# REGIONAL ANIMAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2023-2033

FNQROC

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

This plan acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Far North Queensland region and pays respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and their enduring connections to Country and culture.

# FOREWORD

**Mayor Michael Kerr**

**FNQROC Chair**

The bond between people and their pets is an essential part of the lives of much of our community and delivers untold benefits in quality of life, companionship, and happiness for people from all walks of life. Equally, the domestic animals in our care rely on us for their health, safety, well-being, and quality of life.

Local Governments have a broad jurisdiction over domestic animals centred on dogs, cats and livestock. They work side by side with partners including Queensland Health, RSPCA, AMRRIC and Queensland Police to keep our communities safe, and to ensure the health and well-being of domestic animals.

The FNQROC Regional Animal Management Strategy is a first for our region. It maps out future directions for the essential role local governments and their partners play in keeping people and animals happy, healthy and safe. It also lays the foundations for a transform of animal management from an impoundment model; to a new focus on working closely with community to change behaviours and work with partners and people on the issues which underpin responsible pet ownership.

Importantly the Strategy acknowledges the crucial and unique role our Local Laws and Animal Management Officers play in the community; and identifies opportunities for regional collaboration to support the evolution of the essential service provided by Local Governments and their partners.

# VISION

Animal management is a community responsibility and community underpin the success of our programs. Healthy animals and community safety are the key measures of success, and they are delivered through inclusive, relevant and fit for purpose programs which reflect our tropical location and lifestyle.

# PURPOSE

The aim of the FNQROC Regional Animal Management Strategy is to establish consistency and collaboration across councils, stakeholders, and resources for better outcomes for the community and for animal welfare. This includes building relationships and partnerships, sharing resources, and assisting in day-to-day operations for improved animal management outcomes. The strategy does this through four key themes:

- **People and communities**

- **Partnerships and collaboration**

- **Service delivery**

- **Systems and process (operational improvement)**

# POLICY ALIGNMENT

The delivery of the Regional Animal Management Strategy is guided through the FNQROC Regional Animal Management Technical Committee (AMTC). In addition, the strategy aligns to the Corporate and Operational Plans of participating councils and the FNQROC Strategic and Operational plan.

# The FNQROC Region

The FNQROC consists of 12 local government areas spanning from Hinchinbrook in the south, west to Croydon and north to Cooktown including the Aboriginal Shire Councils of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal and Yarrabah. Most of the region's population is centred in the Cairns city area and beyond that in regional centres of each of the surrounding Shires. Outside of these centres, settlement is widely dispersed in smaller villages and agricultural or rangeland landscapes.

Animal management facilities are based in all local government areas within the region. Additional impoundment yards for livestock are dispersed across the region.

