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Agenda 21 for culture

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## Agenda 21 for culture – An Australian Response

Judy Spokes with a contribution from Aunty Joan Hendriks

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## Agenda 21 for culture – An Australian Response

### By Judy Spokes with a contribution from Aunty Joan Hendriks

Judy Spokes is currently Senior Advisor, Cultural Services with the Redland City Council

Aunty Joan Hendriks is a respected Elder and Founding Chair of the Quandamooka Forum. 'Aunty' is a term of respect within her community

Redland City, south of Brisbane on Australia's sub-tropical east coast, is a peri-urban and island community with a rich natural and cultural heritage. Its diverse landscapes, lifestyles and community values are changing in response to significant urban growth. 96 per cent of the 135,000 who live in the Redlands have arrived here since 1950, when the base of the local economy was mainly agricultural. By 2030 they will have been joined by another 45,000 people, according to current projections. By then older people will comprise a third of the population.

These trends present a challenge to the City Council which is committed to sustaining vitality and diversity of local culture and the environment. Recent community consultation reveals that a major concern of residents is the impact of growth on the sustainability of local communities, culture and ecological systems. Many residents fear that the dwindling, and iconic, urban koala population may soon vanish due to development pressures. Others fear for the future of the native dugong, and other marine life dependent on Moreton Bay. Similarly (and apparently not unrelated to environmental concerns), residents express concern that quality of life, distinctive local culture and a 'sense of place' are also at risk from escalating urbanisation.

Redland City Council consciously includes cultural perspectives, values and processes in its approach to local governance, place management and community development.

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These challenges are common to many fast growing cities in the world, especially those on the fringe of capital cities. Consideration of Agenda 21 for culture has strengthened the Redland City Council's commitment to seek lateral innovative responses to them. A conscious inclusion of cultural perspectives, values and processes in its approach to local governance, place management and community development is evidence of this. Consideration of the principles and undertakings of Agenda 21 for culture has helped to locate local civic challenges in a global context. Also, Jon Hawkes' book, the *Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* has informed the Council's effort to better integrate cultural planning within its wider planning role.

## Our City Our Culture – a plan for cultural vitality

Informed by Agenda 21 for culture, in June 2008 Redland City Council adopted a new cultural policy, and a 10 year cultural plan (*Our City Our Culture*). The plan emphasised the importance of contemporary arts and heritage at the heart of local culture, and established clear priorities for Council investment in these sectors. Affirming the profound inter-relationship between nature and culture (in its widest sense), *Our City Our Culture* seeks a more creative and effective integration of these two most basic forces within social, economic, environment and governance planning.



From *Our City Our Culture*, a Cultural Plan for the Redlands 2008-2018

It is now almost a year since the Council adopted the cultural policy and began to implement it. As the policy architect, I am grateful to the editor of this publication for this timely opportunity to revisit our goals and review our early progress.

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The vision that anchors the ten strategic goals of *Our City Our Culture* is for ‘a robust living culture that reflects and engages all Redlands residents.’ The goals are organised in three broad categories that aim to establish a firm platform for cultural development, build on local cultural assets and strengths, and focus on the future. The plan also identified key priorities for action and support in the decade ahead:

- Enhanced consideration of cultural values in major planning instruments including: the Redlands Planning Scheme, the Local Growth Management Strategy, the Social Infrastructure Plan, site master-plans and neighbourhood structure plans;
- Indigenous community efforts to protect and promote the unique living culture of the Quandamooka region;
- Creative approaches to civic engagement that enrich public exploration of pressing local issues and challenges;
- Renewal and animation of existing community facilities;
- Cultural development in communities facing locational or other disadvantages especially the Southern Moreton Bay Islands;
- Local and regional partnerships between the arts, heritage, environment, media, and education sectors;
- Investment in digital literacy as a major driver of cultural development, education and enterprise development in the new century;
- Succession planning for cultural organisations to engage newcomers, young people, and cross-sector partnerships;
- Emerging communities’ access to cultural facilities and services especially in the south of the city.

While action has been taken to address most of these priorities, two in particular stand out as significant at this early implementation stage, and are the focus of this article. The first aims to engage the community more deeply and more creatively in planning for the future. To achieve this, a designated cultural program has been incorporated within the Council’s long term community planning exercise, ‘Redlands 2030’ which is a major undertaking for the City this year. The second addresses the deepest foundations of local culture; the fact that a predominantly European culture was built over the top of the land and lives of Aboriginal land owners through colonisation of Australia a little over 200 years ago. A new Indigenous Community Policy, foreshadowed in the Cultural Plan and adopted late last year, signalled the Council’s commitment to a new partnership with the Indigenous community that takes account of this history.

