

**TITLE:** [PR-CM] Animal Management Policy and Practices - Review of Council's Pound Operations

**SUBMITTED BY:** Development Assessment and Compliance

Valid



## Caring for the Environment

### LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK:

4	Caring for the Environment
4.1	Protect the environment and natural beauty of the Tweed
4.1.3	Manage and regulate the natural and built environments

### SUMMARY OF REPORT:

At its meeting of 20 March 2014, Council resolved to support a number of actions relating to Council's animal management practices, including the following regarding Council's Pound operations:

*"b. Operation of Council's Impounding Facility*

- *Receives and notes the information presented in this report in terms of the current operation of the Impounding facility;*
- *A further report in relation to the operational needs of the Impounding Facility be submitted to Council; and*
- *Discussions are held with neighbouring Council's in relation to 'resource sharing' of their animal management functions."*

Since that resolution Council officers have conducted a more detailed review of Council's Pound operations, in the context of the Organisational Review Stage 2 (for which Council resolved at its meeting of 21 August 2014 a revised structure for the Planning and Regulation Division), the emerging State Government policy review of the Companion Animals Act, and the best practice of the impounding activities of other NSW Councils.

Following a detailed consultation process with key stakeholders, including existing Pound and Regulatory Services staff, the United Services Union, the Friends of the Pound, and Council's contracted veterinary providers, this report now seeks Council's support for a revised Pound operations proposal, which involves the reduction of public opening hours to 10am to Midday, Monday to Saturday, and closed on Sundays and Public Holidays, as compared with the current opening hours of 10am to 4pm, seven days a week, excluding Public Holidays. It is also recommended that the Council officers conduct a review and submit a report back to Council within 12 months of the commencement of the revised operations.

As part of this proposal, operational contingencies and resourcing have been reorganised to provide for a more efficient and cost effective operation, whilst still ensuring that Council's key regulatory role and welfare of the impounded animals are maintained.

This proposal is also consistent with the State Government's "Fit for the Future" objectives of delivering more efficient and sustainable assets and services.

**RECOMMENDATION:****That Council:**

- 1. Endorses the public opening hours of Council's Dog and Cat Impounding facility at Stotts Creek be 10am to Midday, Monday to Saturday, and closed on Sundays and Public Holidays, taking effect from Monday 5 January, 2015.**
- 2. Prior to the commencement of the new opening hours, suitable notification occur through the Tweed Link, and an update of relevant existing signage be undertaken; and**
- 3. A review be conducted, and a report be submitted back to Council within the first 12 months of the revised operations.**

## REPORT

### Background

At its meeting of 20 March 2014, Council resolved to support a number of actions relating to Council's animal management practices, including the following regarding Council's Pound operations:

***"b. Operation of Council's Impounding Facility***

- ***Receives and notes the information presented in this report in terms of the current operation of the Impounding facility;***
- ***A further report in relation to the operational needs of the Impounding Facility be submitted to Council; and***
- ***Discussions are held with neighbouring Council's in relation to 'resource sharing' of their animal management functions."***

A copy of the officers' report that supported this resolution is provided in Attachment 1.

### **Results of Further Investigations**

Since the above resolution, Council officers have conducted a more detailed review of Council's Pound operations, in the context of the following areas:

#### The Current Uncertainty of the State Government's Companion Animals Act Reforms

As highlighted in the report to Council's meeting of 20 March 2014, the NSW State Government has been conducting a major review of the Companion Animals Act over the last several years, resulting in the production of the NSW Companion Animals Taskforce Report (October 2012), and a formal response by the State Government to this Report in February 2014.

A prevailing theme from both the public submissions and the Taskforce recommendations, was that there were broader expectations that local councils will provide more comprehensive animal care standards through their impounding operations, with alternatives of larger, regionally based Pounds, being complemented by higher order, private and non-for-profit animal welfare facilities. This is evident in the content of the emerging review of the Department of Primary Industries document "[NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No 5 – Dogs and Cats in Animal Boarding Establishments](#)".

NSW Councils will need to be mindful of the progress of the State Government's reforms, as they are likely to require a major reorganisation of Council resources to support the proposed raising of animal care and impounding practices and standards.

#### Organisational Structure Review

The Tweed Council organisation has recently completed Stages 1 and 2 of a Structure Review process. A report recommending changes to the structure of the Planning and Regulation Division was endorsed by Council at its meeting of 21 August 2014.

