

LOCAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT GROUP



ANNUAL REPORT
2019-2020



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cook Shire Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) is required to complete an Annual report at the end of each financial year and provide the completed report to both Cook Shire Council and the Cairns District Disaster Management Group (DDMG) for endorsement. The annual report shall be in accordance with the requirements of the *Disaster Management Act 2003* and is to be developed as per the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) Guidelines.

In 2019 Cook Shire LDMG was activated for two fire events of which Cook Shire LDMG was not the lead agency. The Commissioner for Emergency Services is the Government Champion for Coen and Laura and is assisting the Cook Shire LDMG in lobbying for a Permanent Fire Station Officer to be based in Cooktown. This position will provide integral support, education and recruitment programs within Cook Shire. This officer will also provide much needed logistical and administrative support on the frontline of a fire event.

2020 saw one Social Impact Event in Coen as a result of impacts from the Aurukun Displaced Persons (ADP) with Dept Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships(DATSIP) as the lead agency and the emergence of the world wide COVID19 Pandemic with the Federal and State Governments and Queensland Health taking lead roles.

Cook Shire's approach to Disaster Management

- Comprehensive preparation and all hazard response plans
- Situational Awareness technology and tools
- Emergency Management Liaison Support (SDCC,DDMGs, LDMGs)
- Focus on supporting Emergency Services and the community during response and recovery
- Timely community messaging & media

Annually risks are identified, assessed and procedures are put in place to mitigate, where possible, or be flagged to be addressed if and when the risk eventuates. As part of this process several vulnerable persons in the Cook Shire LDMG area were also identified and a procedure was developed to ensure their safety was addressed prior to an event. All planning and mitigation strategies will now have a COVID19 overlay as part of the procedure.

Council's Airport Manager successfully carried out the bi-annual emergency exercise for the Cooktown Airport on 17 October 2019. The exercise "River Flat Rescue" is a simulated aircraft crash near the aerodrome. The exercise involved Cook Shire Council, State Emergency Services, Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Queensland Health, Hinterland Aviation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, My Pathway, Daintree Air Services and the Queensland Police. All agencies were involved in the preparation and delivery of the exercise and a hot debrief followed immediately afterwards. The Cook Shire Emergency Services Cadets gained a valuable insight into an emergency response with some shadowing emergency services personnel, while other played crash victims.

Cook Shire LDMG undertook a controlled exercise in November 2019 to further identify any communication risks. This included the activation of the Local Disaster Coordination Centre (LDCC) and the Place of Refuge. Queensland Fire and Emergency Service's Emergency Management Coordinator delivered further training of staff in their roles and the use of the Guardian system happened concurrently.

"Get Ready" events were held in Cook Shire prior to COVID19 to help prepare the community for the coming cyclone and bushfire seasons. Media releases, letter box drops (via rates notices), emails to

community groups and campaigning on social media were maintained throughout the year to keep community awareness at an acceptable level.

The Cook Shire LDMG and DATSIP liaised with all key stakeholders by email, via zoom or via phone in the planning of risk mitigation processes to develop the Cook Shire LDMG's Pandemic Operations Manual. Individual Pandemic sub plans were also developed for the discrete indigenous communities of Laura and Coen with an additional Pandemic sub plan for Cooktown and surrounding communities.

DATSIP's Principal Project Officer for the Cape and Torres Region organised strategic Interagency Meetings in Cooktown, Coen and Laura to gauge the communities' thoughts on the Cook Shire LDMG asking to be removed from the DBA. These were held in via teleconference in Coen and Laura and through the Chamber of Commerce in Cooktown. The feedback supplied at these meetings were an essential part of informed decision making by the LDMG.

Prior to the Designated Biosecurity Area(DBA) being disbanded Cook Shire LDMG was required to provide detailed mitigation planning, including trigger points and isolation capabilities in all communities, to DATSIP and the Chief Health Officer. Continued liaison with the Dept of Health both locally and regionally around rapid testing capabilities will ensure accurate information when activating identified triggers and responding to an outbreak in the Local Government Area.

Robust use of direct contact, Local News agencies, Cook Shire LDMG members, social media, targeted email groups and the Disaster Management Dashboard has enabled Cook Shire LDMG to have a wide ranging area for warnings or notices to be issue in the event of an activation. This communication strategy was used throughout the year with great success.

