issues this wet season | 31/3/15 | Agent |
| 37. | Congratulations to Council for no longer poisoning the weeds at the roadside | Staff are to undergo further training on operating within the WTMA Road Maintenance Code of Practice. Road side herbicide works are essential to maintain safety site lines and drainage | 2015 | Asset Owner |
| 38. | Trees are too close to the road and do not give motorists enough time to see wildlife coming on to the road | Refer similar above. | | |
| 39. | Drains – rock pitching to have drains wash better | Investigating options for this work and labour source | 30/4/15 | Asset Owner |

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| 40. | Pig management is inadequate | Douglas, in conjunction with QPWS has for the past 9 years funded the Daintree Community Feral pig Trapping Program removing over 4500 pigs since commencing. A recent community survey regarding council's Feral Pig management was undertaken at the Daintree Biodiversity Forum held at Cape Tribulation last December 2014. The results were overwhelming support for the program, insisting Douglas should continue to fund the program with a focus on increasing size and scope. The survey will now also be released to the wider community for input. | 2015/2016 | Agent |
| 41. | Dogs (mature wild and domestic dogs) are killing wildlife. Hunting dogs should not be brought across the Ferry. My Pathways could construct traps for community use. Landowners need to monitor on a daily basis. | Dog issues, both wild and domestic should be reported to Council. Dog traps are available for use Limiting dog access at the Ferry is not an option at this stage and would require changes to the Local Law and significant resourcing. | Ongoing | Regulator on Council controlled land. |
| 42. | Pond Apple is a problem. | It sure is. Cow Bay has one of the largest infestations in the region with over 300 hectares infested. DSC has been treating Pond Apple in the Daintree Lowlands for over 15 years. It is estimated that initial control of the core infestation at Cow Bay would cost >\$500K. Douglas conducted 498 man hours on Pond apple control in 2014. | Ongoing | Agent |
| 43. | Use Council website to promote Forum meeting. | This is Council's standard practice. | Ongoing | Information provider |
| 44. | Weed identification program – need to have more plant identification and workshop | Council presented at the Daintree Biodiversity Forum hosted by Terrain in December 2014 at Cape Tribulation. The Forum had a major focus on pests and weeds, including high priority invasive species, sleeper weeds and weed identification. The attendance at the Forum from the local community was very low / poor. | For discussion at future Forum | Agent |

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| 45. | Boat ramp required at Cow Bay | There has been previous investigation into access onto the beach and this can be revisited. It is not clear what the actual problem is and a boat ramp would be extremely unlikely. | Not scheduled at this time. | Advocate |
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Session 4: Disaster Management

| | Issue / comments / needs | Action to date | Scheduled | Roles Continuum |
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| 46. | Facebook was brilliant. | Noted. | Ongoing | Information provider |
| 47. | Telstra communication difficult | Issue can be raised with Telstra | February 2015 | Advocate |
| 48. | Planning for Cyclone ITA was excellent | Noted. | Ongoing | Information provider Asset owner |
| 49. | Cape Trib helipad is poorly maintained and is on private land | Noted. | N/A | Advocate |
| 50. | Can there be a unique postcode for the Daintree? | Council has been advised that the community is pursuing this with Australia Post | N/A | Advocate |
| 51. | The Daintree needs a big walking track | Some investigation and discussion has occurred in relation to the CREB Track and China Camp areas. | Progress in 2015 | Advocate |
| 52. | Need a cyclone shelter for north of the River. | Propose that any new State Government facilities be built to a suitable standard to serve as a shelter. | Progress in conjunction with any new development. | Advocate |

| ROLE | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------|---|
| 1 | Information Provider |
| 2 | Advocate |
| 3 | Facilitator |
| 4 | Agent |
| 5 | Part Funder |
| 6 | Asset Owner Fully Responsible Regulator |