

# Response to “Protect our Community and Tamariki”

## Addressing Roaming and Aggressive Dogs in Ahipara

### Executive Summary

This report proposes to highlight roaming and dangerous dogs in the Ahipara area of the Far North District with recommendations Around enforcement options, resources required and measures to improve the community’s safety.

The report aims to respond to concerns raised by the Ahipara Community through their petition presented to Council on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2026 after a recent dogs on dog attack between roaming dogs.

The petition highlights that in Ahipara, many people are carrying sticks or avoiding walking in certain areas due to fear of roaming and aggressive dogs that are uncontrolled in the community.

The recommended solutions strengthen Animal Management resourcing, expand community education and involvement, enhance community and staff safety and response capabilities.

Expected outcomes include fewer public safety incidents, improved compliance by dog owners, and increased community trust.

While the report focusses on Ahipara, the problem is not isolated to Ahipara or even the Far North District and so most causes and solutions can be attributed to other areas of the Far North.

### Problem Definition

#### Overview of Current Situation

Complaints and service requests related to roaming and aggressive dogs have remained consistent over recent years, with incidents in both rural settlements and larger townships. Long travel distances and limited coverage windows create extended response times.

Council records only show incidents that are formally reported, with social media commentary indicating that the problem may be bigger than Council is formally aware of.

Over the last 3 financial years, Animal Management has received over 4500 requests for service each year. Approximately 2000 of these are administrative-related requests, leaving approximately 2500 requests for operational Animal Management Officers to respond to each year.

In the 2025/2026 Financial Year to Date the Animal Management Team has received approximately 4000 requests for service of which 1600 are administrative.

## Impacts

A summary of the community and operational impacts are:

- **Public safety risks:** dog attacks, near-misses, and fear restricting outdoor activity.
- **Animal welfare concerns:** uncontrolled breeding, neglect, and injury among roaming dogs.
- **Operational inefficiencies:** elevated call volumes, repeat callouts, and overtime pressures.
- **Legal and reputational risk:** perceived under-enforcement and inconsistent outcomes.

## Objectives

- 1) Identify causes of Dog Control incidents in Ahipara.
- 2) Identify resourcing gaps to address the causes of Dog Control incidents in the Far North, specifically Ahipara.
- 3) Liaise with community members in Ahipara to identify specific local issues and seek suggestions for improvement.
- 4) Increase community participation in solutions.
- 5) Provide evidence for justification of increased funding to boost Animal Management Officers in the Far North District, including the creation of community liaison/education officer.

## Key Drivers / Causes

- **Owner non-compliance:** inadequate containment, microchipping, registration, and desexing.
- **Education gaps:** variable awareness and compliance of obligations under the Dog Control Act 1996 and Council bylaws.
- **Outdated and unusable legislation:** The Dog Control Act 1996 has legislative gaps, restricting action that can be lawfully taken by Animal Management Officers.
- **Geography:** large district, dispersed communities, and long travel distances extending response times.
- **Resourcing:** Far North District Council has only 10 Animal Management Officers (split into two teams) responsible for a vast district (over 7000 km<sup>2</sup>), severely limiting proactive enforcement and timely response. The North Team that looks after Ahipara has 1 Team Leader, 4 Animal Management Officers and 1 Shelter Operator.
- **Prosecution hurdles:** reluctant witnesses, insufficient evidence, and court capacity.

### Analysis of 2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025 and current Request for Service (RFS) data/drivers.

#### RFS count – total FNDC catchment

|                 | 2022/2023 | 2023/2024 | 2024/2025 | Current YTD | Trend on previous FY |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|----------------------|
| Stray in public | 529       | 614       | 622       | 411         | -6.2%                |

|                                 |     |     |     |     |        |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| <b>Stray pick up</b>            | 530 | 464 | 465 | 224 | -31.5% |
| <b>Dog v Person</b>             | 83  | 101 | 85  | 49  | -26.9% |
| <b>Dog v Dog</b>                | 77  | 87  | 76  | 43  | -20.4% |
| <b>Aggressive dog in public</b> | 147 | 194 | 208 | 125 | -26.0% |
| <b>CoPro-active Patrol</b>      | 10  | 73  | 555 | 419 | +31.8% |

RFS data is not currently able to be sorted into individual suburbs, but data improvements are underway to improve localised reporting.

