

# REDUCING THE IMPACTS OF SEASONALITY ON THE SAVANNAH WAY: AN OPERATOR GUIDE



Australia's Adventure Drive

TOURISM  
TROPICAL NORTH  
QUEENSLAND

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**TOURISM TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND  
ACKNOWLEDGES WE WORK, LIVE AND PLAY ON ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LAND. WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO  
ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.**

This operator guide has been funded by the *Queensland Government's Tourism Industry Resilience Grants* program to help Gulf Savannah tourism operators plan for the impacts of weather (including heat, rain, flooding, and storms) and encourage more visitors to stay and experience the region's attractions. This publication was proudly funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) to provide targeted support to the tourism industry in affected areas, assisting them to recover from the impacts of extraordinary disaster events occurring in 2021-22 and build the long-term sustainability of tourism in these regions.



**Australian Government**



**Queensland  
Government**

Severe weather events over the past few years, coupled with travel restrictions through COVID have seen significant changes in domestic and international visitors during months that are usually busy, and reduced visitor spending overall.

This step-by-step guide provides tourism businesses ways to reduce the impact of seasonality and weather, recognising the limitations of road closures and severe flooding. By the end you will be able to:

1. Know your market
2. Start with spend
3. Know if you can extend your season
4. Explore new products and experiences
5. Review your plan every year

**We can't change the weather, but we can look for ways to make the most of the seasons, the visitors and the natural strengths of the Savannah Way.**



# KNOW YOUR MARKET

Knowing the customer you have the best chance of getting more of is the first step in the process. Knowing who you can target, and encouraging them to spend more or extend, is vital. Three segments identified through consultation with industry in developing this toolkit were:

1



### Drive Market and Families

Interstate travellers, families traveling in holiday periods, and visitors who live close and are less impacted by the heat.

2



### International Visitors

Who travel in the northern hemisphere winter (December–March).

3



### Special Interest and Events

Keen on experience such as fishing, wildlife, scenery, and the 'green' desert experience.

Remember that most businesses will rely on other experiences, attractions and accommodation also being open. So have a chat to other businesses in the region and along the way from where your visitors are likely to come to see if they are also keen to extend their season or if they are already busy during that time.



**Write down three market segments you think you could potentially attract to travel more in your shoulder season, where they will come from / through and who else you might need to work with.**

e.g. International drive market – coming from Cairns in April–May, work with the Tablelands and Mareeba to make the region more attractive recognising they are in hire cars and vans.

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# START WITH SPEND

Before looking at ways to extend the season or attract new visitors, the first question has to be can you generate more revenue per visitor to build a buffer for your business when the market slows down or the weather turns. Across the Savannah Way, visitor spend is consistently below visitor spend along the Matilda Highway. The graphic below shows the potential for the Savannah Way to grow visitor spend, comparing Carpentaria, Longreach and Cloncurry Shire's visitor spend for both domestic and international markets.

## LGA VISITOR EXPENDITURE 2019

Source: Local Government Area Profiles 2019, Australia Trade and Investment Commission.

Carpentaria		Longreach		Cloncurry	
47,000 visitors		130,000 visitors		77,000 visitors	
<b>Domestic</b> <b>\$93</b> Spend per night	<b>International</b> <b>\$61</b> Spend per night	<b>Domestic</b> <b>\$203</b> Spend per night	<b>International</b> <b>\$93</b> Spend per night	<b>Domestic</b> <b>\$132</b> Spend per night	<b>International</b> <b>\$19</b> Spend per night

There is a clear opportunity for businesses along the Savannah Way to grow spend per night from domestic travellers and build on the success to date of international visitor spend.

## SOME WAYS TO DRIVE VISITOR SPEND

To increase visitor spend at your business, have you thought about the following:

1	2	3
<b>Short-stay higher spend</b>	<b>Longer-stay, higher margin</b>	<b>Targeting value over volume</b>
For some products, visitors have higher spend in the first one or two nights, so it makes sense to not try and get an extra night but look to add new, higher margin experiences. Have you thought about some exclusive experiences where you can make a small change to the product but get a higher spend? Something exclusive can drive a higher margin.	For other businesses, high turnover significantly increases staff costs with more customer touch-points. Have you looked at the margin you generate if visitors stay longer and what you can do to incentivise a longer-stay? This is particularly useful if you offer or can access a large range of experiences where visitors can continue spending.	During peak season, having low-spending visitors taking up a high value spot at your place could be costing you more than you realise. Have you looked at your most profitable customers and targeted your efforts to focus on them? Often we go with blanket messaging to reach the widest audience when a better approach is very targeted messages and rewarding loyalty and referrals.





