

Animal Management Plan



Adopted 28 August 2007

INTRODUCTION

This Animal Management Plan has been prepared by the Roxby Downs Council in response to the Council adopting a planned approach to undertake its responsibilities under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, and will guide domestic animal management by the Council over the next five years.

This plan is a living document that from time to time may need adaptation and addition. At this stage this solely addresses issues associated with the management of Dogs and Cats. However, over time it is expected that management policies in relation to other animals including birds will be developed for inclusion.

The Plan identifies strategies and actions to implement the mission, aims and objectives for domestic animal management, and relates these back to the wider policy context. The strategy has been prepared by Peter Keller on behalf of Council, drawing information from a broad range of stakeholders, with the community asked to comment on the draft prior to its adoption by the Council.

Significantly much of this plan has been driven by the Roxby Downs Pet Management Subcommittee of the Environment Forum as part of the communities independent Roxby Downs Community Board. In conjunction with Council staff many meetings and discussions have been undertaken by keen individuals who have objectively looked at the issues. Extensive community surveys have been completed with extensive local media coverage through The Monitor Community Newspaper.

As a result Council is confident that the overall content of the plan will be of no surprise to the community and that there is a genuine ongoing local commitment to ensure that the plan is implemented successfully.

This Plan contains proposals for a wide range of actions to be undertaken by the Council on behalf of the community. These actions will enable a balance between competing interests to be maintained and to reposition domestic animal management to accommodate new requirements.

BACKGROUND

Roxby Downs Council is situated approximately 570 km from Adelaide and has a permanent population base of some 4,500 people with an additional variable one of around 1,000. Located in a fragile arid environment the issue of environmental degradation from human activity, and that of their pets, has been an issue, especially in relation to potential loss of wildlife. Stomach analyses from feral cats at Roxby Downs reveal a minimum of 6 mammal, 43 reptile, 15 bird and 1 amphibian species are preyed upon by cats in the region. Cats are known to be significant local predators of endangered Plains Rats and have been responsible for killing most of the endangered Greater Bilbies that have been released from the Arid Recovery reserve 25 km north of Roxby Downs.

In preparation of this plan Council has incorporated extensive work undertaken by the community over many years. During the period 1990 to 1999 two campaigns were initiated to improve local cat management. These efforts included a number of media articles and public meetings were held which identified the need and with extensive public support for the introduction of significant cat controls. Key issues confronting cat management at Roxby Downs included its location in an environment with many local wildlife species vulnerable to cat predation and the transient nature of residents which often resulted in cats being left behind temporarily when their owners took breaks from shift work or permanently when their owners left town.

Whilst no formal change occurred, due in the main to Council's budget position, never the less both Council and mining company BHP Billiton (formerly WMC Resources) did pursue potential changes in legislation with the State Government but without success.

However, the 2005 Roxby Downs Community Plan also identified that the best action the community could undertake to protect the surrounding environment and native animals was to ensure that pets

such as rabbits, ferrets and cats were never released or escaped into the wilderness. Invoking a by-law to ban any more cats being brought to Roxby Downs, de-sexing the current cat population and banning the sale of rabbits and ferrets were potential solutions to combating this issue.

As a result of examining the practicality of this suggestion during 2006 and 2007 the independent Roxby Downs Community Board's Environment Forum, supported by a dedicated Pet Management Subcommittee examined a range of dog and cat management issues. Community drivers included John Read, Gavin Ibbett, Reece Pedler, Andrew Melville-Smith, Kelli-Jo Kovac, Roy Ebdon, and Julie Beinke.

Four meetings of the subcommittee were held as well as a well attended public meeting on 28 February 2007 as part of extensive public consultation. A key difference in the approach taken by the current Pet Management Sub-committee, compared with earlier local attempts to improve cat management at Roxby Downs, was the proposal to treat cats in the same way as dogs, in terms of registration, identification and containment. This approach was reinforced by several media articles by veterinary and environmental professionals outlining the benefits to cats (less fighting or injury and longer life expectancy), the local community (less impact of wandering/fighting cats on other pets, public health and noise/spray/defecation nuisance) and the local environment (easier to control feral and stray cats if pets are better managed) from the proposed new bylaws.

181 respondents to the Pet Management Subcommittee's questionnaire that was distributed at 2 Community market days, the council office, Vet and local paper in late 2006, revealed overwhelming support for the proposed initiatives, including the 24 respondents who identified themselves as cat owners:

Summary of results is as follows:

- 93% (92% cat owners) considered that existing dog laws should apply to cats
- 89% (75% cat owners) considered that cats should be contained within houses or enclosed cat runs.
- 98% (100% cat owners) considered that cats should be identified
- 89% (83% cat owners) considered that registration fees and breach penalties should be the same for cats and dogs
- 80% (87% cat owners) considered that all cats and dogs sold or registered should be de-sexed. 10 respondents however, felt that exemptions should be made for licensed breeders or owners of pure bred pets and that these concerns should be accommodated.