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## One of the oldest living cultures on earth

The Aboriginal people of Quandamooka (Moreton Bay) have one of the oldest living cultures on the planet. According to archaeologists, their history is at least 21,000 years old. Traditional Owners, still active in their care for 'country' and culture, say their history is older still and emerges from the timeless 'dreaming' (or creation era).

The Council's new Indigenous Community Policy recognises and respects the local Indigenous people and acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the region as 'first peoples' with attendant special rights and obligations. A partnership between the Council and the Quandamooka Forum (a coalition of local Aboriginal organisations) has been important in the framing of the Policy and is vital to its implementation. In the spirit of that partnership, I have invited respected Quandamooka Elder, Aunty Joan Hendriks (Chair of the Quandamooka Forum), to share her views on the early impact of the Council's Indigenous Policy and Cultural Plan.

## Reconciliation is everybody's business

### By Aunty Joan Hendriks

*The Indigenous peoples of the Redlands City area are the original inhabitants of the Moreton Bay region (Quandamooka). North Stradbroke and Moreton Islands are the two islands we call Minjerriba and Moorgumpin; and are the homelands of the Nunukul, Ngugi and Gorempil clans. These peoples are the custodians of the lands and waters of Quandamooka. For many thousands of years our people have maintained our affiliation with our 'place of belonging.' Our ancestry and heritage are the two most important elements in nurturing our culture, spirituality and relationship with Mother Earth, the dwelling place of Creator Spirit. We are spiritual people and the land is our very lifeblood.*

As custodians of our land we recognise the need to work alongside the Redland City Council towards respectful and practical shared stewardship of the natural and cultural resources for which we each have responsibility. In October last year, Redland City Councillors and Executive Managers met together with the Quandamooka Forum (a coalition of Aboriginal organisations on beautiful North Stradbroke Island / Minjerriba). We came together to discuss and establish common ground in the parallel plans for the future prepared by each of us.

Two immediate Council commitments came out of our collaboration that day:

- a decision that the opening of all future General Council meetings would include a formal acknowledgement of the Quandamooka people, as Traditional Owners of the land and waters we share;
- a decision to fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags permanently alongside the Australian, state and city flags at the entrance to the Council chambers.

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It was with great pride and joy that the Quandamooka community stood tall and proud alongside the wider Redlands community in a ceremonial flag raising event which took place on the 13th February 2009. This date was chosen to commemorate the first anniversary of the Australian Government's apology to the Indigenous people for its role in past injustices that had taken place in our country. Of primary importance in the apology was the acknowledgement of the impact of Government policy at the time of the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. The flag raising event was a most memorable occasion and it is with deep pride that each day all who care, especially our own Indigenous youth can be inspired by the symbolism of the flags flying, not simply on special occasions, but every time the national, state and city flags are raised.



The Yulu Burri Bah dancers present stories of their country, Quandamooka, at a ceremony to celebrate the permanent raising of Indigenous flags at the Redland City Council office on the first anniversary of the Australian Government's apology to the 'stolen generations.'

The flag ceremony and the Council's new Indigenous Policy are early results of the Council's new cultural plan, *Our City Our Culture*. In her introduction to the Cultural Plan the newly elected Mayor, Melva Hobson, clearly indicates the ethos and commitments that underpin the action plan it outlines:

*'Our culture is precious. It emerges from our values, spirit and creativity. It is forged in our interactions with the unique environment we share. It fosters community identity and pride; reflects our triumphs and challenges, and expresses our links to the past and our dreams for the future. Like air, it is an intangible – but essential – element in a sustainable future.'*

The Cultural Plan aims to establish 'a firm platform for cultural development.' Under this heading the Council has committed itself to:

*'Acknowledge and support the living culture of the Traditional Owners, Elders and other Indigenous residents of the Redlands, the people of Quandamooka.'*

This statement is indicative of the sincerity that is embedded in the shared responsibility that this particular Council is embarking on in their endeavour to build an inclusive Redlands community. The statement highlighted here is only a mere fragment of the overall picture of the actual influence of the coming together as one in Spirit, that now influences the respectful relationship that is growing between Traditional and Council custodians of Quandamooka / Redland City.

**It has been in the sharing of culturally different stories that we have found common ground and learned to accept and embrace cultural difference.**

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The joint partnership between the Council and the Quandamooka Forum has, at all times, respected the autonomy of each party whilst maintaining the need to work together to share the expertise relevant to the culture and wellbeing of each organisation. It has been in the sharing of culturally different stories that we have found common ground and learned to accept and embrace cultural difference in the sharing of our cultures, our spiritualities and way of living with and caring for the environment. It is about an inclusive, holistic approach to living, and being in, community... as one in Spirit incarnating difference.