The following is an extract from the report to this meeting:

*"In terms of other Divisional issues, priority has been given to reviewing and producing a revised structure proposal to deliver more effective and coordinated compliance services. The proposal will alter the number of Direct Reports to the Director from 6 to 5 (which includes the Executive Assistant) and involves the consolidation of existing compliance staff from the Regulatory Services (including the existing Pound staff), Development Assessment and Building Units, the revision of the current vacant, Coordinator Regulatory Services role, and the relocation of this new section to report to the Manager Development Assessment. Key priorities of this new section will be to*

*create new comprehensive policy and procedure documents, improved systems for responding more efficiently and applying a risk based criteria to the wide range of compliance complaints that Council receives, and the up-skilling of compliance officers in investigation and enforcement techniques.*

*The revision of the vacant Coordinator Regulatory Services position results in a cost saving, through the use of funds created by discontinuing the vacant Senior Pound officer position. Interim arrangements have been put into place to ensure adequate staffing of the current Pound operations. As previously identified to Council, the extent of Council's staffing at the Pound on a daily basis (including weekends) and hours of operation is being reviewed, in consultation with relevant stakeholders such as Friends of the Pound."*

On the basis of the above, Council resolved the following:

***"That:***

- 1. In accordance with Sections 332 and 333 of the Local Government Act 1993 endorses the Divisional Organisational Structure as outlined in the body of this report for the Planning and Regulation Division, effective from 2014, being:***

***Planning and Regulation***

***Development and Compliance***

***Team Leader Compliance***

***Building and Environmental Health***

***Strategic Planning and Urban Design***

***Development Engineering***

- 2. Council receives and notes organisational changes to be implemented beneath Director level within the structure."***

Council Management have since undertaken steps to implement Council's resolution, including the recruitment of the new Team Leader Compliance position, which will oversee a higher order, consolidated Compliance section, including staff of the current Regulatory Services and Pound facility. Further details on the review of the Pound operations are provided in the section below.

#### Best Practice Impounding Facilities in Other NSW Councils

A thorough review of other Council impounding facilities has produced some interesting results, including the following:

- There were examples of councils that have outsourced their entire impounding operations to external providers;
- Other examples were evident of groupings of councils, both in the inner and outer parts of Sydney, as well as regionally, of collectively utilising a larger Council Pound, or a private facility through a commercial arrangement to be the primary carer of the impounded animals from their Council area;
- In terms of Far North Coast Councils, it was evident that the Tweed Council Pound at Stotts Creek provides a much more comprehensive, and publicly accessible service (please refer to Attachment 2 of this report for a comparison);
- There were very few facilities that were open to the public on Sundays and Public Holidays, with most facilities just providing for a limited Saturday morning opening time, or no weekend openings at all; and

- It was also evident that the Gold Coast Council outsources its main animal impounding and care services to the private, non-for-profit organisation, the Animal Welfare League.

### Further Review of Council's Pound Operations

In the report to Council's Meeting of 20 March 2014, the following summary of Council's current Pound operations was provided:

*"Council's impounding facility operates in accordance with much of what was proposed in Recommendation 19 of the Taskforce report. The impounding facility differs from nearby Councils, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, and Richmond Valley Council in that Tweed Council:*

- *Fully staff the Pound (each of the other nearby Councils use Rangers to attend on an 'as required' basis e.g. in response to a dog collection by a customer);*
- *Allow public access 10am – 4pm x 7 days (all other nearby Councils are public access 'by appointment' only); and*
- *Have a working partnership with an animal welfare organisation (none of the other regional Councils do this).*

*In addition to this, Council's Pound staff assess (with veterinary input) the suitability of cats and dogs for re-homing, and work with our partner animal welfare organisation (Friends of the Pound) to implement a **foster care program**. Council **advertises** (for sale) all cats and dogs which are available for re-homing (including online advertising), and arrange for the humane euthanasia of cats and dogs when no other alternative can be found. Staff at the Stott's Island Pound provide a high level of care to the animals at the facility, and also provide a high level of customer service.*

### **Resourcing Issues**

*The resources required to support the impounding facility are continually being stretched in an attempt to balance the growing demands of a changing and challenging regulatory environment with the day to day provision of animal welfare, and varying community expectations for a wider range of services.*

*Currently the three Pound staff work a 'two on' roster seven days a week, with volunteer support provided by Friends of the Pound. Holidays, sick leave, long-service leave, and leave for other purposes (e.g. training) is accommodated within the current roster by employing agency resources (>100 agency days in 2013), and administrative support from staff at the Murwillumbah Civic Centre.*

