

# Operational policy

Wildlife (Animals)

## Management of cassowary incidents

*Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (the department). Operational policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.*

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## **Policy subject**

The subject of this policy is the role of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service & Partnerships (QPWS&P) of the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (the department) in responding to sick, injured and orphaned southern cassowaries in the Wet Tropics Bioregion, outside of the protected area estate.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to department wildlife officers in responding to sick, injured and orphaned cassowaries outside of the protected area estate.

This policy explains how the department will respond to specific types of cassowary incidents occurring outside the protected areas estate.

The policy also identifies the role of other entities, such as private sector organisations, veterinarians, conservation groups and zoos if they are involved in a response to a sick, injured or orphaned cassowary.

## **Background**

### **Community expectations**

The public has a strong interest in cassowaries. This high level of interest and concern is highlighted when these birds are struck by vehicles or orphaned as chicks, particularly in built-up areas.

### **Jurisdiction**

In Queensland, all animals that are indigenous to Australia are protected under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. The Wet Tropics population (the southern population) of the cassowary is listed as endangered wildlife under the Nature Conservation (Animal) Regulation 2020. The remainder of the population (the Cape York population) is listed as vulnerable wildlife. Under the Nature Conservation (Protected Area Management) Regulation 2017, cassowaries are a *natural resource* when present on the protected area estate.

The department maintains the Cassowary Incident Database of incidents involving sick, injured and orphaned cassowaries. Information from that database is used to provide local governments, the Cassowary Recovery Team and other interested groups with data to support conservation management and planning decisions.

## **Policy statement**

### **Partners and community groups**

Many community members, veterinarians and rehabilitation groups play a lead role in the rescue, treatment, rehabilitation, and release of native wildlife in Queensland. However, cassowaries are large birds that pose significant threats to personal safety if not handled correctly. The handling and care of sick injured and orphaned cassowaries by the general public is discouraged due to the safety risk it entails. Therefore, it is not practical to rely on the broad network of volunteers, generally skilled veterinarians and not-for-profit organisations in the rescue and rehabilitation of cassowaries.

The role of responding to sick, injured and orphaned cassowaries is primarily undertaken by suitable trained department wildlife officers, working with specific veterinarians and community groups.

The Garners Beach Cassowary Rehabilitation Centre and the Atherton Tablelands Cassowary Facility, at Lake Barrine are the only facilities that may accept and care for sick, injured and orphaned cassowaries in the Wet Tropics Bioregion.

Veterinarians, wildlife carers and the general public assist by reporting sightings to the department, and on occasions taking custody of chicks until they can be assessed by a veterinarian and placed in an appropriate rehabilitation facility. Veterinarians also on occasion euthanise badly injured birds at the location of the accident or injury.

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) also assists with the management of aggressive birds that might be posing an immediate threat to public safety, and on occasions, organise the euthanasia of a badly injured bird where department wildlife officers or a veterinarian cannot be deployed.

### **Response to sick, injured or orphaned cassowary incidents**

All responses to sick, injured or orphaned cassowary incidents are to be managed using the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS). A department response to a cassowary incident will involve one or more considered actions including:

- the deployment of department wildlife officers to an incident site
- referral to another organisation for action
- a decision to take no direct action.

A department response to a cassowary incident depends on a number of factors, particularly the capacity of community and partner organisations to independently manage some incidents.

The purpose of a department cassowary response is to:

- support the conservation of an endangered species by returning cassowaries to the wild;
- rescue and rehabilitate the cassowary where operationally feasible, and indirectly support other organisations to conduct rehabilitation;
- treat live injured cassowaries expeditiously and humanely to minimise their suffering, including the use of euthanasia where the bird's chance of recovery to the wild is minimal;
- manage public expectations during an incident and ensure personal and public safety are not compromised;
- improve the understanding of the threats and risks to cassowaries through the collection of data obtained from incidents, where operationally feasible.