Thanks to our shared responsibility approach there is now a place for the Quandamooka people at the table of key Council planning processes, most notably the Redland 2030 Community Reference Group. This reference group has the responsibility of ensuring that:

- the process of developing the Redlands 2030 Community Plan is transparent, credible, ethical and fair;
- Redlands 2030 represents and promotes community views and interests.

One way we are working towards including Aboriginal community views in the Redlands 2030 process is a documentary film project called Quandamooka Stories. Funded by Redland City Council and managed by the Quandamooka Forum, the project will gather Indigenous stories and views about the future, the present and the past. The films that will be produced will influence directions of the final Redlands Community Plan and will improve the profile of Quandamooka Culture in the Redlands (and beyond, we hope). Traditionally, oral storytelling, visual arts, song and dance were the sole means for our community to express our culture and pass on knowledge from generation to generation. While the technology filmmaker Marcia Machado is using in this project is 21st century, the meaning, ideas and cultural values it will capture are timeless.

In conclusion, the words of the late Oodgeroo Nunukul, Aunty Kath Walker of the Nunukul clan (a famous Aboriginal Australian) echo the reality of our need to continue moving forward with the Council and our own community in a spirit of shared responsibility. There is much work to be done:

*To our Fathers' Fathers, the pain the sorrow*

*To our Children's Children, the Glad tomorrow*

Oodgeroo Nunukul

As the current Chair of the Quandamooka Forum I would be pleased to provide further information about our work, our culture and our 'Quandamooka Aboriginal Community Plan.' Please direct enquiries to the Quandamooka Forum Secretariat via [nsiiho@bigpond.com](mailto:nsiiho@bigpond.com), Joan Hendriks.

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Council efforts to deepen its engagement with the local Indigenous community through application of distinctly cultural perspectives and practices is beginning to bear fruit. The Quandamooka Stories film project, mentioned above, is one element in the ‘Stories of the Redlands’ cultural program. Designed to enrich community engagement in the Redlands 2030 community plan, the program affirms the role of artists as catalysts of community cultural expression. Along with other Indigenous community development initiatives supported by the Council, the film project aims to raise the profile of Quandamooka culture, heritage and rights, and provide a vehicle for Traditional Owners to assert their own values, views and visions.

## Culture and community planning – longer deeper wider views

Quandamooka Stories on Film is one of several creative projects commissioned to ensure that diverse community values and aspirations are expressed and fed into the wider community planning process. The ‘Stories of the Redlands’ arts program focuses especially on engaging children, teenagers, and isolated communities for whom traditional engagement techniques are often unattractive or ineffective. The program reflects the Council’s commitment to applying a cultural perspective to its most important civic engagement and participatory planning exercise.



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This conscious cultural perspective acknowledges community values as the cornerstone of sound community planning. It affirms creative approaches to engaging citizens in an exploration of their values and aspirations. It harnesses the intangible 'heart and soul' dimension of community life as central, rather than marginal, to the setting of goals, priorities and progress measures. Creative community engagement, in this case harnessing the skills of professional and non-professional artists, is itself a powerful community building activity. Compared with traditional, technocratic or 'top-down' approaches, this fluid, creative approach is expected to increase the diversity, range and depth of community participation in Redlands 2030.

## Arts, culture and community engagement

'Stories of the Redlands' comprises several community arts projects that will gather residents' views and imagined futures of their City for inclusion in the Redlands 2030 community plan. They are:

- *Soapbox: Loud and Clear @ the Plaza* – a youth music, media and speakout event at the local skate park;
- *Big Thinkers* – primary school-based arts workshops lead to an exhibition on the future as seen by the children who will inherit it;
- *Quandamooka Stories on Film* – a series of short documentaries exploring Indigenous perspectives of the past, present and future;
- *Song Trails: a little bit country and a little bit rock-n-roll* – a professional master class for local songwriters to explore their future through music (a partnership with the Queensland Music Festival);
- *Travelling Community Journal* – an artist-designed interactive community journal for visitors to Council's mobile and branch libraries;
- *What has the future of koalas got to do with our future?* – artists, educators and scientists collaborate in production of a new community-based professional theatre work;
- *Stories of the Redlands exhibition* – the local museum launches a new permanent exhibition documenting the history of Redlands;
- *'Re-futuring' the chicken farm* – a creative design workshop to transform a former poultry farm into a vibrant, sustainable community and education space;
- *Bay Views: stories of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands* – artist in residence project to create digital stories of island life and heritage in collaboration with both young and older island residents.