Identification and adherence to disaster protocols and chain of command enables a high level of coordination of future events, including requests to and from DDMG and SDCC. Continued open communication and co-ordinated messaging allowed Cook Shire LDMG to control desired outcomes and manage resources.

Intelligence on an event is collected and discussed by core LDMG members and then disseminated to LDMG and the public via targeted email groups, news agencies, Social Media and via the Disaster Management Dashboard. Use of the Guardian system ensures up to date weather information and media releases are available on the dashboard in a timely manner.

Cook Shire LDMG liaised with the Dept of Health, Dept of Communities, Queensland Police Service and Dept of Fire and Emergency Services to address needs in the communities affected by an event. A strong working relationship has been established between Cook Shire LDMG, Queensland Police and the departments during this season.

Previously the role of Disaster Management Officer was a part-time position that had a primarily reactive role and met the minimum legislative requirements. Cook Shire Council now has applied for funding for a Disaster Management and Resilience Officer (DMRO) for two years through the Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Fund. If successful in the application this position will provide a great opportunity for community preparedness, consultation, education and resilience. A Memorandum of Understanding with Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal LDMGs identifies the need to collaborate on the development of a Natural Hazard Risk Assessment specific to this area and a coordinated approach to disaster management community education, public awareness, training and exercises. The DMRO will be maintaining and further developing closer relationships in Communities throughout the Shire to identify local issues within disaster management and use local knowledge to develop resilience strategies.

Cook Shire LDMG is now well placed to achieve desired outcomes and the capacity to sustain most operational matters by adhering to good practice methods currently being used.

2. OVERVIEW OF EVENTS

Cook Shire LDMG has assessed both fire events, the social impact event and the monsoonal flooding under the following categories:

- Prevention
- Planning
- Response
- Impact
- Recovery

BUSHFIRES:

September 2019:

Iron Range National Park

Out of season controlled burn carried out by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services in Iron Range National Park. Weather conditions caused fire to become out of control. A similar fire was caused at Heathlands National Park. QPWS became lead agency for fighting fires. Lines of communication and reporting were established with QPWS providing updates at least once a day via email. Cook Shire LDMG offered operational support and remained at a pre-activation level.

November 2019:

Poison Creek/Oaky Creek Fires

Fire was caused by an occupant discarding a cigarette butt in a yard on Poison Creek Road. Cooktown Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), Marton Rural Fire Service and Poison Creek Rural Fire Service (QRFS) were in attendance and provided assistance to residents where possible. LDMG moved to Stand Up at 3.00pm on 3 November 2019 at the request of OIC Police. The Auxiliary Fire Service Chief advised all residents of Wilton Access Rd whose properties are not defendable and who have no fire management measures in place to comply with police direction to evacuate. Reinforcement AFS and QRFS staff from Tablelands were activated to attend and provide relief for local firefighters. Person responsible for the fire was subsequently charged with "light unauthorised fire" under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* and appeared in the Cooktown Magistrates Court on 6 December 2019 receiving an 18 months' probation.

EMC visited fire front at 6.00pm and returned at 8.00pm from the fire in Poison Creek/Wilton Access Road and reported as follows:

- Back burning is being completed tonight
- The fire is contained for now
- The situation will be re-assessed Monday 4 November 2019
- Additional crews from Mareeba are expected to arrive at 9.00pm to relieve the crews on the ground.

LDMG moved to Stand Down at 8.00pm, 3 November 2019

COMBINED ASSESSMENT OF FIRE EVENTS IN 2019.

Prevention:

1. Bushfire Mitigation – Operation Cool Burn

Firebreaks

- 29 May 2020 – Laura firebreaks completed
- 29 May 2020 – Coen firebreaks completed
- 29 May 2020 – Cooktown and Marton firebreaks completed
- 29 May 2020 – Coen Airport firebreaks completed

Hazard Reduction Burns

- 6 June – Marton Rural Fire Brigade carried out several hazard reduction burns.
- August – Hazard reduction burns to be carried out in Laura
- July – Hazard reduction burn carried out in Rossville
- 31 July – hazard burns to be carried out in Coen with assistance from QPWS

Facebook

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| ▪ 05 June 2020 Keatings Lagoon cool burn activity | 1,865 people reached |
| ▪ 06 June 2020 Fire responsibility campaign | 1,604 people reached |
| ▪ 02 July 2020 Rossville cool burn activity | 1,049 people reached |
| ▪ 05 July 2020 Cape York Arson campaign | 1,001 people reached |

Planning:

1. Cook Shire LDMG Disaster Management Officer liaised with stakeholders to prioritise key and fire prone areas to be addressed as part of Operation Cool Burn and Bushfire mitigation.
2. Bush fire preparedness pamphlet sent out with Cook Shire Council's Rates Notices in July 2019.
3. Posts on social media and advertisements in the local newspaper advising community of hazard reduction burns in their area and property owner responsibilities.