Write down some thoughts on your ideal customer and what you could do to generate greater yield (not just more spend or more volume) for more for your business.

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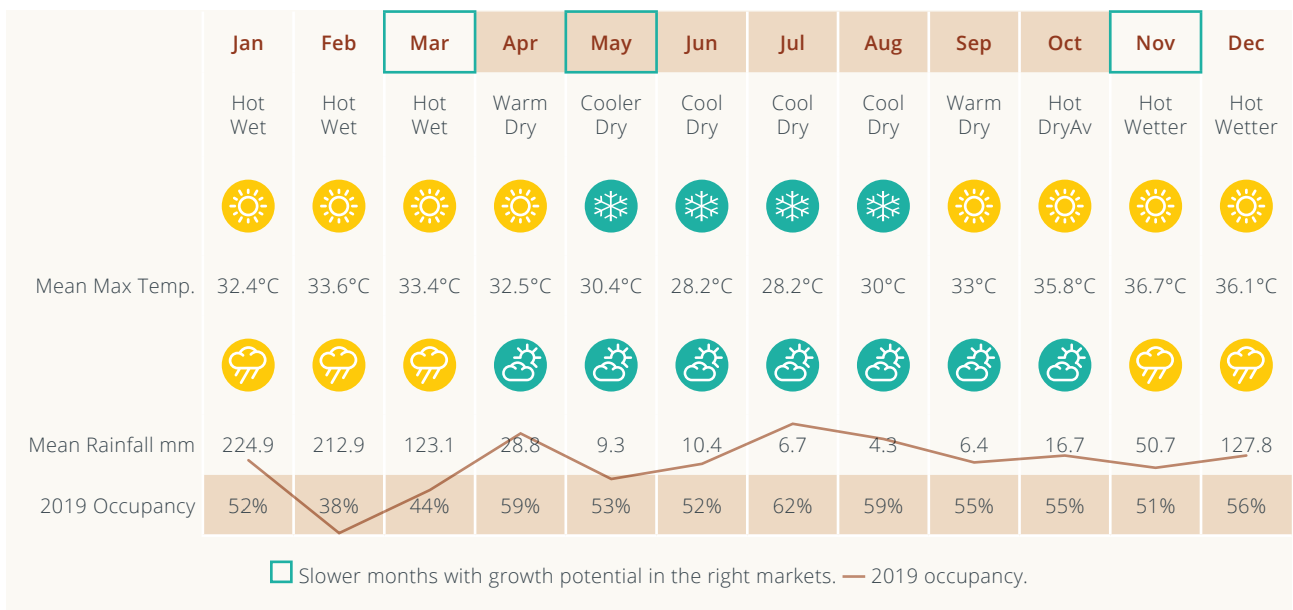
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# KNOW IF YOU CAN EXTEND YOUR SEASON