In recommending to Roxby Downs Council to create bylaws to address the overwhelming community support for these initiatives, the Pet Management Subcommittee has volunteered to apply for external funding to upgrade the pound and scanning capabilities and to extend the roles of the current authorised volunteer Cat Management Officers to assist with the proposed new pet management initiatives in Roxby.

As a result of these deliberations the subcommittee considered whilst potentially banning of cats was considered to be not practical nor desirable strong support was elicited for improved containment and management aspects improved management controls were.

Overall various activities, albeit on a reactive nature, have historically been undertaken with respect to dog and cat management as per the following statistical summary

Item	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04	2002/03
Dog Registrations	555	577	735	709
Dog Expiations	58	37	55	60
Dog Complaints	60	2	33	51
Dog Impoundments	17	37	16	18
Dog Attack Reports	2	1	4	15
Cat Nuisance Reports	5	5	5	10

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Due to the remoteness of Roxby Downs there is a unique opportunity for the council to undertake many positive & innovative steps towards effective management of Dogs and Cats. These steps could, if correct decisions are made protect the fragile nature and balance of the environment that surrounds us.

The Plan's Mission is to promote and facilitate responsible ownership of dogs and cats, animal welfare and the benefits of animal companionship focusing on the legitimate needs of pets and their owners while respecting the rights of other members of the community and protecting the environment.

The Plan aims to:

- promote responsible dog and cat ownership In Roxby Downs;
- provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats;
- ensure public safety and enhance the amenity and environment and reduce community conflicts by providing effective dog and cat control measures;
- harness the benefits of dog and cat ownership; and ensure that the expenditure of registration fees addresses domestic animal issues.
- to protect native fauna from the negative impact of owned and un- owned dogs and cats;

Council's Corporate / Strategic Plan requires Council to provide effective dog and cat management to suit our remote locality by the development and implementation of local bylaws to supplement existing legislative controls. As part of an Environmental Goal the following 2005/06 actions are stated.

- *Develop and implement local dog and cat control bylaws to supplement existing legislation.*
- *In conjunction with BHP Billiton the Community Board & Environmental Forum, develop appropriate cat control mechanisms and seek incorporation into relevant legislation...*

In reality Council cannot change legislation but Council can seek to implement appropriate bylaws as indicated in this plan.

The Dog and Cat Management Act was enacted in 1995 and brought in a new legal framework to South Australia covering both dogs and cats. The objectives of the Act are to:

- Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership
- Reduce public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats, and
- To promote the effective management of dogs and cats (including encouragement of de-sexing and micro chipping of dogs and cats)

Animal control has widened into a greater array of contexts following the introduction of the Act. Knowledge of both animal and human behaviour is now a requirement of working in the field.

There is growing recognition that enforcement of laws will not, on its own, result in lasting, voluntary changes in behaviour. It needs to be supplemented by a range of non-regulatory approaches such as public education and improved signage.

There is now considerable evidence to support our understanding of the benefits of owning pets. This implies a potentially new role for Council in harnessing the benefits of pet ownership or at least maintaining the ability of the community to continue to own dogs and cats. In this new environment, it is essential that Council take a strategic approach to managing domestic pets. This strategy will provide Council with a sound basis and direction from which it can plan, co-ordinate and make future decisions to meet the needs of the community over the next five years.

THE LAW AND GUIDELINES

The responsibilities for dog and cat management in South Australia are prescribed in the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995. Under the Act Councils are required to administer and enforce the provisions relating to dogs within its area. Prescribed responsibilities include the appointment of a Registrar, maintenance of a Dog Register, the appointment of a dog management officer and to make arrangements for dogs seized, and its other obligations under the Act. A Council is also able to make By-Laws relating to the management of dogs and cats within its area.

The Act also provides for the appointment of the Dog and Cat Management Board, which has responsibilities to plan, promote, and advise on effective management of dogs and cats in the State, to monitor Councils management of their responsibilities, to issue Guidelines for Councils, to advise and assist Councils to undertake their responsibilities. The Board also has a role to provide advice to the Minister to keep the Act under review, to undertake research into companion animal management and to provide education programs for dog management officers and community awareness information. The Act also provides that a Council may appoint cat management officers for its area of responsibility.

While these provisions provide the legal framework for the Council's responsibilities and the penalties that can be imposed on dog and cat owners for non compliance, this Plan seeks to implement a balanced approach that caters to everyone's needs that will not only benefit dogs and cats and their owners as a group with legitimate needs but also the wider community as well as those charged with the responsibility of animal management by-laws.