Response:

1. Provide operational support to QPWS in the form of machinery to clear areas to contain the fires.
2. Request for aerial fire bomber sent through to DDMG.
3. QPWS provided daily updates on fire impacts.

Impact:

Iron Range Fire

1. Severe fire damage to rainforest in Iron Range National Park and closure of all camp sites in the area.
2. Closure of tourist roads and evacuation of campers in Heathlands National Park.

Poison Creek Fire

1. Shed type dwelling and car in the yard at Poison Creek Road destroyed.
2. Occupants of an address on Poison Ck Rd evacuated
3. Wheelchair bound occupant of an address on Poison Ck Rd evacuated after Auxiliary Fire Service made a fire break around residence.
4. Rehabilitation Centre Flaggy Rd commenced self-evacuation after leaving fire control measures in place.
5. 15 clients and five staff were self-transported to Gungarde Community Hall Cooktown where they were fully self-sufficient in terms of food and bedding.
6. Auxiliary Fire Service Chief advised all residents of Wilton Access Rd whose properties are not defensible and who have no fire management measures in place to comply with police door knock and evacuate.
7. Police carried out door knocks and welfare checks where safe to do so.
8. No residents chose to evacuate.
9. Poor communications impacted fire lines due to blackspot areas.

Recovery:

1. Continued Liaison with QPWS offering support.
2. Continued liaison with EMC, QPS and DDMG.
3. Investigated and resolved communications issue.
4. All correspondence recorded in Guardian Control.

January 2020

Aurukun Displaced Persons – Coen

New Year's Day 2020 saw the death of a man in Aurukun. Subsequent rioting in Aurukun resulted in the destruction of six homes and a further two homes being deemed uninhabitable.

More than 250 people fled Aurukun with around 100 residents taking refuge in Coen. Adding an extra 100 people to the population of Coen had significant impacts on both housing and food supply.

Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) were the lead agency for this event.

- DATSIP had ongoing communication with the Police over the weekend of 4-5 January 2020 in relation to the influx of Aurukun people in Coen.
- Coen Police advised that as at Sunday night 5 January 2020 there were 101 Aurukun displaced persons in Coen.
- DATSIP established a line of credit at the Coen Store for Aurukun people in Coen to purchase food and essential personal hygiene items.
- DATSIP travelled to Coen 7 January 2020 and undertook the following actions:
 - Convened an emergency Interagency Meeting to coordinate services response and support including:
 - Identified residents with highest needs – in particular those that have been displaced due to losing their house.
 - Identified gaps in services available to be relayed back to working group for actioning where possible.
 - Identified opportunities to conduct activities such as community barbeques, possible child care activities etc. to reduce impact on Coen residents.
 - Organised Centrelink and other State Government support response and provided information on how these can be accessed by affected Aurukun residents.
 - Identified possible education needs, enrolment, travel to boarding school etc. to ensure if the situation was extended students education is not impacted.
 - Five Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) staff were in Coen to engage with Aurukun residents
 - DATSIP liaised with the Australian Government to have Centrelink staff support the Aurukun residents in Coen – only those people whose houses were destroyed were eligible for an emergency Centrelink payment
 - DATSIP liaised with GIVIT to organise donations of essential clothing and personal items for the Aurukun people

Prevention:

This was an unprecedented event and prevention was out of the immediate control of Cook Shire LDMG. This situation arose out of a law and order issue in a neighbouring shire.

Planning:

No forward planning occurred for this event. After notification of the event Cook Shire Council assessed the need to increase council services in Coen to address the extra persons in the township.

Response:

1. Follow lead from DATSIP on requirements for LDMG
2. Identified long term accommodation for additional Police Officers flown into Coen.

