

Media Release – For immediate release

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Etheridge Shire Council wins 2026 Butch Lenton Award for community-led tourism model

Summary: *A remote north Queensland council of approximately 700 people has won the Butch Lenton Memorial Bush Council Innovation Award for turning its community's ideas into \$8.2 million in federal funding.*

Etheridge Shire Council will receive a \$10,000 bursary from Peak Services as the winner of the Butch Lenton Memorial Bush Council Innovation Award, announced at the Local Government Association of Queensland annual conference in Cairns last night.

The winning project, 'Unearthing Etheridge', is a place-based regional development partnership between the Council, residents and Griffith University.

Etheridge Shire Mayor Barry Hughes said the award recognised the whole community.

"This award belongs to our communities. 'Unearthing Etheridge' has been successful because it started with listening to local people, the people who know this country, its stories, its history and the places that matter most. Rather than developing solutions for our communities, we have worked alongside them to identify opportunities and shape projects together," Mayor Hughes said.

"The community engagement undertaken through the Master Plan, particularly at places like Copperfield Gorge/Einasleigh, demonstrated the value of local knowledge. That's resulted in projects that better reflect what makes Etheridge unique while creating opportunities for our future".

Council will use the money to start community co-design of Charleston Dam as a place for recreation, wellbeing and connection.

"The \$10,000 bursary will allow Council, our communities and Griffith University to begin the next chapter of the Unearthing Etheridge journey by undertaking a community-led co-design process for Charleston Dam," Mayor Hughes said.

"The outcome will be a Charleston Dam Community Recreation and Activation Framework that guides future investment and helps create new opportunities for community wellbeing, economic development and visitor growth. This funding gives us the opportunity to turn local

ideas into future projects that are genuinely owned and shaped by the people who use the dam”.

Peak Services CEO Brett Fraser congratulated the application and said the program showed what the award was created to celebrate.

"Butch Lenton spent more than 20 years pursuing a bold vision for the Winton region when he was Mayor, including developing tourism. Etheridge Shire Council is carrying that innovative approach forward," Mr Fraser said.

"What stood out to the judges was that *Unearthing Etheridge* isn't a one-off project. It's a different way of doing regional development, and one that other regional and remote councils across Queensland could learn from.

"Etheridge has shown that a small, remote council can turn community aspirations into real investment by building on its own strengths and partnering with key stakeholders, including the community. We're proud to support the next stage of that work at Charleston Dam”.

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About the Butch Lenton Memorial Bush Council Innovation Award Peak Services presents this award each year to recognise innovation by Queensland's bush councils. It honours the late Graham "Butch" Lenton, former Mayor of Winton Shire, and his contribution to his community and to local government in Queensland. The winning council receives a \$10,000 bursary to put towards its next project.

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