This will be achieved by:

- the department maintaining a contact number (1300 130 372) to provide an after-hours service to receive cassowary incident reports;
- the department assessing and responding to reports of sick, injured or orphaned cassowaries in Queensland;
- where appropriate, the department taking lead responsibility for cassowary incident responses;
- working in partnership with the Atherton Tablelands Cassowary Facility, placing sick, injured or orphaned cassowaries for rehabilitation and assisting with release to the wild;
- working in partnership with veterinarians and carers to treat injured adult birds in the wild wherever appropriate;
- working in partnership with veterinarians and carers to euthanise birds that cannot be rehabilitated or treated in the wild or placed at either the Garners Beach Rehabilitation Centre or the Atherton Tablelands Cassowary Facility, or too a suitable zoo.

## **Response and intervention**

It is not realistic for department wildlife officers to attend every sick, injured or orphaned cassowary that is reported to the department. Successful rescue and rehabilitation cannot always be achieved, regardless of the available resources. In particular, cassowaries that have been extensively injured will be humanely euthanised rather than undergoing extensive veterinary interventions.

The type of response that can be expected to occur for cassowary incidents is described in Appendix 1. The prioritisation of effort is based on when and where an incident occurs, the condition of the bird, and the feasibility of various options for rescue and rehabilitation, based on the size of the bird.

### ***Euthanasia***

If cassowaries cannot be treated in the wild or rescued and rehabilitated FOR ANY REASON, whether logistical or veterinary, every attempt will be made to humanely euthanise the bird. The department primary aim is to avoid or reduce unnecessary suffering of the birds.

Cassowaries that are determined by department wildlife officers to be unrecoverable (based on the attached Appendix 1) will be euthanised wherever operationally feasible. In other cases this determination may be made by veterinarians.

The department supports the following methods of euthanasia:

- Shooting is considered the quickest and the most humane form of euthanasia.
- Chemical euthanasia may be used on birds that are in circumstances unsuitable for shooting and where accredited and skilled staff can carry out the operation.
- For birds that are in a location unsuitable for euthanasia, the bird may be sedated by a veterinarian or an accredited and skilled department wildlife officer and moved to a more suitable location for euthanasia.

## **Reference materials**

### ***Definitions***

For the purposes of this operational policy—

**Cassowary** means a member of the species *Casuaris casuaris johnsonii*, southern population, as found in the Wet Tropics Bioregion.

**Cassowary incident** means an event which results in an injured or orphaned cassowary, including but not restricted to:

- bird struck by a vehicle
- bird entangled in fencing or other infrastructure
- bird attacked by a dog
- bird with injuries from an unknown cause
- chick found without a male bird guardian
- bird reported in an emaciated or diseased condition

**Department wildlife officer** means staff within the department who respond to cassowary incidents and are trained in cassowary management.

**Operationally feasible** means a response to a report could proceed after consideration of all relevant preventative factors (e.g. unacceptable safety risks, dangerous weather conditions, inaccessible location, and

unavailability of department wildlife officer and/or equipment).

**Partners** means individuals or groups that contribute to a cassowary response, such as veterinarians and rehabilitations groups.

**QPWS&P** means the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service & Partnerships.

**Response** means the collective actions involved to locate, assess and determine a course of action for an injured or orphaned cassowary, and to carry out the actions as deemed appropriate. An appropriate 'response' may range from a return phone call to the person initially reporting the incident, to an immediate dispatch of QPWS wildlife officers, partners and community groups and equipment to catch and treat or rescue a cassowary.

### Legislative authorities

- *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- Nature Conservation (Protected Area Management) Regulation 2017
- Nature Conservation (Animal) Regulation 2020

### Human Rights Acts 2019 Compatibility

The department is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the [Human Rights Act 2019](#), the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this operational policy, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to [Comply with Human Rights Act](#)).

### Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

### Approved By

Ben Klaassen

Signature

30/11/2023

Date

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**Appendix 1: Department response types and target levels**

<b>1. Six months or older that have been struck by a car or attacked by a dog or injury of unknown origin</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
<i>1.1 Struck by car, attacked by dog – no visible injury</i>	1.1.1 No constraints	<p>Ask member of the public to observe the bird if safe to do so. If the bird remains sitting, deploy department wildlife officers and/or veterinarian to assess the bird.</p> <p>If the bird leaves the area continue response and attempt to ascertain the location of the bird and if the bird requires treatment.</p>
	1.1.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	<p>Ask member of public to observe the bird if safe to do so. If it does not leave the area, seek veterinary assistance to assess the bird.</p> <p>If the bird leaves the area continue response and seek assistance from partners to ascertain the location of the bird and if the bird requires treatment.</p> <p>If no available qualified partners, or if partners require assistance, deploy department wildlife officers at next opportunity to relocate the bird to the Garners Beach facility for assessment (perhaps next day).</p>
<i>1.2 Visible injury, blood, cuts, scratches but no visible broken bones</i>	1.2.1 No constraints	<p>Department wildlife officers attend, with veterinarian if possible, to assess the bird for suitability for treatment in the wild. If suitable for treatment in the wild – treat.</p> <p>If the bird is assessed as capable of release to the wild after rehabilitation, admit to facilities at Garners Beach. If not, euthanise.</p> <p>If veterinarian is not available for on-site assessment, admit to Garner’s Beach facility for veterinarian assessment and return to the wild if treatment in the wild is viable.</p>
	1.2.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	<p>Ask member of the public to observe the bird if safe to do so. If the bird remains, deploy department wildlife officers and/or veterinarian to assess the bird.</p> <p>If the bird leaves the area continue response and attempt to ascertain the location of the bird and if the bird requires treatment.</p> <p>If no available qualified partners, or if partners require assistance, deploy department wildlife officers at next opportunity (perhaps next day) and continue response as per 1.2.1.</p>

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1.3 <i>Protruding bone, broken bone, significant loss of skin and flesh</i>	1.3.1 No constraints	Attend to euthanise. Veterinarian assessment not required.
	1.3.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	Advise on safe way for members of the public, veterinarian or wildlife carers to offer food and water to the bird. Deploy department wildlife officers when operationally feasible to attend to euthanise. Veterinarian assessment not required.
1.4 <i>Dead</i>	1.4.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers retrieve body and dispose either to a council waste facility or veterinary surgeon for necropsy. Birds do not necessarily need to be necropsied.
	1.4.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	Department wildlife officers contact local council to request body be removed from roadside and disposed of at a council waste facility or at veterinary surgeon for necropsy. Birds do not necessarily need to be necropsied.
1.5 <i>Injury of unknown origin</i>	1.5.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers attend, with veterinarian if possible, to assess the bird for suitability for treatment in the wild. If suitable for treatment in the wild, treat. If the bird is assessed as capable of release to the wild after rehabilitation, admit to Garners Beach facility. If not, euthanise. If veterinarian is not available for on-site assessment, admit to Garner's Beach facility for veterinarian assessment and return to the wild if treatment has been successful..
	1.5.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	Ask member of the public to observe the bird if safe to do so. If the bird remains, deploy department wildlife officer and/or veterinarian to assess the bird. If the bird leaves the area continue response and attempt to ascertain the location of the bird and if the bird requires treatment. If no available partners, or partners require assistance, deploy department wildlife officer at next opportunity (perhaps next day), and continue response as per 1.5.1.

<b>2. Six months or older caught in fence or other type of restraint</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
2.1 <i>No visible injury</i>	2.1.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers will attend to disentangle bird. No veterinarian assessment required.
	2.1.2 More than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	Request assistance from partners.  If no assistance from available from partners, or partners require assistance, deploy department wildlife officers when operationally feasible.
2.2 <i>Visible injury</i>	2.2.1 Nil or more than 2 hours drive away from nearest available department wildlife officer	Department wildlife officers will attend, with veterinarian if possible, to assess the condition of the bird. Treat, if suitable for treatment in the wild. If not and bird is assessed as capable for release after rehabilitation, admit to Garners Beach facility for rehabilitation. If not, euthanise.

