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International expert to lead 2020 Festival plans

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Planning for the seven-week commemoration to mark the anniversary of James Cook's historic stay at Cooktown has stepped up another notch, with the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony producer joining the Cooktown 2020 Festival planning team.

Merryn Hughes started in the role of Cooktown 2020 Festival Producer with Cook Shire Council last week, and brings a vault of experience in international events, cultural festivals and marketing with her. "I'm very excited to be working on the 2020 program here in Cooktown," Ms Hughes said. "People are able to learn more about and from Indigenous Australia here than anywhere else, and I'm very passionate about making sure these stories are told to the whole of Australia."

Ms Hughes has worked most recently as executive producer for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games opening and closing ceremonies, with other projects across Australia and the world including the Abu Dhabi Cultural Festival, Sydney Festival, the Pacific Games in Papua New Guinea and produced Australia's cultural program for three World Expos. "It's not my first time here, I love Far North Queensland, and spent time here on my honeymoon, after getting married at St Mary's by the Sea in Port Douglas," she said. "I think the Festival program is absolutely fantastic and I'm looking forward to working with everybody."

The Festival is spread over seven weeks in 2020, the 250th anniversary of James Cook's 48 day stay in Cooktown to repair his ship, and the important interactions between the newly arrived Europeans and the nation's first people. The festival will include separate events focusing on various aspects of the story, including an Indigenous showcase week with cultural events throughout Cook Shire and Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale. "I will be working with Council and the community to realise this great project and ensure we have a festival which is meaningful and authentic to everyone," Ms Hughes said.

For more information visit the Cooktown 2020 Festival website at www.cooktown2020.com or contact Council's Tourism and Events team via email at mail@cook.qld.gov.au or phone on 4069 5444.

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