

COOMALIE COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT COUNCIL

Rum Jungle Lake Rehabilitation Project Community and Stakeholder Engagement Report

AUGUST 2024



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Kungarakan and Warai people as the traditional owners of the Coomalie region and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Territory Government's Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (NT DITT) has entered into an agreement with the Coomalie Community Government Council (the Council) to extract gravel material from a borrow pit on the Rum Jungle Lake site.

The borrow pit project will raise revenue for the Council through the sale of material extracted from the site, but also presents an opportunity to position the site for further development once the project is completed.

In 2024 the Council undertook the Rum Jungle Lake Borrow Pit Community Consultation Project (the Project). Following an open tender process the Council appointed Atria Group to undertake an engagement consultancy to establish community and stakeholder insights which have been developed into a report informing Council of the community's priorities.

The purpose of the consultancy was to ask the local Coomalie community what the preferred land use would be for the Rum Jungle Lake site after the extraction process was completed and what the Council's priorities should be for using any income received from the borrow pit.

The community consultation process employed a range of methods for engagement and data collection, including:

- Direct engagement with identified critical stakeholders and communities of interest.
- Activations at key community events – the Adelaide River Show and the Batchelor Markets, to engage with a broad cross-section of the community and speak directly with residents from across the shire area.
- Public consultation via dedicated project web page on the Council website and social media.
- Publicly available survey available online.
- Public promotion through both the Council's monthly newsletter and NT DITT's project newsletter.

This report highlights:

- A highly successful engagement program that informed community and stakeholders about the Rum Jungle Lake Borrow Pit Project.
- A method that delivered significant community insights to inform an effective report to assist Council in future decisions about the Rum Jungle Lake site and the priorities of the community for Council to consider more broadly.
- The engagement with a significant number of key stakeholders, organisations, community groups and residents from across the Coomalie Shire.
- The significant level of interest within the community about the site and its potential benefits for residents and the region.

CONSULTATION FINDINGS

The consultation highlighted that the methodology and approach used during this project generated strong community and stakeholder demand to share their views. A common theme within the community was an appreciation to the Council for the opportunity to participate in the engagements.

The majority of community and stakeholders that were engaged during the consultation are invested and passionate about the future use of the Rum Jungle Lake site. Participants shared a vision for usage that delivers significant benefits to the local area from its future development.

Participants outlined priorities for the site that have the potential to deliver variety of outcomes for the local community and broader region. For the local community it could provide recreational impacts for enhanced physical, mental and social health. For the region it could create economic opportunities by attracting visitors to the community.

The key messages to the Council resulting from this consultation are:

1. The local Coomalie community strongly supports developing the Rum Jungle Lake site for use as a community asset.
2. Enhancing the lake area for its natural amenity to facilitate its use as a recreational facility is a priority.
3. Use of the borrow pit area for recreational pursuits such as mountain biking, walking/ hiking and motorbiking is a priority.
4. Further use of the remaining areas of the Rum Jungle Lake property (outside of the lake and borrow pit area) for sub-division or free camping areas could also be considered.
5. Activities to engage young people in the community and aged care services are priorities for Council to focus on.
6. The value of this engagement is measured by the strong relationships that the Council has built with the community and stakeholders by undertaking this consultation. The community and stakeholders value the engagement and are enthusiastic about assisting the Council to co-design outcomes that will benefit the community in the long-term.



2. INTRODUCTION

Rum Jungle Lake is located on Poett Road, approximately 11.5km west of the town of Batchelor and approximately 7km to the south of the former Rum Jungle Mine. The site is currently used as a recreation area. The land is 375 hectares of Freehold Title which is owned, managed and maintained by the Council on behalf of the Coomalie community.

NT DITT has entered into a commercial agreement with the Council to extract gravel material (gravel and clay) from a borrow pit on Rum Jungle Lake. The extraction process is expected to commence in late 2024 and continue until 2030.

Completion of the borrow pit project will change the terrain of a significant proportion of the property. The agreement with NT DITT about remediation (or development) of the borrow pit site at completion provides the opportunity for the Council to prepare the site for further development and use for other purposes.

The primary opportunity arising from the borrow pit project is the opportunity to develop the site for further use by the community, and the secondary opportunity is the revenue generated over the life of the borrow pit for the Council.

Atria Group was appointed through an open tender process as consultants to ask the community about these opportunities and the future priorities for Council to consider. This report presents the findings of this consultation from the engagement process.

2.1. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The engagement process was developed and implemented across several phases with an early focus of the project team being co-design of the engagement plan with the Council.