Impact:

1. Overcrowding in households
2. Increased potential for unrest within community
3. Impact on food supplies
4. Strain on ability to produce enough safe water for additional 100 people

5. Potential for increase in outbreaks of communicable diseases

Recovery:

1. Increase in frequency in rubbish collection and close monitoring of water supply.
2. Extra police transferred to Coen
3. Extra senior clinic staff transferred to Coen
4. Continued liaison with DATSIP and QPS

January – February 2020

Monsoonal Flooding

Monsoonal flooding occurred within Cook Shire and adjoining Indigenous Shires between 23 January and 3 February 2020 with the greatest impact in the northern and western parts of the shire. The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) were activated for Cook Shire on 6 February 2020 by Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA).

Prevention:

1. Previous DRFA funded flood damage repairs completed prior to wet season.
2. Budgeted mitigation works completed under maintenance.
3. Applications for “Betterment Funding” submitted to QRA.

Planning:

1. Programs within maintenance and capital works budgets prioritised as part of budget review.

Impact:

1. Severe damage to strategic arterial roads and assets providing access to remote and indigenous communities.

Response:

1. Damage of all roads identified and documented.
2. Roads made safe under Counter Disaster Operations.
3. Apply for activation of event with QRA.
4. Preparation of DRFA funding submission.

Recovery:

1. Written approval for Reconstruction of Essential Public Assets as per DRFA guidelines.
2. DRFA works commenced 13 July 2020.

COVID19 PANDEMIC 2020

Cook Shire LDMG moved to pre-activation for the COVID19 Pandemic on 27 February 2020 after the Prime Minister’s implementation of the Coronavirus Emergency Response Plan.

(Due to this being the first pandemic Cook Shire LDMG has had to respond to and the complexity of the event, the same reporting format as previous events has not been used)

BACKGROUND

During December 2019, a novel coronavirus was detected in Wuhan China. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The first case of coronavirus detected in Australia was on 25 January 2020 in Victoria. The Prime Minister declared the **COVID-19 outbreak** a national pandemic on 27 February and **World Health Organisation** a global pandemic on 12 March 2020.

Australia introduced travel restrictions and self-isolation following WHO pandemic declaration.

Although Queensland Health is the lead agency for pandemic responses in Queensland, the Federal Government took a ‘Whole of Government’ approach to the pandemic in the initial stages with regular

meetings of the National Cabinet. The role of the LDMG in response to COVID19 has been limited to providing support to Queensland Health and providing feedback to the Premier’s Office and DATSIP.

CURRENT SITUATION (as at 27 July 2020)

- International: 16.2M cases, 9.34M recovered and 648,000 fatalities.
- Australia: 14,403 cases, 9,170 recovered and 155 fatalities.
- Queensland: 1,076 cases, 1,063 recovered, and 6 fatalities.
- Cairns & Hinterland: 37 cases and 0 fatalities.
- Cape York: 0 cases

On 22 March 2020, a disaster declaration was issued across Queensland due to the risks posed by the developing COVID-19 pandemic. This declaration remains in place until 26 August 2020. An amendment to the Disaster Management Act 2003 on 25 May 2020 changed the period of extension from 14 days to 90 days for COVID- 19. A vehicle check point was established on the Mulligan Highway at Mt Carbine. All Cape York residents were urged to return home by 5pm on 25 March 2020 or face being locked out of their communities. The Vehicle Check Point (VCP) was in preparation for the new requirements activated under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* by the Federal Government. Cape York became a Designated Biosecurity Area (DBA) on 26 March 2020.

Under the advice of the DDMG, the Cook Shire LDMG moved to an activation level of ‘Stand Up’ on 29 March 2020. The Cook Shire LDMG held an ordinary meeting on 2 April 2020 in response to COVID-19. Another meeting was held on 24 April 2020 where the newly developed Pandemic Operations Manual including sub plans to address COVID19 in the Coen and Laura discreet Indigenous communities and a sub plan for Cooktown and surrounding townships were endorsed. Cook Shire LDMG would like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work carried out by DATSIP’s Principal Project Officer for the Cape and Torres Region in preparing this document on their behalf.

COVID19 CALL CENTRE ACTIVATION

Cook Shire established a COVID19 call centre on 22 March to address enquiries, issues and permits for residents of Cook Shire. Six staff were seconded from various departments to provide support to the community, LDMG and government departments. Daily meetings with call centre staff were held to discuss any issues identified. The call centre did not disband until 10 July 2020.