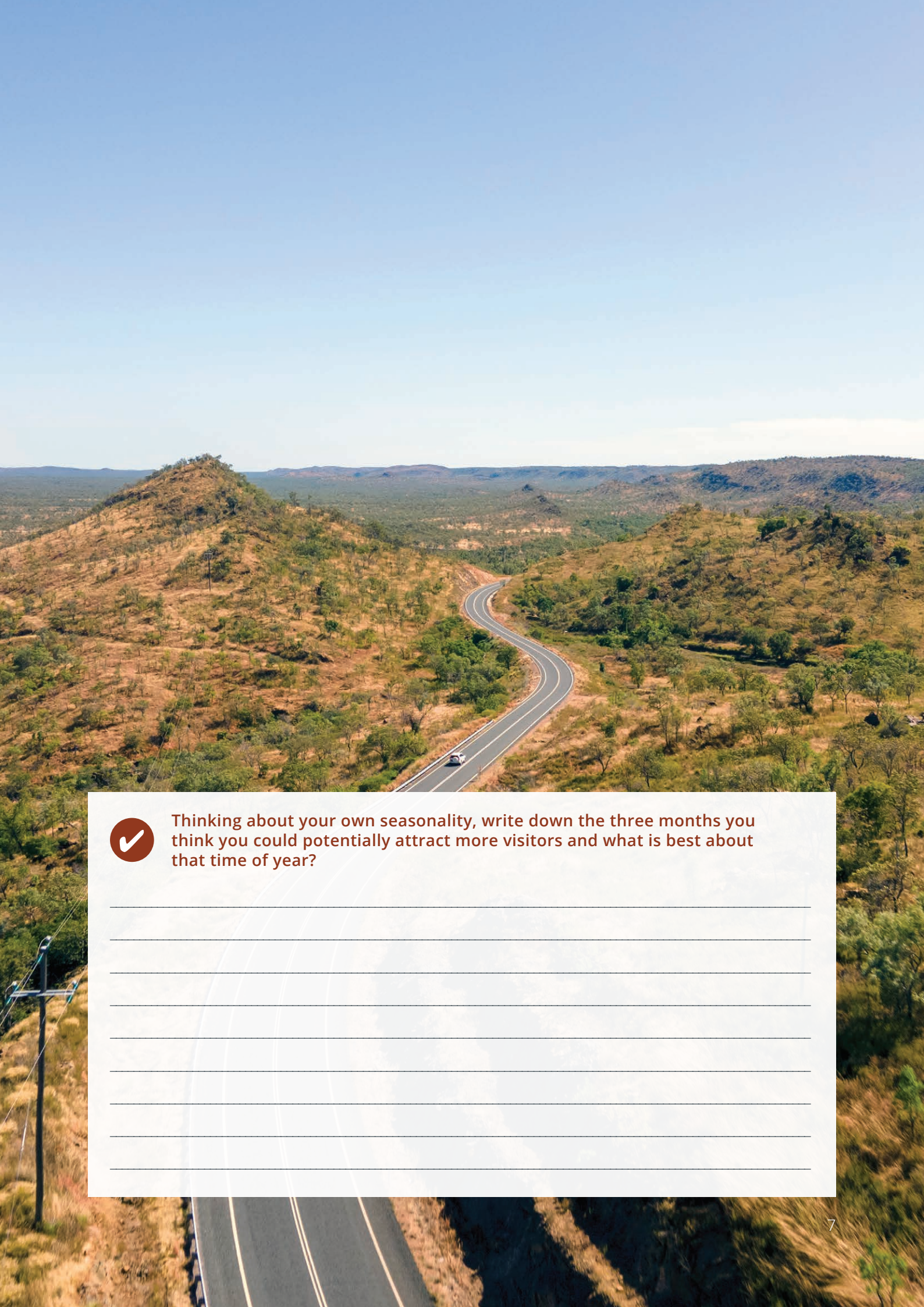
80% of visitors to the Gulf Savannah arrive between April and October (see below), but if you look at the blue line below of average occupancy, there are months like May, June and October that could all grow in average occupancy. Have you looked at your seasonal trends to look at ways to boost shoulder season visitors? With different target markets, including international, more shoulder season visitors are possible.



Source: Localis Accommodation Data and Australian Bureau of Meteorology (Georgetown Post Office).

The weather will definitely play a role, particularly with interstate travellers who are most likely to continue to travel in the cooler months (June-Sept). International visitors are less likely to be impacted by the weather in the region and more by the weather at home with the majority coming to Tropical North Queensland in the northern hemisphere winter (Nov-March). Road closures and seasonal business closures impact on the ability of the region to have 'year-round' visitors but we can extend the season.

Also visitors from Central and North Queensland experience similar temperatures and conditions at home, so with the right attraction and experience they can also be a growth market in the shoulder seasons.



Thinking about your own seasonality, write down the three months you think you could potentially attract more visitors and what is best about that time of year?

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# EXPLORE NEW PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

Knowing the markets you want to target, and thinking about the ways you can increase their spend or extend your season may mean you need to invest in new products and experiences.