<b>3. Six months or older—starving or sick bird</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
3.1 <i>Thin wasted, not able to stand or move far, sick and depressed appearance</i>	3.1.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers will attend and request veterinarian to assess the condition of the bird. Treat, if suitable for treatment in the wild. If not and bird is assessed as capable of release to the wild after treatment, admit to Garners Beach for rehabilitation. If not, euthanise.
	3.1.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer or partner	Advise on safe way for members of the public, veterinarian or wildlife carers to offer food and water to the bird.  Deploy department wildlife officers when operationally feasible and continue response as per 3.1.1.

<b>4. Six months or older—aggressive/problem bird</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
4.1 <i>Displaying aggressive behaviour such as 'stalking people' attacking people and or vehicle</i>	4.1.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers to attend and conduct site assessment. Department wildlife officers to consider undertaking education of public and/or develop cassowary behaviour modification strategy.
	4.1.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer or partner	Department wildlife officers to attend and conduct site assessment when operationally convenient.  Department wildlife officers to consider undertaking education of public and/or develop cassowary behaviour modification strategy.  Deploy QPS if required for human safety.



<b>5. Less than six months old—no male present</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
<i>5.1 No visible sign of injury or illness</i>	5.1.1 No constraints	<p>Department wildlife officers to attend to assess chicks and location of the male bird.</p> <p>Area to be assessed over a 48 hour period to attempt to locate the correct male and reunite the chicks.</p> <p>If no male present after this time, catch chicks and admit to Garners Beach rehabilitation facility.</p>
	5.1.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer or partner	<p>Establish if a partner available to attend. If not, try and have a member of the public observe birds. Department wildlife officers to attend to assess chicks when operationally feasible and to locate the male bird if possible. If no male present, catch chicks and admit to Garners Beach rehabilitation facility.</p>
<i>5.2 Visible sign of injury or illness</i>	5.2.1 No constraints	<p>As above with the addition of a veterinary assessment. If chicks not suitable for rehabilitation, euthanise.</p>
	5.2.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer or partner	<p>Establish if any partner is available to attend. If not, try and have a member of the public observe birds. Department wildlife officers to attend to assess chicks with veterinary assessment when operationally feasible. If suitable for rehabilitation, admit to Garners Beach or rehabilitation facility. If not, euthanise.</p>

<b>6. Less than six months old—male present</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
<i>6.1 Visible sign of injury or illness</i>	6.1.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers to attend to assess chicks. If able to treat in the wild, instigate rehabilitation plan for treatment. If admission to Garners Beach facility, consider timeframe for rehabilitation. Short periods of time (two weeks or less) admit the entire family. Long periods (three weeks or longer) consider conservation value of chick rehabilitation. It may not be appropriate to admit the entire family and may not be appropriate to admit the chick only. Leave chick in situ with father to allow for natural processes to occur.
	6.1.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer	Establish if any other skilled partner available to attend. If not, try and have a member of the public observe birds. Department wildlife officers to attend to assess chicks when operationally feasible and to locate the male bird if possible. If no male present, chicks caught, admitted to Garners Beach rehabilitation facility.

<b>7. Male with chicks less than six months old</b>		
<b>Condition of bird</b>	<b>Logistics</b>	<b>Response</b>
<i>7.1 Visible sign of injury or illness to male only</i>	7.1.1 No constraints	Department wildlife officers to assess male for treatment in the wild.  Careful consideration should be given to separating chicks from a male upon admission to Garners Beach if the separation is likely to be more than two weeks.  Careful consideration should be given to length of time rehabilitation will take. Loss of home range is a significant factor in successful release if rehabilitation is likely to take more than two weeks.
	7.1.2 More than 2 hours from nearest available department wildlife officer	Establish if any other skilled partner available to attend. If not, try and have member of the public observe birds.  Department wildlife officers to assess male for treatment in the wild as available.  Careful consideration should be given to separating chicks from a male upon admission to Garners Beach facility if the separation is likely to be more than two weeks.  Careful consideration should be given to length of time rehabilitation will take. Loss of home range is a significant factor in successful release if rehabilitation is likely to take more than two weeks.