An overview of just one of these projects may illustrate the value of tapping the cultural seam of community life in civic planning.

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## Bay Views: stories of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands

The Bay Views project was conceived by cultural researcher and artist, Dr Chris Dew. She was commissioned by the Council as an artist-in-residence to work with four island communities off the mainland coast in a creative exploration of their unique history and culture. In collaboration with local artists and community groups, Chris is creating short digital films by, about, and for, the island communities. Her project is the cultural dimension of a wider Council commitment to assist islanders who struggle to achieve the same quality of participation in social, cultural and economic life that mainland residents enjoy. The unique challenges faced by the growing population of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands is due largely to poor planning by the State Government during the 1970s, inadequate transport services, and a higher-than-average proportion of residents from the lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The first Bay Views film is a short animation created in collaboration with animator Dave Jones, local primary school children, and older island residents. In both arts development and community development terms, it has far exceeded the Council's and the community's best hopes for the program. Titled *It Never Did Sink*, the quirky and engaging film was selected for exhibition in the State's major contemporary art gallery (GOMA) in late 2008 and was recently screened as the only Australian entry at the 55th International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, Germany. It also featured in the Council's own art gallery as the centrepiece of an interactive children's exhibition in April this year.

The film explores the transport challenges of island life in a way that celebrates local heritage and highlights the strengths, skills, creativity and humour of a unique community. It has provided a major boost to the sense of pride, identity and belonging so vital to strong social bonds. It has also fostered a spirit of innovation and enterprise on the islands where learning and applying new skills are recognised as important to local progress in cultural, social and economic terms.

We are now six weeks out from the Bay Views project's milestone event, 'Floating Pictures', the world premiere of six digital stories of island life created through the arts residency. These short films will be screened on the ferry that provides islanders with their only transport link to the mainland. The floating film launch will be held in conjunction with a local art fair on the beach of the smallest island to promote the work of the many creative artists who live on the islands. Included in the resident artist's plans for the event are interactive creative arts activities that will collect, and tangibly express, residents' views of their imagined future. These will be launched by the Mayor on a 'raft of ideas' that will be constructed by island artist Darren Goleby during the event.

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As Chris Dew and the local community finalise arrangements for 'Floating Pictures' the strengths of this arts-based approach to community engagement are increasingly evident. A growing network of energetic community partnerships nurtured through the Bay Views project now drives much of the creative and practical management of the film launch and art fair. Very much a community owned celebration it is now imagined as the beginning of what will become an annual 'winter festival' for the islands. So far, Bay Views has strengthened inter-generational and cross-island relationships; promoted contemporary expression of local heritage; developed the creative skills of children and teenagers; encouraged new perspectives of local issues; and fostered creative links between education, social services and local business sectors. Importantly, the project has also helped to forge a shared identity for islanders that links the heritage of established residents with the contemporary experience of the many newcomers to the islands.

Thanks to Bay Views, on the Southern Moreton Bay Islands culture is at the heart of the Council's community and place development effort, and is recognised as an important part of community planning. On North Stradbroke Island (Minjerriba), thanks to a strong partnership with Aboriginal Traditional Owners, culture is entrenched as a fundamental plank of community development and land management. For mainland Redland communities a better future is also being imagined through integration of cultural processes in planning and development programs.

Community engagement in Redlands 2030 has provided an ideal mechanism for early implementation of the Council's Cultural Plan. As well as enriching civic engagement, the 'Stories of the Redlands' arts program is designed to sharpen the focus of the Council's existing cultural services and community programs in line with the long term directions of *Our City Our Culture*. The medium term vision is for stronger connections between local communities, local issues and the programs of key civic facilities and services especially the City's new Performing Arts Centre, art galleries, Indigiscapes nature education centre, library services, community support and school-age care programs. Our progress will be measured over the long term, and will be assessed using principles of Agenda 21 for culture among other innovative policies concerned with the role of culture in local public planning.

## Postscript

Redland City Council is eager to promote Agenda 21 for culture in the antipodes and wider Asia-Pacific region where its influence is limited. We are keen to hear from local governments, researchers and cultural organisations interested in an international forum on the topic in the southern hemisphere. The beautiful islands and facilities in the Redlands would provide an ideal venue. Please contact me via: [judy.spokes@redland.qld.gov.au](mailto:judy.spokes@redland.qld.gov.au)

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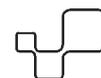
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