

## The 2016 Cherbourg Dog Management Program: a story of collaborative success

**Stephen Hill**, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, QLD, **Dr Bonny Cumming**, Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities, NT, **Amanda Hutchings**, Darling Downs Public Health Unit, and **Dr Greg Simmons**, University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science, QLD

Cherbourg is an Aboriginal community in South East Queensland, 3 hours north west of Brisbane. It is on land that is the home of the Wakka Wakka people and is surrounded by cattle properties and a large area of state forest and national park. The rural community has around 1500 residents who, as a result of the relocation of Indigenous people under past government policies, have connections to many tribal groups throughout Queensland.

We'll be speaking about the 2016 Cherbourg Dog Management Program and how collaboration resulted in its success; but firstly, we'd like to play a video that shows the community perceptions of the program.

Link to 2016 Cherbourg Dog Management Program; Community Perceptions Video: <https://youtu.be/My18uVDojY>

### **Stephen Hill, Environmental Health Worker, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council**

The Cherbourg Community needed a vet program as we have never had anything like it before. With a lot of meetings between Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC), Queensland Health Darling Downs Public Health Unit (DDPHU), University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science (UQSVS) and Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council (CASC), we got things going forward after Council received a lot of complaints about dogs knocking bins over, noise from dogs fighting and barking at all hours and also dogs attacking kids at school. The CEO and councillors at Cherbourg were only too happy to be on board and get this vet visit up and running. As with a lot of other communities there is a lot of work to be done in reducing dog numbers, as well as educating residents about caring for and making their animals healthier. We put messages up around the community, on our radio station Us Mob FM, and Council's Facebook page letting residents know that we had visiting vets coming in October, then word of mouth got out about it, and more and more residents got dogs registered. The Animal Control Workers and I were only too happy to be involved, helping the vets, but most of all helping our community to be a healthy one. Most residents in our community care about their animals; some do treat them as family. With more numbers this year in dog registrations, the visiting vets are back again in October for three weeks in 2017.

I would like to thank all those wonderful people who were involved in working to make it all possible.

### **Amanda Hutchings, Senior Environmental Health Officer, DDPHU**

In 2014, animal management within CASC consisted of:

- two Animal Management Workers, one Environmental Health Worker (EHW), one Environmental Health consultant,
- a pound which need some work and was not operating
- local laws which had not been implemented,
- no baseline data on animals within councils, numbers of animals being put down, data on the health of animals or data on animal management issues (such as dog attacks),
- no visiting vet program in the community, and
- no dog registration in placed.

In late 2014/early 2015, concerns were being raised from community members during our community visits, and with CASC EHW and other government agencies, and it was clear that there were a number of animal management issues in the community. Concerns included public health and safety (e.g. workers being bitten by dogs, school children having lunch snatched from their hands, issues at school bus stops), zoonotic disease concerns (i.e. potential transmission of diseases from animals to people) and animal management issues (e.g. dogs knocking over bins, nuisance from dogs barking and fighting at night time, dogs scavenging at the tip). CASC was unsure of how best to humanely and sustainably address the community's dog management concerns, and realised they required the assistance of external organisations to achieve this aim.

CASC initially consulted with both DDPHU and AMRRIC to seek assistance in developing an appropriate and effective dog management solution. Our unit already had an existing relationship with CASC as a result of the Queensland Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Public Health Program, and CASC requested assistance from AMRRIC following a recommendation from Biosecurity Queensland. Upon initial discussions, it was clear that CASC required the services of a local veterinary provider that had the capacity to deliver a high-quality but low-cost veterinary service within the community. To meet this need, AMRRIC invited UQSVS to join the stakeholder group. Over the following 18 months, staff from these organisations worked together to develop an effective dog management program for Cherbourg that benefitted all involved.