STATISTICS

Number of Calls received	8,496
Number of counter enquiries	1,101
Number of emails received	4,914
Number of applications processed	646

(This number does not include essential service applications)

Website views

- Coronavirus information page 20 March – 7 July 2020 33,977
(Average of 2:08 mins spent on the page)
- Coronavirus latest news page 20 March – 7 July 2020 18,965
(Average of 3:25 mins spent on the page)

Facebook

Number of direct messages - 113

Facebook posts – number of people reached

- 22 March - post about travel restrictions 143,900
- 24 March - post about updated travel restrictions 41,400

• 26 March Coen restricted access	34,925
• 27 March call Centre open	2,559
• 28 March entry permit update	8,940
• 30 March parks, BBQ, outdoor gym, skate park closed	2,405
• 31 March Wujal Wujal, Ayton, Bloomfield closed	7,127
• 31 March travel restrictions quarantine accommodation	2,231
• 31 March Council closed	2,063
• 01 April Coronavirus app	1,140
• 02 April Buy local	1,923
• 03 April Buy local	1,892
• 04 April Buy local	898
• 06 April Isolation video	956
• 08 April procedure at the hospital due to COVID	1,554
• 08 April Coronavirus opening hours council	1,552
• 09 April Buy local	846
• 09 April Buy local	601
• 10 April Buy local	1,478
• 10 April flatten the curve	711
• 10 April food safety and coronavirus	1,493
• 11 April Buy local	950
• 11 April essential service update	855
• 11 April All in this together	1,133
• 12 April Buy local	1,019
• 13 April Buy local	1,426
• 17 April travel restrictions	3,477
• 20 April Buy local	717
• 21 April Buy local	1,491
• 22 April Buy local	798
• 23 April Buy local	662
• 27 April travel restrictions	3,225
• 01 May COVID update	1,326
• 06 May Buy local	1,360
• 08 May Buy local	2,027
• 08 May Qld Government – restrictions eased	1,634
• 12 May Entry to Cook Shire remains restricted	60,280
• 14 May Buy local	909
• 15 May Cape York businesses call for easing restrictions	1,867
• 21 May Pushing for changes to travel restrictions	6,050
• 27 May travel restrictions update	30,168
• 31 May travel restrictions update	32,039
• 06 June simplified entry to biosecurity zone	9,492
• 09 June COVID restrictions for business	1,998
• 11 June new CHO direction	3,975
• 18 June tourists travel still not allowed	107,928
• 01 July Breaking news Cook Shire to reopen	34,094
• 03 July Cape York Travel update	41,237
• 03 July COVID Economic survey	846

Vehicle Check Point

Number of vehicles recorded travelling both north and south through the VCP.

1 April to 1 July 2020 2,620

Cape and Torres Hospital and Health Service

COVID10 tests carried out in the DBA as at 22 July 2020 1,750

ENTRY PERMITS

Due to the announcement by the Federal Government that the entry permit system would be locally led by LDMGs, development of an initial permit application to address the legislative requirements for entry into the DBA was established in collaboration with Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal LDMGs. This was then superseded by the Federal Government's Biosecurity Determination on 26 March 2020 with a new application developed by the DDMG.

A new protocol came into effect on 24 April 2020 again with a new application process using the Queensland Government online Border Entry passes and DDMG forms for self-isolation and exemptions.

During this time daily meetings (including weekends) between the Chair of the Cook Shire LDMG, LDC and OIC Cooktown Police were held to assess applications for exemption with advice from the Human Biosecurity Officer and the DDMG. All essential services applications were assessed directly by DDMG and the Cook Shire LDMG had no formal involvement in this process.

Queensland was removed from the Federal Government's Biosecurity Determination on 12 June 2020 and replaced with Chief Health Officer's Direction. Entry requirements were again changed with a new online remote communities pass and all applications for exemption were assessed by the State Government with advice sought from the LDMG Chair.

Given the extraordinary nature of the event, the Cook Shire LDMG Economic Recovery Subgroup was activated and began liaising with key stakeholders and businesses. The focus was on the major impact areas and to form response and recovery strategies to meet the needs of their sector.

Whilst LDMG members had been actively engaging their stakeholders for many weeks, as the event progressed further into recovery, the LDMG considered that a collaborative and coordinated approach needed to be applied to ascertain and respond to the economic impact on Cook Shire Council communities.

