

MEDIA RELEASE

6 May 2016

Funding failure threatens safety in remote towns.

"It's only a matter of time before the uncontrolled populations of Buffalo, Cattle, Horses and Donkeys cause injury or death in our remote towns in Roper Gulf," Mayor Tony Jack said today, following the rejection of Council's application for funds through the Aboriginal Benefits Trust for stock exclusion grids and fencing around five Roper Gulf Towns.

In the dry season, herds of Buffalo in particular are a risk to our residents of Barunga, Beswick, Bulman, Weemol and Jilkminggan. The Buffalos enter the towns looking for the water and green fodder of watered grassed areas, ovals and gardens.

They are already causing damage at night to gardens, grassed areas and irrigation systems and residents are frightened to go out.

We have had some near misses but thankfully we have had no injuries.

In less than three weeks we will have more than 3000 visitors camping at Barunga for the Barunga Festival.

Last year Buffalos walked and ran through camps and back stage at the Festival.

I am really concerned that an injury or worst could occur with so many people being in contact with these potentially dangerous and unpredictable beasts. This concern is shared by Skinnyfish, the festival's Coordinators, Sunrise Health and Police who have all identified Buffalo as a high risk.

Council with its limited resources and powers has tried all avenues to address this community safety issue with no results.

The exclusion fencing and grids is the only thing Council can do to help mitigate this risk to life and property and funding for this has been rejected by the Commonwealth Government.

The estimated cost of fencing and grids was around \$270 000 of which Council had budgeted a \$32 000.

Council cannot fully fund this without a significant impact on our existing budgets. We are clearly very disappointed with this outcome.

Buffalo numbers have swelled since the end of the wide scale culling of the 1980 and 1990's and there are an estimated more than 90 000 buffalo in the Top End. The Northern Territory Government has identified these animals as an economic resource, giving them increased value in the eyes of Traditional Owners. There has been some limited mustering and pet meat operations but this has not effectively reduced the numbers or halted the seasonal invasion of small towns.

“Responsibility rests with the landholders and land managers but as a Council we also have a responsibility to develop a safe living environment for residents and visitors and to advocate on their behalf. At present without some way of excluding these feral animals from our towns we can only expect a conflict will occur that could be life threatening.

We need to deal with this community safety issue now. Lives are at increasing risk. We call on all parties in this to find a way to fund exclusion fencing and grids in these towns.”

Mayor Jack concluded.

For further details please direct your enquiries to
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