**~250,000 sq km**

**12 local governments**

**280,000**
PEOPLE

**120,750**
DWELLINGS

**34,883**
DOGS REGISTERED
(6673 NEW DOGS REGISTERED)

**33**
NUMBER OF REGULATED DOGS

**13,045**
CUSTOMER SERVICE ENQUIRIES RESPONDED TO REGARDING ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

**1381**
WANDERING DOGS (214 CATS) INTERCEPTED
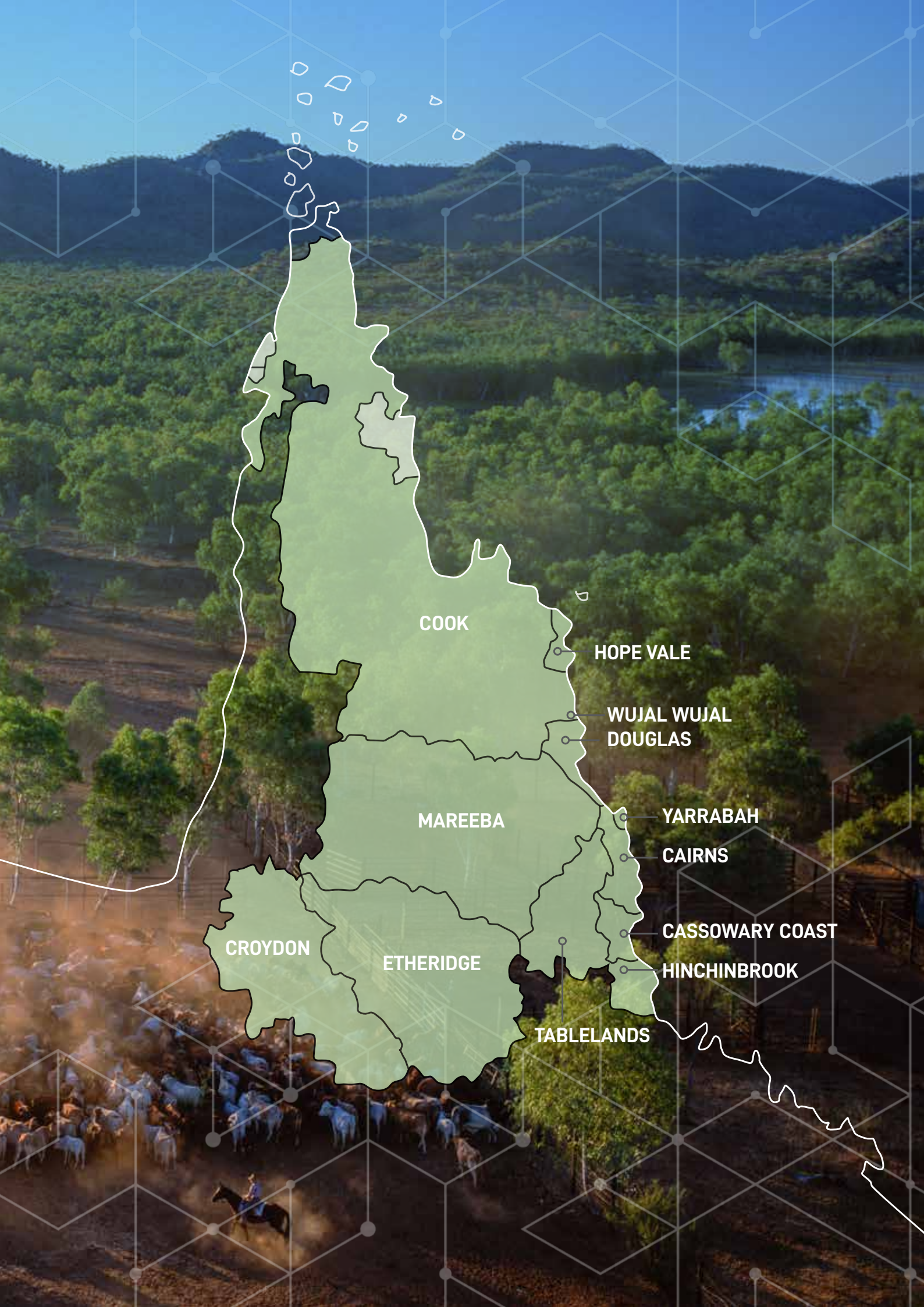
**329**
WANDERING STOCK CALLOUTS

**1397**
DOG ATTACKS (REPORTED OR) RESPONDED TO

**741**
ANIMALS REUNITED WITH OWNERS

**561**
ANIMALS REHOMED

*Animal Management reporting from 2021

COOK

HOPE VALE

WUJAL WUJAL
DOUGLAS

MAREEBA

YARRABAH

CAIRNS

CASSOWARY COAST

CROYDON

ETHERIDGE

HINCHINBROOK

TABLELANDS

# WHAT IS ANIMAL MANAGEMENT?

Local governments are responsible for managing and ensuring the responsible keeping of animals in accordance with the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 and Local Law (Animal Management). The welfare of animals generally is guided by the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001.

They provide a range of services related to animal management and respond to thousands of requests annually. Councils typically fund their animal management services through registration and licence fees. The most common requests for service include roaming animals, noise nuisance from barking dogs, inadequate containment of animals, and dog attacks or aggressive behaviour.