*Preliminary discussions have been held with Pound staff, Friends of the Pound, senior management, and Union representatives, to consider what operational changes might enable an improved and more flexible response to business needs. It was generally agreed that the hours 'open to the public' are too long, and that a reduction in hours would not negatively impact the community if adequate notice/ education was given. Friends of the Pound were also keen to ensure that any reduction in Council staff would not impact upon the level of care for the Pound animals, and have offered to provide additional volunteers to support the Pound operation.*

### **Security**

*The Pound is remotely located to the Civic Centre, and despite the close proximity to Council's landfill facility, staff feel at risk. This is partly due to the location but also because staff often deal with angry/aggressive customers. A number of serious incidents, where staff have been physically and verbally threatened, have occurred during the past 12 months, resulting in calls for assistance from police or Civic Centre staff.*

*Discussions have commenced, between Regulatory Services and Waste Services, to explore the possibility of closing the existing access to the Pound, and instead establishing access via the landfill entrance and weighbridge.*

### **Maintenance**

*The impounding facility is a mix of old and new buildings, which are in constant need of repair and improvement.*

*It is expected that there will be considerable expense associated with ongoing maintenance of the facility. Maintenance needs, over the next 12 - 24 months, include items such as partial re-roofing to exercise areas; concrete drain replacement (to the landfill leach pond); upgrade or major repair to the onsite sewage management system; and replacement of smaller items (screens, doors, security lighting, fencing, gates). The cost is likely to be in the range \$30,000 - \$40,000. It is worth noting that Friends of the Pound have regularly made financial contributions towards the maintenance costs relating to the Pound, and make regular requests for ongoing maintenance or upgrades to the facility.*

### **Community Partnership**

*The operation of the Impounding Facility is a non-core function of Council. The NSW Companion Animals Taskforce Report recommended that Councils:*

*“focus on regional approaches to impounding through **partnerships with nearby councils** and animal welfare organisations”.*

*Council has previously (2003) explored the option of engaging an animal welfare organisation, such as Friends of the Pound, to take over the non-regulatory functions of the impounding facility i.e. to provide a fee for service to Council for the day to care of impounded animals. This would have allowed Council to focus on core regulatory duties rather than animal management, but no contract was awarded even though three animal welfare organisations submitted tenders.*

*Given that NSW State Government is encouraging local partnerships, it might be timely to reconsider whether the impounding facility could be better managed by a third party (such as Friend of the Pound or RSPCA). In considering future options it may be beneficial to commence a dialogue with neighbouring Councils.”*

Further to these previous investigations, Council Management have conducted a detailed consultation process with key stakeholders, including existing Pound and Regulatory Services staff, the United Services Union, the Friends of the Pound, and Council's contracted veterinary providers.

Some of the key issues that were identified through this consultation include:

- Budget Issues - The net deficit of the main outgoings (staff salaries, operational expenses etc) and income (microchipping, registration fees etc) for 2013/14 was approximately **\$332,028**.

## **Re-defining the Role of the Pound**

### **Key Issues Requiring Further Input From Internal and External Stakeholders**

<b>ISSUE HEADING</b>	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>POSSIBLE STRATEGIES</b>
<b>Re-defining the Role of the Pound</b>	What it is, and what it is not.	There needs to be an acknowledgement in any communications that the current primary role of the Pound is to administer Council's statutory obligations under the Companion Animals Act and Regulation, and that it is not an

ISSUE HEADING	ISSUE	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES
		animal welfare shelter, nor a shop.
<b>Clarifying the role and PDs of the Pound Attendants - this issue needs to be addressed with by current staff, the Union, and the HR Unit</b>	The extent of supervision required for volunteers or casual staff.	A clearer identification by Council Management of the expectations for supervision, as supported by current induction processes, and a more regular presence of either the Impounding Officer or Senior Ranger at the Pound facility.
	The level of required technical and animal handling skills, which has WH&S implications.	Assistance and advice from Council's WH&S Unit to determine any concerns with any current work activities.
	The extent of observation of the animals and input to the Vet/Impounding Officer discussions of health and re-homing options.	A clearer identification by Council Management of the expectations for supervision, as supported by current induction processes, and a more regular presence of either the Impounding Officer or Senior Ranger at the Pound facility.
	The extent of safety and security of being in a remote location.	The proposal to require 2 Pound Attendant or casual staff members on the public opening hours should be suffice to minimise safety and security concerns.
	The current burden of administrative duties and inefficient IT procedures.	This is a major issue which needs to be discussed in terms of the new Compliance Section, and to determine how the Pound Attendants can be supported. Council Management also needs to seek some form of priority to updating the IT receipting procedures for customers at the Pound, as it is currently a lengthy process.
<b>Friends of the Pound</b>	Maintaining clear and consistent operational arrangements.	<p>The relationship between Council and FOP has been very positive in recent months, assisted by regular meetings and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding.</p> <p>A key issue in any upcoming consultation with FOP is to ensure that reasonable standards of care of the impounded animals are maintained.</p>
<b>Contracted Veterinary Services</b>	Council's 2 vet service providers at Queen and King Street Murwillumbah were initially engaged a number of years ago. There is a need to seek an	An EOI process be conducted to seek updated vet services.