ECONOMIC

The Department of State Development, Tourism and Innovation (DSDTI) is the state lead agency for the Economic Recovery. The DSDTI will act in a support role to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) in liaising with Councils to bring together economic components of a recovery plan for the state. At the local level, economic issues are managed through the Cook Shire LDMG, Economic Recovery Subgroup, Cooktown Chamber of Commerce and Tourism and Cook Shire Council's Economy, Community and Innovation Department.

The health impacts of COVID19 for Queensland and the Cape York have been well controlled and no cases of COVID19 were recorded for Cape York. However, significant economic impacts are occurring due to the declaration of a Designated Biosecurity Area over Cape York. Cape businesses rely heavily on tourism. The tourist season is a very limited season between May and October. This timeframe is also effected by the timing and duration of the wet season and impacts of cyclones and tropical lows.

There is an expected Gross Regional Product (GRP) drop by 7.3% for June and a 5.8% drop in jobs. Data estimates from economy.id indicates that the Qld Gross Product is estimated to drop by 12%. The Queensland Government have implemented a number of measures e.g. Dept of Employment and Small Business have announce several grant and funding opportunities for small business.

There is also the Unite and Recover for Qld Jobs Strategy which includes a range of strategies for building infrastructure and industry (Phase 1 Qld Economic Recovery Strategy). One oversight of these grants is the

ineligibility of sole traders to apply for funding. Cook Shire and Cooktown Chamber of Commerce and Tourism have since lobbied the Minister for Employment and Small Business to include sole traders in the next round of funding to be released by their department.

A concerted campaign to “buy local” was initiated by Cook Shire Council and the Cooktown Chamber of Commerce and Tourism. This campaign was advertised extensively on the Cook Shire website and Facebook page and other media and achieved 18,997 views on Facebook. While many businesses were able to adapt to the restrictions by providing takeaways and delivery, some businesses had to shut down completely until the restrictions were eased. Cook Shire Council generated a survey to identify strategic information from business in preparation of the COVID19 Recovery Plan for the Cook Shire LDMG.

The total cost of the COVID19 Pandemic to Cook Shire Council as at 30 June was \$205,435.45 with approximately 75% of these costs being wages including overtime. A total of 2,479.75 hours were directly related to COVID19. The remaining 25% of costs were shared between the purchase of PPE, training, advertising and software licences etc. While the government has activated grants for businesses and community groups no specific funding has been activated for Councils to recover costs incurred during the pandemic. Although Councils were notified they were able to redirect funds from the Works for Queensland grants, Cook Shire decided the long term benefits of providing much needed infrastructure for the community through Works for Queensland outweighed the operational costs of managing COVID19. However Cook Shire Council does not have access to additional operational funding and costs were met in part through staff redeployment and re-allocation of committed operational funding.

HUMAN AND SOCIAL

While it is acknowledged that the direct impacts on physical health through COVID19 infection were nil, the social and economic impacts were deemed to be extremely high. The creation of the Designated Biosecurity Area (DBA) was a swift preventative measure and many residents were unable to return by the designated time and found themselves on the “wrong side” on VCP. This caused considerable stress to many returning residents, especially for local grey nomads and the elderly, and an immediate solution to this issue was not available. Through continued communication and considerable support from DATSIP’s Principal Project Officer for the Cape and Torres Region interim accommodation was sourced as soon as possible. This was one issue that was not taken into consideration when “closing the border.” Although exemption permits were eventually established, the continually changing entry requirements also caused a great deal of angst during which time the LDMG and the COVID19 call centre received numerous calls and pleas for assistance.

Community and Agency feedback indicated an increased degree of concern, loneliness and uncertainty related to restrictions on freedoms and dramatic changes to lifestyle, livelihoods and severe financial distress. Cook Shire prepared a social recovery survey to be distributed to all outlying communities and Cooktown to help identify achievable human and social recovery objectives to be included in the COVID19 Recovery Plan which is a document reviewed as part of the of the Regional Recovery Plan being developed by the Queensland Reconstructive Authority. These local and regional plans then feed into the State Recovery Plan.

Families in particular, were concerned regarding the impact on local small business, the ability to travel “on country” and carry out maintenance and risk mitigation on rural properties or cultural sites. Some elderly community members stated that they are not necessarily keen to leave their homes, even after the easing of restrictions. The impact of not attending face to face appointments with medical professionals, due to the 14 day quarantine requirement outside the Cape York, has been identified as an issue for many residents. The impact of delayed medical treatments may not be fully realised for several months. In addition Queensland Ambulance Service noted an increase in mental health call outs and the reluctance to be transported to hospital for fear of being transferred out of the DBA. Queensland Police recorded a slight decline in all incidents, including Domestic Violence, compared to the same time last year and only three Public Health incidents relating to COVID19 restrictions. Police worked proactively with local liquor outlets to identify increased alcohol sales to residents of dry communities in an effort to reduce potential alcohol related incidents.