UQSVS's involvement with the Cherbourg Dog Management Plan presents a mutually beneficial arrangement; for example:

- UQSVS students gain a better appreciation of life in an Aboriginal community and are given the opportunity to communicate and develop relationships with Aboriginal community members;
- UQSVS gains access to large numbers of entire animals that need desexing, thus giving students the opportunity to be involved in a large-scale desexing program; an opportunity that would otherwise not occur;
- CASC receives a low-cost veterinary service;
- CASC and animal-owning community members are assured of a high-standard veterinary service where highly qualified
- UQSVS veterinarians and vet nurses supervise all aspects of student involvement; and
- UQSVS (and the University of Queensland generally) is able to demonstrate and publicise its commitment to community development and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Once the stakeholders were connected, the group evolved to make the best use of the widely varying experience and scope of practice of each of the key stakeholder groups. For example, AMRRIC's experience and knowledge positions it as a valuable source of advice relating to animal management activities in rural and remote Indigenous communities; UQSVS is a highly regarded veterinary facility and research institute, capable of delivering high-quality services grounded on evidence-based best practice; DDPHU, through its work supporting EHWs, has an in-depth understanding of legislative requirements relating to Cherbourg's animal management; and CASC has intimate knowledge of the Cherbourg community and its needs and likely responses to any proposed solutions.

Through regular meetings and communication, the stakeholders assisted CASC to identify community concerns and dog management requirements. This process included articulating and documenting clear short and long term goals for the program; developing a broad dog management framework; planning, so that when the implementation of the program occurred, roll-out happened smoothly with few setbacks; ongoing communication and intentional monitoring of stakeholder attitudes towards the program design process (enabling the program to naturally evolve and strengthen); and, conducting a designated evaluation to allow all stakeholders involved to reflect on the development process and implemented program, and consider how they would like to improve both in subsequent years.

From the start of this process, there was a clear understanding amongst the group that the aim was to have sustainability in the animal management program, and that it was to be driven by CASC and community member desires. To achieve the goal it would take time (5 years minimum). All the stakeholders also recognised that the visiting vet program is only one element of CASC's broader animal management program.

### **Bonny Cumming, Veterinarian & Project Officer, AMRRIC**

The 2016 program included the establishment of a registration system for dogs, veterinary program and education program. Registrations opened in April and, by October, when the vet and education program was delivered, there were well over 180 dogs registered. The veterinary program ran for two weeks in October; the education program ran during the first week, and a community dog health day was held on the Wednesday of the first week of the program.

Funding for the program was shared across the various collaborators. The total value of the program was estimated to be around \$30,000, including actual and in-kind costs. Thanks to in-kind contributions from each of the collaborators, the actual costs for the program totalled \$13,132 and included items such as veterinary supplies, travel and accommodation. CASC contributed \$5000 towards the actual costs associated with the veterinary and education programs; the remaining costs were absorbed by AMRRIC, UQSVS, DDPHU and CASC. Generous sponsorship from veterinary wholesaler CH2 and pharmaceutical company Merial considerably boosted the program's budget.

The two-week long veterinary program was delivered by UQSVS staff and students; the team consisted of two experienced vets, one vet nurse and three final-year vet students. Available treatments/procedures on offer included: general health checks; education about animal health, disease prevention and responsible pet ownership; surgical desexing of dogs; microchipping; parasite treatments; emergency treatments to address animal welfare concerns; and euthanasia (only with full and informed consent of animal's owner). The team brought all necessary equipment and consumables and set up a field veterinary hospital within the CASC pound. Throughout the program, CASC environmental health and animal control staff liaised with community members and transported animals to and from the temporary veterinary clinic. AMRRIC and Queensland Health staff provided additional coordination and logistical support, and AMRRIC's app was used to record dog population and treatment data. Community members were overwhelmingly supportive of the program, with a number of owners making dedicated trips to the pound facility to ensure their dogs were treated. Households that had large numbers of entire animals, and those identified as being a regular source of puppies were strategically targeted in an effort to reduce the number of unwanted litters being born in the community.