A broad range of engagement methods were used to ensure the insights were informed by significant numbers of direct and indirect consultation as well as from a broad range of stakeholders across the community.

2.1.A. PHASE ONE: PLANNING AND PREPARATION

This included meetings with key Council staff to clarify priorities for the project and develop a shared project vision.

Through this phase the determination of project governance, communication preferences, methodologies, timelines, and risk were achieved, as well as sharing of relevant documentation and information that provided important background information to the project.

The co-design process was finalised through a workshop held with the Councillors and its staff to determine options for end-land use objective that could be tested through stakeholder and community consultation.

This provided the basis for the development of the engagement and consultation plan, which included stakeholder mapping, risk analysis and an engagement methodology. These were presented to the Council's project lead and approved.

The development of consultation tools and communication materials produced the following for use during the consultation:

- Community meeting plan
- Targeted consultation plan
- Survey

- FAQs
- Media Release
- Fact Sheet
- Website content
- Newsletter content

2.1.B. PHASE TWO: ENGAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

The second phase saw the project team commence engagement with the community. This included the distribution of communication materials through various channels to reach a significant number of residents within the community.

Targeted consultation was held through on-site visits and meetings with key stakeholders, community groups and organisations, as well as via email and phone conversations.

Public activations were also conducted in the main localities of the shire to interact with large numbers of residents in these places.

2.1.C. PHASE THREE: INSIGHTS DEVELOPMENT AND REPORTING

The insights gathered during the engagement phase were used to inform this report which will assist the Council with decision-making processes about the Rum Jungle Lake site and community priorities more broadly.



3. ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

The objective of the project was to seek the community's opinion on the preferred land use for the Rum Jungle Lake site after the extraction process was completed and what the Council's priorities should be for using any income received from the borrow pit.

The first question was put to the community with a set of potential options that were co-designed with Council. These options were:

- Simple development, such as a rehabilitated nature space or park.
- Some development, such as outdoor recreation area.
- Complex development, such as a sub-division for housing, commercial or industrial development.
- Other.

The second question was framed to seek general responses from stakeholders and individuals consulted.

3.1. ENGAGEMENT OUTLINE

The community of interest for the program were the ratepayers and residents of the Coomalie Shire. These included the townships of Batchelor, Adelaide River and Lake Bennett, as well as the residents of the rural areas within the shire boundary.

Key stakeholders, both individuals and organisations or groups were identified and engaged directly, while the broader community was engaged at a number of planned public and community events.

The priority for engagement was to achieve wide-ranging consultation with residents, businesses, organisations and community groups across the different localities within the Coomalie Shire.

3.1.A. COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

- Webpage – material was provided to Council for development of a dedicated project webpage on the Council's website.
- Survey – a publicly available survey was developed and published on the Council's website.
- Fact Sheet
- FAQ Sheet
- Media Release
- Coomalie Community Government Council Newsletter – material provided to Council for its monthly newsletter.
- NT DITT Newsletter - material provided to NT DITT for its monthly project specific newsletter.

3.1.B. TARGETED CONSULTATION

The following stakeholders were identified and engaged to ensure their insights were captured to inform the final outcomes of the report:

- Coomalie Community Government Council- Elected Members
- Coomalie Community Government staff
- Kungarakana and Warai Traditional Owners
- Northern Territory Government
- Batchelor School and Outdoor Education Centre
- Adelaide River Museum
- Batchelor Pool
- Litchfield Regional Tourism Inc.
- Local businesses

3.1.C. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

The project team conducted public activations at the:

- Adelaide River Show
- Batchelor Markets

The purpose of these activations was to engage with local residents and capture the insights from a high number of local and regional people attending these events.

3.1.D. BROAD PUBLIC PROMOTION AND ENGAGEMENT

The broader public was engaged through a publicly available survey which was distributed both in paper form at several locations around the shire, including the Council offices, and online via the Council's website, social media, and newsletter distribution network.



3.2. ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

In total over 120 individual residents and stakeholders were engaged and consulted directly through the course of the consultation process.

The result of the consultation process was that the equivalent of 1 in 10 residents within the Coomalie Shire were directly consulted about the project.

3.2.A. TARGETED CONSULTATIONS

- 30+ people engaged in person, via telephone, and via email correspondence.
- 10 local organisations, businesses and community groups consulted (including local traditional owners).

3.2.B. PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Two public activations held

- Adelaide River Show
- Batchelor Markets
- 80+ individual conversations held with residents of the Coomalie Shire.