The following problem analysis applies to Ahipara, but similar issues are prevalent across the district. It is not an exhaustive list but a strong indicator of contributing factors.

Council staff met with a representative of the Ahipara Community who presented the petition to FNDC in March this year to discuss causes of increased roaming and aggressive dog incidents in the Ahipara area.

- There is no pre-requisite to show a level of responsibility to obtain or own a dog. Registration and Microchipping, while legally mandated are not required before possession of a dog is obtained. There are no legally mandated requirements to fence properties before people obtain dogs.
- Often properties in Ahipara have inadequate fencing and gates to mitigate or prevent dogs from leaving the confines of the property. To compound this, irresponsible ownership of these dogs includes an unwillingness to properly fence a property (although this can be due to a financial barrier) or secure dogs from being able to roam freely.

Ahipara locals, particularly Tamariki, know which houses/streets are problem areas and are forced to take another route or run quickly past certain addresses to reduce chances of being approached by problem dogs.

- Inadequate training or an unwillingness to properly train dogs to minimise occurrences of leaving the property also appears to be a factor that contributes to roaming dogs and unsociable behaviour.
- Owner attitudes towards dogs being obtained for “guard duties” rather than as a pet or part of the family.
- Entire dogs are more susceptible to roaming incidences as they explore to seek a mate or protect perceived territory.
- Most powers under the Dog Control Act 1996 to restrict ownership or require mitigation measures (such as desexing) occur after dogs are obtained or after an incident (or series of incidents) have occurred.
- Mandatory desexing is only enforceable for certain breeds classified as menacing under the Dog Control Act 1996.

When comparing the last 3 financial years of Request for Service (RFS) data for roaming and aggressive dog incidents, we can see a steady increase until evident decreases in the 2025/2026 current Financial Year to Date (compared to this time last year).

Contributing factors to reduced RFS data may be that communities are reluctant to report incidents to authorities through fear of retribution from dog owners, not seeing it as their responsibility or accepting what is happening as status quo.

The community representative also said it is easier to “report” via social media than it is to use the council reporting service. This may have led to an ‘urban myth’, that posting a complaint on social media is the same as reporting an incident to Council/Animal Management.

The Ahipara community did acknowledge that “in the last month” there appeared to be a noticeable decrease in incidents since social media/news outlets had spotlighted the issue, in conjunction with increased patrols by AMO staff (approx. 2 per day in Ahipara) and that dog owners appeared to be taking more responsibility for their community by securing dogs correctly. This is affirmed by community commentary on the Ahipara FB pages.

Suggested improvements included:

- more frequent and transparent communication via a dedicated social media presence, including frequent reporting of statistics in the Ahipara area and sharing the Mahi that the Animal Management team is doing.
- Having a visible presence around school start and finish times for Tamariki to know we are there was also suggested (has resourcing implications).
- Work is underway with Council’s Communications and Engagement team to explore the viability of an Animal Management social media presence.
- And we need to address making it as easy as possible to complain, so we are reviewing that process with our IT team.

## Current State Analysis

### Resources We Have

**Animal Management Officers (AMOs):** The AMO team is split into two teams, a North team (1 x TL and 4 x AMO, 1 x Vacancy) and South Team (1 x TL and 5 x AMO). 1 vacant AMO FTE is currently being recruited into the North Team to make a 5/5 split.

A moderate dog attack can take 2-3 officers for safety, leaving almost no capacity for any proactive work, or other response work while the incident is resolved

AMOs work between 8:00am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday. Each 7-day cycle, 1 officer from each team is ‘on call’ to attend after hours complaints between 5:30pm and 9:00pm.

The number and type of incidents that after hours AMOs can attend is limited due to them working alone.