New markets might need new products and experiences. An event like Undara Rock and Blues could be the way to get them to travel. It might be a new tour, targeting special interest groups, or value-added offers like extended stays (four nights for the price of three) for travel outside the peak season. Some of the experiences identified by operators that could attract more visitors to the region include:

- 'Green' experiences where people can enjoy the abundance of wildlife and greenery offered during the wet season (e.g. bird watching)
- Unique experiences that people are seeking as part of an 'outback' holiday such as camping under the stars or river based activities
- First Nations cultural experiences
- Activity based events such as hot air ballooning or wind sports



## What new products or experiences might you need and how will you communicate it?

e.g. International drive market – a new guided experience or sharing your story with translation, have you thought about being in a trade program.

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Government grants are often available to support tourism initiatives. Visit the Queensland Government's Grant Finder [www.grants.services.qld.gov.au](http://www.grants.services.qld.gov.au) to find out more. To find out more about being ready for the international market check out the [ATEC Tourism Trade Ready](#) program or contact [TTNQ](#) to find out about current training and mentoring programs for international markets.

Before you leap in to plan or develop new products or experiences consider the following (which should form part of your business plan).

## PLANNING FOR NEW PRODUCTS OR EXPERIENCES

There are a range of tourism mentoring programs available to support businesses that are looking to grow, especially those looking to grow into the international market. The Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport have a range of programs to support tourism businesses, including:

Funding	Budget	Staffing	Resources	Approvals
 <p>Can I source government funding?</p>	 <p>Does my business have any budget to support the product?</p>	 <p>How many staff will I need and for how long?</p>	 <p>What resources do I need to develop the product?</p>	 <p>Do I need Council, OH&amp;S or other approvals?</p>
Partnerships	Itineraries	Sustainability	Timeline	Marketing
 <p>Can I partner with others to develop the product, or bring more visitors?</p>	 <p>Can I make this part of drive or group tour itineraries?</p>	 <p>Can I offer the product during peak and off-peak times?</p>	 <p>How long will it take me to delivers the new product?</p>	 <p>How can I market the product and make sales?</p>

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- Tourism business health check
- Financial counsellor service
- Small Business Wellness Coach

Visit: [www.dtis.qld.gov.au/tourism/industry-resources/queensland-tourism-business-financial-counselling-service](http://www.dtis.qld.gov.au/tourism/industry-resources/queensland-tourism-business-financial-counselling-service)



## PARTNERSHIPS TO GROW VISITATION

When it comes to tourism, no business is about to thrive alone, every visitor comes to your door through the support of a range of partners. As you explore ways to reduce the impact of seasonality on your business, consider working with:

- Other tourism businesses in the region through [Gulf Savannah Development](#) who is the Local Tourism Organisation working with TTNQ;
- [Tourism Tropical North Queensland](#) who runs a number of programs and campaigns that can help you including [Drive North Queensland](#), a partner with Tourism and Events Queensland on Drive Queensland and the Savannah Way;
- [The Savannah Way](#) has a Board of experienced tourism professionals, including the three regional tourism organisations (TTNQ, Tourism Top End NT, and Australia's North West WA) that have active partnerships with a range of tourism partners;
- Tourism partners bringing visitors to the region including AAT Kings, Outback Spirit, Oz Tours, the Savannahlander and Gulflander, Outback Aussie Tours and many more who are already bringing visitors (including international visitors) to the region that may want to work with you and add your experience or product to their tours in the coming year. Be aware planning is done annually and once a season's itineraries are locked in, they rarely change until next season; and
- Businesses along the route your visitors are most likely to take to get to you. Think about their opening days and times and how that may impact on your ability to welcome guests.

Another great way to build partnerships is by getting your business International Trade Ready and taking part in events such as the Australian Tourism Exchange with the support of business mentors. Speak to TTNQ about these opportunities.



Complete the following steps to help grow partnerships to extend your season.

1

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Contact TTNQ about promoting your business to international markets, to seek grant support, and take part in business mentoring activities.

2



Speak to providers in your region to explore how you can work together, such as joint tours or itineraries.

3



Reach out to other operators to find out if they intend to extend their visitor season.

4



Keep a list of contacts to follow up each year.

5



Attend events such as the Australian Tourism Exchange or trade shows to showcase your products and experiences and grow networks and partnerships.



STEP 5

# REVIEW YOUR PLAN EVERY YEAR

Select a date to review and update your plan each year.

Insert your annual review date here:





