

5.8. REQUEST FOR FUNDING - CAPE YORK WEEKLY

REPORT AUTHORS Terry Farrelly, Manager People and Community Services
Tom Volling, Senior Media and Communications Officer

DEPARTMENT People and Community Services

MANAGER Mark Stoermer, Chief Executive Officer

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Approves \$10,000.00 (GST Exc) from the People and Community Services operational budget towards supporting the Cape York Weekly to commence a community newspaper;
2. Notes that Council staff will develop KPI's for the allocated funding that will focus on strong support for advertising for not for profit and community groups in the shire; and
3. Delegates authority under section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to finalise any and all matters associated with the above.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cape York Weekly present a proposal to Council staff to start a free weekly community newspaper in Douglas Shire. The publisher is currently preparing to start up the Douglas Shire-based newspaper early next year and has requested grant funding to assist with this process.

Cape York Weekly is a free community paper owned and operated by Matt Nicholls out of Weipa. The paper is a commercial entity that highlights community issues, events, public services, and supports not-for-profit groups.

The editor, who would re-locate to Douglas Shire, has requested \$10,000.00 to assist with the purchase of office equipment to produce the weekly newspaper. The masthead would be printed in Townsville and re-named to reflect the Douglas Shire. The editor will approach local businesses for advertising revenue and anticipates over 2,000 copies will be printed for distribution in prominent locations free for the community.

This out of round funding request can be funded through the People and Community Services operational budget.

BACKGROUND

The Douglas Shire Council provides assistance to commercial organisations through Tourism and Economic Development Funding, which is aligned with the themes of Council's Corporate Plan.

Tourism and Economic Development Funding is available for not-for-profit and commercial businesses to establish initiatives, which may then lead to an on-going Resource and Performance agreement. Currently there are no funding rounds available.

The People and Community Services Department does provide sponsorship to organisations during out of funding rounds and has considered this request for sponsorship as a community benefit to ensure a community newspaper is established. The KPI's may include;

- Number of printed newspapers
- Reach and distribution in the community
- Community advertising benefit for community groups

COMMENT

Douglas Shire has been without a locally produced and independent print newspaper since the Port Douglas Mossman Gazette stopped printing in July this year. Multiple residents have contacted Council since the closure to express concern about the lack of a locally focused print medium.

Council uses many communication channels including its Corporate website, social media channels, local online news outlet, local radio, and direct letter box mailouts to reach its constituents. Previous research undertaken by Council revealed about 60% of the Douglas Shire population relied on getting their Council information from the local newspaper.

The return of a local newspaper would bring a significant community benefit by providing another communication channel for not-for-profit groups, event organisers and Council to reach the local audience. It is envisioned the first edition will be developed in mid-January 2021 and ensure a wide reach to the community, including Wujal Wujal.

As an information provider, Council regularly updates the community on services, events, policies, rules, strategies, and any other relevant data that helps the community to stay informed. In performing this role, Council seeks to be open and transparent and an independent newspaper, with an editor based locally, focused on the Douglas Shire will support this goal.

Council staff will develop a Resource and Performance Agreement, including KPI's for the allocated funding that will focus on strong support for not-for-profit groups and targets for the organisation to achieve.

PROPOSAL

That Council:

1. Approves \$10,000.00 (GST Exc) from the People and Community Services operational budget towards supporting the Cape York Weekly to commence a community newspaper;
2. Notes that Council staff will develop KPI's for the allocated funding that will focus on strong support for advertising for not for profit and community groups in the shire; and
3. Delegates authority under section 257 of the *Local Government Act 2009* to the Chief Executive Officer to finalise any and all matters associated with the above.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Council's 2020-21 Budget provides \$10,000.00 (GST exc) funding to support the delivery of activities by the editor of Cape York Weekly to start a local community newspaper in Douglas Shire.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Nil

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic: Supports economic growth by facilitating the start-up of a new communication channel for industry to share ideas and promote themselves. Opportunity for organisations to access free and low-cost advertising in the Shire.

Environmental: Nil

Social: Promoting and supporting arts, culture, not-for-profit and community groups in the Douglas Shire through another communication channel. An independent newspaper encourages transparency and accountability in Council operations and decision-making.

CORPORATE/OPERATIONAL PLAN, POLICY REFERENCE

This report has been prepared in accordance with the following:

Corporate Plan 2019-2024 Initiatives:

Theme 1 - Celebrating Our Communities

Douglas Shire Council embraces the diversity of our communities and values the contribution that all people make to the Shire. We recognise that it is a core strength of the region. We acknowledge our past so that it may guide us in the future. We recognise the wrongs done to our Indigenous community and we actively seek to reconcile so that we may all benefit from and enjoy our Shire. We acknowledge early European settlers who forged an agricultural base for our economy, and we welcome all new arrivals as part of our broader community.

Goal 1 - We will celebrate the diversity of our community and ensure that all infrastructure, programs, and services are underpinned with inclusiveness and accessibility.

Goal 2 - We will deliver programs and services that protect and enhance the livability of our beautiful Shire

Goal 4 - We will promote arts and cultural programs and events that bring vibrancy to the community and compliment the tourist experience.

Theme 2 - Fostering Sustainable Economic Growth

A robust economy is at the heart of a thriving community and enables investment in environmental protection. While our remoteness is a key attribute, it also presents challenges for attracting new business and investment.