3.2.C. SURVEY

- 11 x digital surveys completed.
- 1 x paper survey completed.



4. STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

The engagement process discovered substantial enthusiasm within the community about the consultation. Many stakeholders engaged were grateful for the opportunity to provide input and complimentary of the Council for undertaking the consultation process to seek the community's input.

The key insight from the consultations was that the majority of the community support the activation of the Rum Jungle Lake site and not rehabilitating or restoring it back to its present state.

The Coomalie community overwhelmingly sees the site as an asset for the Shire and its residents that should be used by the community more than it is now.

There was a diversity of opinions and ideas within the community about the best use for the site. Very clear trends emerged, however, right throughout the consultation with a majority of stakeholders and members of the community supporting a common idea.



4.1. PRIORITY FOR LAND USE

The key priorities to emerge from the consultations were:

- Additional recreational facilities available to the community with a focus on activities suited to all individuals but with a focus on youth engagement such as mountain biking, motocross (motor bike riding), fishing, hiking/ walking, swimming etc.
- Enhancement of the natural amenity of the area (particularly around the lake) with a focus on nature walks featuring native flora and fauna, including culturally important plants and animals to allow local Traditional Owners to showcase some aspects of their culture to the community and visitors.
- Enhanced drawcard to attract visitors to the area and potentially address the lack of amenity for the annual overflow of tourists to the Litchfield National Park.
- Establishment of first stage of a significant mountain biking trail linking Darwin, Batchelor and Adelaide River to cater to the growing mountain bike tourism market. An example put forward by several stakeholders was the mountain bike trails in Derby, Tasmania. Stakeholders saw this as an example that the Council could follow.

The outcomes of these priorities were to provide a two-part benefit. For the local community it provides recreational outcomes for enhanced physical, mental and social health. For the region it could provide economic outcomes by attracting visitors to the Coomalie Region.

The proposed recreation facilities can vary in scale, ranging from local improvements such as additional picnic and barbecue areas, to extensive, such as mountain bike trails similar to those built in Derby Tasmania. The community is of the belief that any additional recreational facilities can deliver these outcomes irrespective of their scale.

The priorities and examples provided by the community are further detailed here.

1. ACTIVATION OF THE LAKE AREA

A clear priority for the community to emerge from the consultation was that the lake area of the site should be used for its natural amenity and non-invasive recreational potential for uses such as:

- Picnic and barbecue area for day use only.
- Environmental tourism attraction featuring nature walks/hiking around the lake, with invasive species removed and natives, including bush foods, being planted. This provides an opportunity for local Aboriginal people to conduct cultural and bush food tourism walks around the lake area.
- Use of the lake for water recreational activities such as:
 - Swimming
 - Diving and dive training
 - Stand up paddle boarding, kayaking, canoeing and rowing.
 - Fishing
- Development of a wetland area between the lake and Menaling Creek to attract birdlife and associated eco-tourism market, similar to Fogg Dam.
- Utilise the elevation of the overburden pile as a sunset viewing area and stargazing facility.
- Creation of a "Friends of the Lake" group to maintain the nature areas.

2. ACTIVATION OF THE BORROW PIT AREA

The majority of the community saw the conceptual terrain of the completed borrow pit as an opportunity for use as a recreational facility.

The key insights from the community were that the borrow pit area could be used for:

- Recreational activities such as:
 - Mountain biking, with connectivity to other potential mountain biking trails in the area such as the railway corridor, with a vision to making a trail linking Darwin, Batchelor and Adelaide River.
 - Motor bike and ATV/buggy riding.
 - Adventure four-wheel-driving.
- Other potential uses referred to:
 - Four-wheel drive training and heavy-duty vehicle recovery training.
 - Creation of a wetland area in the borrow pit to encourage birdlife.
 - Some appetite for subdivision of the borrow pit area for either residential or industrial land use.

4.2. PRIORITIES FOR COMMERCIAL OUTCOMES

Another aspect to the consultation was asking the community about priorities for use of the revenue from the site. This was framed in a way that asked what the community's broader priorities were in terms of the Council's function and what the community needs.

The key insights discovered during the consultation are detailed below.

4.2.A YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

A common theme throughout the consultation was that there is not enough amenity for young people in the community. This creates boredom which manifests into increasing rates of youth crime, especially in Batchelor and Adelaide River townships.

Mountain biking and motorbike riding are popular pastimes among the young people of the Coomalie community, but there is not enough designated areas for these activities to be undertaken. This means young people are forced to ride in areas that are not appropriate to do so, such as the old railway corridor, which contributes to erosion, and also to trespass onto private property.