The education program was delivered concurrently in the first week of the veterinary program, and in addition to spreading messages of responsible pet ownership, was utilised to build momentum and awareness for the veterinary services on offer. AMRRIC's Education Officer worked with the CASC EHW and Animal Control Officers, training them in the use of AMRRIC's Education Kit and delivery of education lessons to school classes and community groups. A total of 131 school students readily participated in responsible pet ownership lessons, and local radio announcements helped to spread awareness of the program.

Education programs such as that delivered at Cherbourg provide a learning experience for students to develop: empathy for dogs' feelings; an understanding of dogs' needs and behaviours; safe personal behaviours around dogs; knowledge of the relationship between dog and human health (personal hygiene); an increased understanding of owner responsibilities that contribute to the wellbeing of dogs; increased community awareness about responsible pet ownership, dog management programs, and the links between animal and human health; and self-pride and an increase in the value of the EHW and Animal Control Officer roles within the community.

A well-attended community dog health BBQ was a chance for the community members to meet the veterinary team, receive free parasite treatments (donated by Merial), and seek advice from the vet team about their pets. Staff from the University of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit also attended the day, meeting community members and exploring the rich history on display at Cherbourg's Ration Shed Museum.

The outcomes for the dog management program have made CASC, the collaborators and the community proud. In total, 59 dogs were surgically desexed (which, at that time, represented approximately 31% of the registered dog population). Eleven of the 37 female dogs that were desexed were pregnant, so by desexing them, the team prevented 72 puppies entering the dog population. Eight dogs were treated for various injuries and four were euthanased due to health or behavioural issues. Additional registrations were received during the community health day and throughout the program; by the end of October, 215 dogs were registered with CASC.

Throughout the program, thanks largely to the development of strong working relationships, both the individuals and organisations involved as key stakeholders benefitted enormously from the collaboration. Beyond the anticipated dog population management outcomes, reciprocal learning gave stakeholders a better understanding of the Cherbourg community and its history, of effective collaboration and its prerequisites, and of the process and importance of establishing, nurturing and maintaining relationships and trust between disparate organisations. For the veterinary students, the program provided an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and personal growth: "During the two weeks at Cherbourg, we had a lot of opportunity to communicate with the local residents and look after a number of dogs. We not only learnt about veterinary science, but also about the history and culture of Cherbourg. This furthered our understanding and appreciation of the interactions between animals and human kind. Our horizon was widened in this journey." Final Year Veterinary Students Shirley Lee, Danielle Hindmarsh and Caroline Edgehill

Certainly, the program's success can be attributed to the effective collaboration between all of the stakeholders. Upon reflection, the keys to the collaboration's success have been: identifying all the

relevant stakeholders; reaching mutual agreement on the issues; clearly identified goals of the program; collaboratively planning; clearly understanding each stakeholder's role and responsibilities; and regular face-to-face and email/phone communication to ensure good relationships were maintained.

While 2016 was the inaugural program, we all have a long-term view for animal management in Cherbourg, and so the collaborative team has been busy planning the 2017 program. CASC has undertaken some great infrastructure works to improve the pound facility; due to high demand, the veterinary program will be extended to three weeks (instead of two) and veterinary treatments will be offered to cats in addition to dogs. Building on last year's training, AMRRIC's education officer will deliver further training to CASC as well as UQSVS staff in education program design and delivery. With community consent, the stakeholders are looking to undertake some studies: one on students' perceptions of the impact of the program; and another taking blood and faecal samples from the animals to investigate parasite loads, including those of zoonotic concern.

Thanks to strong relationships and effective collaboration, the future for animal management at Cherbourg is certainly bright!

#### **For more information**

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#### **Glossary**

AMRRIC Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities  
CASC Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council  
DDPHU Darling Downs Public Health Unit  
EHW environmental health worker  
UQSVS University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science