ISSUE HEADING	ISSUE	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES
	updated EOI for future services.	
<b>Communications</b>	The Tweed community is a great supporter of the Pound facility.	To work with Council's Communications Team to seek to ensure an effective explanation of any proposed changes to the Pound operations.

## A Proposal for Revised Operations

Based on a comprehensive review of other Council pounds throughout NSW, it is proposed to revise the current Tweed Pound public access hours (10am-4pm, 7 days a week, excluding public holidays, closed on Public Holidays) to the following:

### **Monday to Saturday, 10am to Midday, closed Sundays and Public Holidays.**

As previously identified, it was determined through the recent restructure of the Planning and Regulation Division that the existing vacant Senior Pound Attendant position be abandoned, and the cost savings from this action be used to complement a new Team Leader Compliance position (also involving the abandonment of the vacant former Coordinator Regulatory Services position to fund the new position), and also for discretionary expenditure by the Director Planning and Regulation to address other Divisional staff resourcing demands on a needs basis.

The restructure therefore has left two existing permanent Pound Attendant positions. One of these positions is currently unfilled.

In order to service the proposed revised public opening hours and operations, it was considered most efficient to recruit for a temporary Parental Leave Pound Attendant placement, and to seek to use the funding of the existing unfilled Pound Attendant position to create two new part-time Pound Attendant positions to ensure a coverage of the required seven day services, as well as to cover for any leave required by the three positions.

This new staffing arrangement will not require any additional funding, and there will be an overall salary reduction created through the reduced public opening hours on weekends. It is proposed that only reduced Pound Attendant shifts occur on weekends and public holidays. Only one Pound Attendant per shift will be required on the mornings of Sundays and Public Holidays, to provide for appropriate levels of feeding and care for the Pound animals, and supported by Friends of the Pound volunteers.

Another key objective behind these revised hours is to allow more of a focus on the operational tasks in the morning (servicing animals and the public), and then dedicated time to administrative tasks in the afternoons, noting that workplace safety considerations require two Pound Attendant staff to work together in the public opening times. Outside of these times, it is acceptable for only one Pound Attendant staff member to be working at a time.

The revised staffing arrangements will also be complemented by a more site based supervisory role provided by Council's Senior Ranger, and clearer procedures for both Council staff and Friends of the Pound volunteers.

Another important consideration identified in the stakeholder consultation was to ensure that any revised operations did not result in any reduction of the care and welfare of the animals, with the key concerns raised for Sundays and Public Holidays, where there is a proposed reduction in the Council staff presence at the facility.

Through discussions with Friends of the Pound, it will still be possible for additional care for the animals to be provided by the volunteers in conjunction with the limited Council staff presence on Sundays and Public Holidays.



**OPTIONS:**

That Council:

1. Supports the officers' recommendations; or
2. Does not support the officers' recommendations.

Option 1 is recommended.

**CONCLUSION:**

A comprehensive review of Council's animal management practices has been undertaken, involving extensive consultation with both internal and external stakeholders, with a major focus on the operations of Council's Dog and Cat Impounding facility at Stotts Creek. This review has identified that the Impounding facility provides a greater level of publicly accessible services than other Far North Coast Councils, and comparable standards with many other facilities throughout the state. Through the recent Organisational Review process Council Management has taken actions to improve the efficiency of the Pound operations, and is now seeking Council support for a revised public opening hours to further enhance these efficiencies.

**COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:****a. Policy:**

Corporate Policy Not Applicable.

**b. Budget/Long Term Financial Plan:**

Cost savings will be achieved through the reduced staffing required for weekend and public holidays.

**c. Legal:**

Not Applicable.

**d. Communication/Engagement:**

Not Applicable.

**UNDER SEPARATE COVER/FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Attachment 1:	A copy of the officers' report submitted to Council's Meeting of 20 March 2014 (ECM 3491120)
Attachment 2:	Table of comparative Pound services among Far North Coast Councils (ECM 3491139)

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