**The purpose of the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 is to:**

1. **Provide for the identification of cats and dogs; and**

2. **Provide for the registration of dogs; and**

3. **Provide for the effective management of regulated dogs; and**

4. **Promote the responsible ownership of cats and dogs; and**

5. **Promote the responsible breeding of dogs**

Local Laws are used in conjunction with the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 to ensure that community and animals are happy, healthy and safe. Local Governments also work in partnership with Queensland Police Service and Department of Transport and Main Roads in the *Section 100, Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995* to manage wandering stock and other risks in road corridors.

The Queensland Tropical Public Health Unit (TPHU) and Animal Management in Remote and Rural Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC) work in close collaboration with Aboriginal Shire Councils to deliver animal management and health programs in our indigenous communities. In addition to the legislative approaches applied across all Local Governments, Animal Management Workers deliver education, animal care and welfare in a culturally appropriate context.

Animal management legislation also interfaces with the Biosecurity Act 2014 in matters relating to animal health (pathogens and disease) and regulation relating to issues such as wild dogs and feral cats. Remote communities are actively engaged in biosecurity surveillance and quarantine programs across northern Australia.

# Legislative context

**Relevant legislation**

- *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001.*
- *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008*
- *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Regulation 2019*
- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Local Laws (Animal Management)*
- *Section 100, Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995*

# ANIMAL MANAGEMENT IS PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

While the primary focus of animal management is the delivery of care, health and welfare outcomes for animals and community, every element of its delivery is contingent on the actions and decisions of people. Domestic animals are reliant on us for their welfare and safety; and the community is reliant on the actions of themselves and others to ensure they and their animals are safe and healthy.

In addition to the pre-requisite skills for handling and caring for animals, there are three main approaches to engagement with people used in animal management. While each approach has its strengths, each also has its limitations and so an animal management program usually requires an integrated approach with a clear objective in mind to deliver the best outcome.

**Education and awareness** are essential tools for sharing and building knowledge; understanding expectations and standards; and increasing buy in and support for programs and initiatives. Facilitating people to make their own informed decisions reduces the need for use of legislation and compliance approaches to animal management.

**Legislation and compliance** approaches use laws and regulations to provide specific directions and clear standards. Incentive for compliance is delivered through penalties and infringements if those conditions are not met. With legal instruments like Local Laws, some elements of compliance are discretionary and can be negotiated with the customer to achieve the best outcome. Compliance with legislation is almost always used in combination with educations and requires a specific set of skills and resources to deliver.

**Behaviour change** approaches to engagement target a specific outcome for positive change. Behaviour change programs may be applied at an individual or a community level and deliver interventions using incentives such as social norms and rewards to endorse or otherwise support the desired behaviour. Behaviour change practices are useful where an 'off-the-shelf' approach might not be effective or where change at a societal level is required.

With the diversity of these approaches in mind, animal management officers must be skilled in managing not only animal behaviour but also human behaviour, often simultaneously.

# WORKFORCE SKILLS AND CAPACITY

During the development of the strategy The Animal Management Technical Committee workshopped the essential attributes of an Animal Management Officer/Local Law Officer. There were core skills required as part of the day to day needs of working with the public in addition to some quite specific personal attributes.

Understanding, promoting, and resourcing the unique aptitude and attitude required in local laws and animal management's officers is important to retain capacity to deliver services required.

**SELF CARE**
Able to manage stress and debrief

**OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**
Think fast, high pressure, quick to adapt, team player

**CORE SKILLS**
Social and cultural liaison
Legal process aptitude
Animal handling

**COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL NEEDS**
High expectations
(Council and community)

**WORKPLACE NEEDS**
Odd hours, shifts, weekends and on-call.

This workshop piece is preliminary, and the recommendation is to undertake a workforce capability review to explore the current and future requirements of the animal management workforce.

# STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

## Agencies and organisations

**Our key operational and strategic stakeholders are engaged and are in the room and include:**

- **Local government**
- **Queensland Health – Tropical Health Unit**
- **AMRRIC (Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities)**
- **RSPCA (Royal Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)**
- **QDAF (Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries)**
- **DAF (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry- Animal Health and Biosecurity**
- **Queensland Police Service - Stock Squad**

## Community as stakeholders

The community is our overarching stakeholder in Animal Management. Alongside the requirements described in legislation, community's needs and expectations define the animal management services and programs provided by local government.

**The Animal Management Technical Committee identified the three key community needs and expectations as:**

- Need to feel safe and know their animals are safe, and
- Expect consistency and fairness in application of local law, and
- Expect reasonable, practical, and achievable regulations and requirements from local laws.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT TO DATE

**Accomplishments in the Animal Management space identified by the FNQROC Technical Committee include:**

- **The establishment of the Animal Management Technical Committee** has facilitated networking, collaboration and resource sharing across regional partners involved in the animal management space. It has also increased the visibility and currency of animal management operations across the region and our councils.

- **Accomplishments such as shared investment in the 'Take the Lead' television campaign** led by Cairns Regional Council demonstrate the power of collaboration across councils.

- We've seen a **dramatic increase and improvement in animal health within remote communities** particularly through the work of AMRRIC and Aboriginal Shire Councils working in collaboration with 'the Tropical Public Health Unit – Queensland Health. Having these partners at the table adds enormous value for all parties.

- **The transition from 'animal pounds' to 'animal management facilities'** is well underway in region.  New facilities and sharing opportunities which have emerged, and regional options and opportunities provide the chance for much more collaboration into the future.
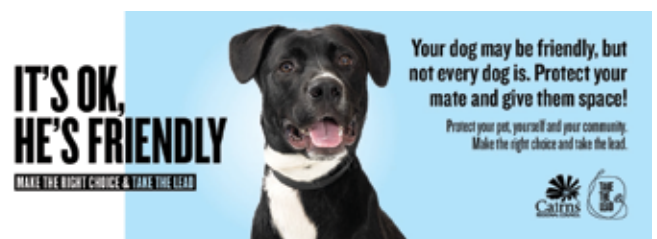
# CURRENT CHALLENGES

Animal management is a challenging area of service delivery for local government, and it often makes up a large portion of customer interactions which come through a customer request system. Most requests require multiple interactions with the customer to resolve.

**Current challenges identified by the FNQROC Animal Management Technical Committee include:**

- Desirable service levels are not always deliverable with the available resources.

- Complex and confrontational workplace with a high exposure to risk.

- Operating in rural and remote locations.

- Operating in a tropical environment dealing with extremes of weather and climate and the flow on effects of that on our operations.

- Managing expectations within councils and the community.

- Lack of a clear understanding of the role and process of animal management internally and externally.

- Responding to the unique and specific challenges within our own councils.

- Finding the time to be strategic amongst operational pressures and expectations.

- Providing appropriate support to staff for their mental health and appropriate support services/ un-relenting workloads.

- Attracting and retaining skilled staff.

- Wandering domestic horses are identified as a significant concern in Hope Vale, Yarrabah and Goldsborough Valley.

# KEY THEMES

The strategy is captured in four core themes which are underpinned by supporting actions. A suggested timeframe for delivery is provided (short term 1-2 years, mid-term 2-5 years or long term 5-10 years)

# 1. People and communities

The transformation of animal management service delivery requires collaboration across all sectors and genuine consultation with the community. There is a need to move beyond a simple impoundment release model to address root causes and promote community and behaviour change. This requires a shift away from an enforcement-only approach and exploring opportunities to integrate animal management programs with aligned social and health initiatives.

| Theme | Action | | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Education and community awareness** | 1.1 | Produce video (Ride with me/day in life of ....) and other media to assist transformation of image from pounds and animal catchers to animal management facilities and liaison officers. | Short term |
| | 1.2 | Produce a discussion paper outlining requirements/opportunities/barriers for uptake and deployment of technology to streamline management and communication. | Mid term |
| | 1.3 | Undertake regional survey/canvasing to understand community expectations of animal management. | Short term |
| | 1.4 | Develop communication and messaging providing a positive image and demonstrating the value of animal management workers/local laws officers to council and the community. | Mid term |
| **Behaviour change** | 1.5 | Commission study to map out social networks and community connections relevant to animal management to inform behaviour change and management programs. | Mid term |
| | 1.6 | Pilot local/regional project as case studies and build literacy in regional workforce to establish behaviour change skills in regional skillset. | Mid term |
| **Health and social services** | 1.7 | Map out opportunities for natural compliance through participation in aligned health and social programs. | Short term |
| | 1.8 | Undertake benefit:cost analysis of West Cairns Project. | Short term |
| | 1.9 | Undertake service access assessment to identify barriers and opportunities to improve ease of access/relevance to all those requiring it. | Mid term |
| | 1.10 | Establish projects which focus on animal management as an environmental health and social outcome getting people on board to participate and systematically working through the issues (particularly in our remote and indigenous communities). | Long term |