The development of Rum Jungle Lake into an area where these can occur has the potential to address this issue.

Quote: "Local kids are bored. They have all the toys, like motorbikes and buggies, but don't have anywhere to ride them".

4.2.B. AGED CARE

Batchelor is seen as a town that is desirable for older people to retire to due to its small community and natural amenity. Batchelor was noted by some people interviewed as having one of the highest proportions of senior citizens in its community of any town in the NT.

It was commonly noted during the consultation that Batchelor does not have adequate aged care facilities or services.

Quote: "Recently an older resident who had retired to Batchelor passed away in his house and wasn't found for over a week due to a lack of in-home services. He was only found because his family down south asked local police to check on him when they hadn't heard from him".

If further services were available in the town, such as a live-in aged care/retirement village, in-home care services and better health services, then Batchelor could be a more desirable place for older residents from Darwin and the Northern Territory more broadly to retire to. This would then create more jobs and attract more younger professionals to the area, creating a larger rate-payer base for the shire.

4.3. CONSIDERATIONS

4.3.A. SACRED SITES

The most significant concerns about potential land use of the area were raised by the traditional owners that were consulted. While supportive of activating the site and enthusiastic about its potential as an asset to the community, it was flagged that there are potentially sacred sites and sites of cultural significance located on the site, particularly along the waterway that intersects the property.

Any land use would need to take these into consideration as a component of further scoping and feasibility studies.

4.3.B. COMPETITION WITH LOCAL BUSINESS

The majority of the community were supportive of the site being developed into a facility that could attract tourists to the area and potentially provide some relief from the overflow of tourists to the adjacent Litchfield National Park area that occurs every year. There is not enough capacity in the Park to cater for the tourists that visit each year and Batchelor currently does not have enough attractions or facilities to entertain and hold that overflow.

However, some of the businesses consulted flagged that use of the site as a caravan park could create competition with local businesses. This would need to be explored further to consider an increase through in-demand and capacity modelling.

4.3.C. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Several stakeholders raised concerns about residual contaminants of both the dirt in the overburden pile and the water in the lake.

The Rum Jungle Lake Borrow Pit, the lake itself and surrounds are safe for recreational use from a human health perspective. Any changes to the land use, e.g. housing subdivision, may require an environment and human health impact assessment.

4.3.D. LIMITATIONS

It is acknowledged that it is not the role of this report to undertake any environmental, feasibility, product design or economic modelling of any of the proposed ideas.

The Council will need to appropriately assess any of the ideas put forward by the community in this report prior to making further decisions.



5. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

The key messages to the Council resulting from this consultation are:

1. The local Coomalie community strongly supports developing the Rum Jungle Lake site for use as a community asset.
2. Enhancing the lake area for its natural amenity to facilitate its use as a recreational facility is a priority
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4. Further use of the remaining areas of the Rum Jungle Lake property (outside of the lake and borrow pit area) for sub-division or free camping areas could also be considered.
5. Activities to engage young people in the community and aged care services are priorities for Council to focus on.
6. The value of this engagement is measured by the strong relationships that the Council has built with the community and stakeholders by undertaking this consultation. The community and stakeholders value the engagement and are enthusiastic about assisting the Council to co-design outcomes that will benefit the community in the long-term.



APPENDICES

Case Studies for reference

The following case studies were referenced by participants throughout the consultation process.



DERBY- AUSTRALIA'S MOUNTAIN BIKING TOWN

In the North East of Tasmania, Derby was a sleepy town until 2015 when the Blue Derby Mountain Bike Park was opened. Derby is now considered a Mecca for national and international visitors with an interest in mountain biking.



The \$3.1 million, 80km network of tracks is reportedly attracting more than 30,000 visitors every year, who spend four to five nights in Derby then another five nights elsewhere in Tasmania. The return on investment has been estimated at \$30 million per year. A \$2.5 million Federal Government grant enabled the project, aiming to develop a new industry to help the region recover from the collapse of the forestry industry.



FOGG DAM CONSERVATION RESERVE - A PARADISE FOR ECO-TOURISM

Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve is located a 45-minute drive from Darwin. It is one of the most accessible places in the Northern Territory (NT) to experience spectacular wetlands and wildlife throughout the year. It is internationally regarded for its diverse habitats, flora and fauna. It is considered a paradise for birdwatchers, photographers, storm chasers and astrophotography.

In 2023, 57000 people visited Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve.



Atria Group acknowledges and respect the Traditional Owners of the land and waterways we work on. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