Networking within the Cape fostered a “look out for your neighbour” attitude with many people offering to pick up and deliver supplies to the elderly or residents self-isolating. Cook Shire has six Care Army volunteers registered and a social media group called Cooktown Online Angels has 205 members and is a referral service that links offerings of help to other charities and professionals.

Cook Shire Council continues to provide support to the community through payment arrangements of rates for individuals, community groups and small businesses and assistance with grant applications for businesses.

In order to further assess the effect COVID19 has had on our human and social functions, Cook Shire Council has developed another survey to help identify key issues to be included in our COVID19 Recovery Plan.

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

The Department of Environment & Science (DES) is the state agency lead for environmental recovery.

DES has remained operational throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Management of parks and forests remained operational where staff continued to work from bases and in the field. The Park Alerts system has provided updates to community and the Department's website used for other areas of service delivery. All camp grounds were closed to public use for camping and reopened on 4 June with access only to residents in the DBA.

With access constrained both in and out of the Designated Biosecurity Area, there were some challenges to undertake fire and pest management programs. Rural Fire Brigades are engaging with National Parks and Wildlife and Indigenous Ranger Groups within the DBA about hazard mitigation/cool burn activities which are continuing subject to social distancing and favourable weather conditions. At the time of writing this report further cool burns were hampered by strong winds.

Cook Shire Council's Environmental Health Officer and Workplace Health and Safety team undertook COVID19 training in order to provide clear and helpful advice to the LDMG, staff, registered businesses and the general public around COVID Safe Plans, social distancing, cleaning, disinfection and personal protective equipment.

Compared to the social and economic repercussions and no cases of the virus in the Cape, the public health component of the response was fortunately relatively small and addressed by Queensland Health (QH) as the lead agency.

Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service carried out 1,750 tests over this period with no positive cases. These figures include the entire Designated Biosecurity Area. It is to be noted that the Queensland Health website identifies only 9 cases of COVID19 for First Nation People.

INFRASTRUCTURE (Built Environment)

The Department of Housing & Public Works (DHPW) is the state agency lead for buildings recovery and the Department of Transport & Main Roads (DTMR) is the state agency lead for roads recovery. Initially the DHPW and DTMR were unable to access the designated biosecurity area.

As this event is very different to usual events like cyclones and/or bushfires where impact to the built environment is likely, infrastructure providers have been focused on continued service delivery and planning significant loss staff due to illness. No recorded cases in Cape York saw the ability of DHPW staff to enter as essential workers into the DBA.

DHPW also assisted DATSIP in finding suitable isolation accommodation for returning residents who did not have the financial means to source their own accommodation

There is significant focus from state and federal governments to invest in new infrastructure to push economic stimulus. Cook Shire Council has commenced planning for such projects to boost economic recovery within in the shire.

3. CONCLUSION

The year 2020 has been one of many challenges which saw the LDMG and COVID19 Call Centre staff going above and beyond. The ability to quickly understand changing legislation and Governmental processes followed by clear communications to the community explaining the effects of these changes is supported by statistical data.

\$515,000 in DRFA funding for flood warning infrastructure in Cook has recently been announced for 13 stations that are a combination of rain stations, river monitoring stations and flood monitoring cameras but no financial assistance for the maintenance of these sites. While this is a great outcome for the Cook LDMG due to budgetary constraints Cook Shire may not be in a position to accept the funding as maintenance costs of the infrastructure is a further cost to Council.

With interim employment of a Disaster Management Officer and enhanced co-operation between agencies and DDMG, the Cook Shire LDMG is well prepared for the coming season.

This Annual Report is to be tabled for endorsement at the Cook Shire Council Ordinary Meeting on 11 August 2020 and presented at the LDMG meeting on 26 August 2020 as per the Local Disaster Management Guidelines.

RESOLUTION 2020/218

Moved: Cr Larissa Hale

Seconded: Cr John Dessmann

That Council endorses the Cook Shire Local Disaster Management Group's Annual Report for 2019/2020.

CARRIED