# 2. Partnerships and collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration have been the keystones of the Animal Management Technical Committee since its inception in 2019. Sharing policies, processes, and approaches across FNQROC councils is well-established, however opportunities for sharing operational resources is less established. Given the AMTC estimates it takes up to 4 years of training and skills to get a Local Laws Officer fully equipped for their role; supporting professional development across councils presents a significant opportunity for collaboration.

| Theme | Action | | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Regional skills, training and capacity** | 2.1 | Establish regionally consistent PDs and baseline skills matrix. | Short term |
| | 2.2 | Undertake a workforce capability assessment for LLO and AMW. | Short term |
| **Transformation of service delivery** | 2.3 | Work with customer services to identify opportunities for transaction with community to be efficient and effective. | Mid term |
| | 2.4 | Undertake regional comparative study of communication systems currently in use in AM to identify opportunities for resource sharing and co-investment. | Short term |
| **Grow community of practice** | 2.5 | Continue to build on joint operations and programmes through regional taskforce MOU to share learnings for operational efficiency and to deliver timely outcomes when they're required. | Ongoing |

# 3. Service delivery

| Theme | Action | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| **Mentoring and peer support** | 3.1  Work through the AMTC to establish mentoring opportunities for areas or specialisation across councils and agencies. | Mid term |
| | 3.2  Establish cross agency peer to peer training opportunities matrix. | Short term |
| | 3.3  Work with WHS to map out required mental health/support investment requirements for LLOs. | Short term |
| **Regional skill and resource sharing** | 3.3  Host an Animal Management (AMW/LLO) operations symposium. | Mid term |
| | 3.5  Investigate establishment of a regional prosecutor position shared across councils. | Mid term |
| | 3.6  Establish baseline standards for LLO and AMW position descriptions. | Short term |
| | 3.7  Initiate external and internal training and mentorships for new staff. | Short term |
| **Service delivery** | 3.8  Identify opportunities (discussion paper) for improvement of self-service options for customers self-resolution (prior to coming to council/ lodging complaints relating to neighbours). | Mid term |
| | 3.9  Map out requirements/gaps/opportunities through a service delivery model. | Mid term |
| | 3.10  Workshop animal management disaster preparedness, policy and procedure with LDMG to scope readiness and key actions/options. | Short term |
| **Establish links and collaboration with relevant FNQROC technical committee's.** | 3.11  Progress procurement program opportunities for body worn cameras and explore regional procurement of other operational resources, specialist equipment, technologies. | Mid term |
| | 3.12  Scope opportunities to commission regional (Wet Tropics) cat report or study to map out the issues and propose solutions between AMTC and NAMAC. | Short term |

# 4. Systems and process

At the regional scale there are opportunities for aligning policies across local governments and partner agencies to deliver can greater impact; streamline processes; and foster cooperation.

| Theme | Action | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|
| **Recording, reporting and data management** | 4.1 Making better use of census survey and audits to inform how we might improve or transform our approach to management – baselines and trends. | Mid term |
| | 4.2 Managing both the advantages and the sensitivity of data and information we collect to better inform operations - more comprehensively, more consistently and at required scale. | Mid term |
| **Compliance and local laws** | 4.3 Investigate options for establishing consistency across regional AM local laws. | Mid term |
| | 4.4 Develop protocols and process and sharing Local Law provisions across the region. | Short term |
| **Legislative reform** | 4.5 Continue engagement in animal management advocacy matters by supporting partner agencies and organisations. | Ongoing |

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