The rostered on-call officer is also responsible for shelter duties in conjunction with their ‘on-call’ duties on Saturday and Sunday.

The North Team is responsible for the Ahipara area.

**Fleet and equipment:** Each AMO has an allocated vehicle for the role as well as relevant safety and specialist equipment.

**Facilities:** The Northern Shelter is in Kaitaia with 20 pens. The Southern Shelter is in Kaikohe with 15 pens.

**Education:** A safety around dogs' education has been developed in conjunction with DIA and Auckland Council and is set to be rolled out from April to various schools across the district. Ahipara school is scheduled for May. At this stage, with no dedicated education officer, this is being delivered by AMO staff, on top of their usual operational requirements.

**Registration compliance (Ahipara):** Far North District Council has 9403 active dogs on our database. 207 of these reside in Ahipara. 159 of these are registered, with 48 still to register. Active compliance follow up is ongoing with these dogs.

## **Gaps and Constraints**

**Staffing vs. district size:** The North Team that services Ahipara consists of 1 x Team Leader, 4 x Animal Management Officers and 1 x Shelter Operator with 1 vacancy being recruited. The 4 current "field" staff (Animal Management Officers) cover the entire Te Hiku ward, which is a vast and varying landscape. Many aggressive dog incidents will require 2 officers to attend for staff and community safety.

**Travel time:** The distances required by the Animal Management Officers mean that they spend a lot of time in vehicles. The staff, while currently focusing on Ahipara, cannot neglect the remainder of the Te Hiku ward, meaning that they could end up at Coopers Beach, a significant distance from Ahipara.

**Education reach:** The recently developed Dog Safety program is being delivered into junior schools targeting certain age groups. This is being delivered by operational staff on top of operational requirements in conjunction with school timetables.

**Budget constraints:** Animal Management has limited cost recovery ability, with enforcement fees being set by the Dog Control Act 1996. Far North District Council can set reasonable fees and charges but will never be a complete "user pays system". Additional staff to address issues require additional funding with limited offset through fees and charges without penalizing the community through significant increases.

## **Cost Analysis**

### **Animal Management Officer**

The cost to fit out 1 x Animal Management Officer is approximately \$176,877 per annum which covers basic salary and vehicle related costs.

### **Education/liaison officer**

An education/liaison officer is estimated to cost approximately \$69,000 per annum in salary + vehicle related costs associated to the role.

## **Proposed Solutions**

The proposed solutions are over and above the operational improvements that Animal Management has been making over the last 12 months. Several operational improvements have shown gradual improvements as. These solutions aim to compliment initiatives already being implemented.

### **Option 1: Status Quo**

No new/additional investment.

Anecdotal information suggests that small impacts are being made in the Ahipara community, due to focused effort.

**Risks:** incident rates increase again when focus shifts elsewhere.

### **Option 2: Increase Enforcement and Resourcing**

Increase AMO resourcing by 2 FTE (1 North and 1 South) to extend coverage and reduce response times.

Increased staff = increased patrols and response times to Dog Control Incidents.

**Risk:** FTE is not currently budgeted for and would need to be accounted for in next Annual Plan. Creation of positions and recruitment shouldn't be a problem based on previous recruiting drives.

### **Option 3: Education and Communication Focused Strategy**

Approve budget for a dedicated community liaison/education officer to improve, deliver and increase safety programmes from school to other community events, allowing Animal Management Officers to focus on problem areas.

Increase social media presence to communicate more directly with the Ahipara (and other) communities.

Investigate improvements to reporting channels.

**Risk:** FTE is not currently budgeted for and would need to be accounted for in next Annual Plan.

### **Option 4: Hybrid Approach (Recommended)**

Combine Options 2 and 3 to increase Animal Management in a staged approach with a view to increasing education initiatives through the dedicated role and increased patrolling presence only viable through increased officers.

Investigation is already underway to improve reporting channels for the community to report incidents to ensure Animal Management has an accurate picture of the community issues, as well as investigation into an increased social media presence to increase community reach.