We must also meet the challenges of fierce competition in the tourism sector. Council will partner with industry to build, diversify and promote the Douglas economy. Council will design and deliver infrastructure, strategies and services that support the local economy and businesses.

Goal 2 - We will work with partners to promote the Shire as the World's leading sustainable tropical destination and encourage business investment.

Goal 3 - We will develop strategies that seek to diversify the Shire's economic base.

Theme 4 - Inclusive Engagement, Planning and Partnerships

In delivering for our communities, economy and environment, Douglas Shire will ensure open and transparent engagement and communication. We will develop robust strategic plans and we will partner with our community and key stakeholders.

Goal 1 - *We will implement transparent decision making through inclusive community engagement and communication.*

Theme 5 - Robust Governance and Efficient Service Delivery

Strong governance and financial management are the foundations of the way in which Council will conduct its business and implement the initiatives of the Corporate Plan.

Goal 1 - We will conduct Council business in an open and transparent manner with strong oversight and open reporting.

Goal 4 - We will work with our communities to ensure they are informed, empowered and supported so that they are resilient to the impacts of disaster events. Through our leadership and capabilities, we will plan, prepare, respond and recover from events so as to minimise the impact on people, property, the environment, and our economic stability.

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:

Funder Council often partly funds services, events or community organisations through grants, donations, subsidies and in-kind support. Council will apply robust governance to ensure that such funding is fair and appropriate.

Information Provider Council provides the community with important information on services, events, policies, rules, strategies, and any other relevant data that helps the community to stay informed. In performing this role, Council seeks to be open and transparent.

CONSULTATION

Internal: Acting Chief Executive Officer
Manager of People and Community Services
Senior Media and Communications Officer
Councillors

External: Cape York Weekly

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil

ATTACHMENTS

1. Cape York Weekly - letter to Council [**5.8.1** - 2 Pages]

Cape York Weekly

Good morning Douglas Shire Council team,

Firstly, I want to thank you for providing me with an opportunity to speak about my passion – community newspapers.

I grew up in regional Victoria and have been reading local papers my whole life. I began writing for my town's free weekly paper when I was in high school and it has been my profession for all 16 years of my adult life.

I'm talking to you because Douglas Shire lost its one and only masthead, the *Gazette*.

Closed during the pandemic, News Corp turned its back on the community when the community needed a strong news platform more than ever.

The same thing happened in Cape York, albeit with a different newspaper owner.

The closure of the *Cape & Torres News* at the end of the March left a major hole in those communities and I felt honoured when the Weipa community, led by Rio Tinto and the local town authority, urged me to return to start up a new publication.

On Monday, September 7, the first edition of *Cape York Weekly* was printed and distributed in one of the most remote places in Australia. We are now nine editions in and business is strong. There has been a real appetite for a free community newspaper that gives local people a voice and shares their stories.

The paper has reached an audience far and wide thanks to our very popular digital edition. In fact, that's how I ended up talking to your council. Mayor Michael Kerr made contact with me, asking for advice as to how Douglas Shire could get a newspaper back in the community.

I told him immediately that I believed there was an opportunity to create a new masthead specifically for the Douglas Shire communities.

With a focus on positive news, sport and human-interest stories, there would be no problem filling a newspaper each week. I then travelled to Mossman to meet with two key council staff, Terry Farrelly and Tom Volling. After a productive conversation, which answered questions from both sides of the fence, I walked away confident that this was a feasible project.

Since then, I have enjoyed some informal discussions with key businesses in the region. They have also given me confidence that a new paper would be well supported. The key differences between my proposed paper and the *Gazette* would be:

- * Free in print and online
- * A focus on positive and community interest stories
- * Independently owned and operated

For this to happen, it would require the support of Douglas Shire Council. The paper definitely needs to remain independent of the council, but a dedicated advertising budget each year would help make it sustainable and grow.

I would also like to apply for a one-off small business grant to kickstart the operation. Start-up costs include a computer, camera, software and printing.

It didn't take long for *Cape York Weekly* to become sustainable and prosperous. That was done with the backing of Rio Tinto, which simply just made an annual advertising spend commitment. Knowing there is regular income eased the pressure.

I don't for a second believe that newspapers are money-making machines. However, with the right people and systems in place, they can be highly sustainable.

My model is to run a low-cost operation. I don't believe in having a shop-front office as they can be expensive and inefficient. My philosophy is to be on the ground reporting. When stories need to be written, they can be done from a home office.

I do believe we will provide competition to *Newsport*, however I believe both can operate side by side. I would also be willing to sit at the table and have a conversation, if they so desired.

My publication would not be in the business of daily news. If there were big stories to be broken, we would certainly cover them, but we are not in the business of driving daily traffic to our website.

Our bread and butter is the print and digital edition. That's where our advertisers are and that's where our attention is focused.

Please feel free to take a look at the *Cape York Weekly* website and peruse through the digital editions to see how it all works – www.capeyorkweekly.com.au

And remember, a community without a newspaper is a community that gets ignored. *Cape York Weekly* ran a campaign about the Weipa boat ramp pontoon and within weeks the state government found \$3 million to fix the problem.

There's no doubt that Weipa would have missed out on that funding if there was no newspaper.

So, the question is, can Douglas Shire afford to not have a strong media voice?

I look forward to meeting all of you.

Kind regards,

Matt Nicholls | Editor/Publisher
Cape York Weekly | 0477 450 558
editor@capeyorkweekly.com.au