MISSION STATEMENT

Following extensive consultation Council has adopted the following Mission Statement

“Companion animals are part of the Roxby Downs community, contributing to its quality of life, and it is important to ensure that through a coordinated approach that their needs and those of their owners are accommodated with those of non pet owners. In this way an environment is created which encourages responsible pet ownership with pets integrated safely and harmoniously so that the potential negative environmental, social and economic impact of owned and unowned cats and dogs are minimised”.

AIMS OBJECTIVES COMMENTRY & ACTIONS

Council's Animal Management Plan has been presented in a succinct manner which ensures that specific aims are stated along with relevant objectives and commentary followed by the proposed actions that are required to address each respective aim.

Details of the plan are as follows:

Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community

Objective

Ensure that Officers of Council operate within predetermined guidelines and in accordance with the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995

Commentary

It is essential that Council Officers operate within the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act. This can be done by creating a set of guidelines for use by Staff and designated Cat Management Officers to ensure that regular training and development of skills are provided on an ongoing basis. Consistency of advice is critical and must be a high priority.

Council staff cannot also operate consistently without clear direction and guidelines, as individuals will often interpret legislation in differing ways. The Dog and Cat Management Act is the primary legislation. By-laws introduced by Council are subordinate legislation and procedures are the mechanism to implement the Act and by-laws.

Due to lack of resources Council has in the past appointed "community" based Authorised Officers under the Act, most notably in relation to unidentified cats. The Roxby Downs Pet Management Subcommittee have expressed an interest in being involved in any new dog and cat control regime.

Proposed Actions

- 1.1. *That Council review staff training and development to ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of animal management issues.*
- 1.2. *That Council introduce performance reviews for all staff involved in animal management.*
- 1.3. *That Council introduce procedural guidelines for all staff to follow.*
- 1.4. *That Council investigate the options for "community " based Dog and Cat Management Officers performing an active role in the implementation of any new dog and cat management regime introduced under this plan.*

Objective

Encourage Education of dog and cat owners

Commentary

Generally speaking most dog and cat owners want to do the right thing. Registration of dogs and general compliance with the Act is relatively high throughout the community. Council must do everything in its power to ensure that residents and visitors understand their obligations to act responsibly with their pets.

Proposed Actions

- 1.5. *That Council introduce a brochure explaining State laws and local bylaws and the rationale behind them for all residents and visitors to the Roxby Downs Council. The brochure should be distributed through as many outlets as possible including Council buildings, associations, interest groups and new residents.*

Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community

Objective

Introduce and administer a comprehensive bylaw including mandatory registration to manage dogs and cats

Commentary

Part 4 of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, states that every dog over the age of 3 months must be registered and identified in accordance with the Act and Regulations. A person must be over the age of 16 before they can register a dog.

It is imperative that in order to address the issues of feral animals, all owned companion dogs and cats need to be identified. This will result in just two status types of companion animals, "Identified" and "Un-identified". An unidentified dog or cat will be considered to be un-owned.

Once status identification becomes a routine part of dog and cat ownership, the process of adequately dealing with un-owned animals will also be clear. The following principles apply

- Any owned dog or cat must be registered to the owner through Council, with penalties applicable for the keeping of any unregistered dogs or cats.
- Any "un-owned" / "un-registered dog or cat to be regarded as feral, and be subject to a different set of rules on management and control to owned / registered dogs and cats.

Through extensive community consultation as part of the Roxby Downs Community Plan the need for a comprehensive modern bylaw for the management of dogs and cats has been recognised and incorporated within the plan as indicated in the proposed actions

Proposed Actions

- 1.6. *That the Administrator of Roxby Downs Council be the Registrar for all dogs and cats for the Municipality of Roxby Downs.*
- 1.7. *That enforced registration of all owned dogs in Roxby Downs under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 be continued*
- 1.8. *That implementation of a council bylaw requiring mandatory registration of all owned cats in Roxby Downs occur, with compliance requirements and penalties that mimic the existing laws relating to dog registration. This bylaw to include but be not limited to the following elements:*

1.8.1. *That all dog and cat registrations include a requirement for the dog or cat to be micro-chipped with identification registered on veterinary records.*

1.8.2. *That all cat registrations include a requirement for the cat or cats, to be de-sexed or; require the owner to obtain a permit for the keeping of an "intact cat with penalties for non compliance.*

1.8.3. *That a grace period for compliance be introduced as part of any implementation.*

Note

- *A six (6) month grace period has been suggested.*

1.8.4. *That cat registration be segregated to identify an "intact cat or cats" and "de-sexed cat or cats", with the ownership of an intact cat being the sole right of those people who have paid for and obtained a permit to keep an "intact" cat.*

Note

- *Where a cat or kitten has been obtained by a new owner, that cat or kitten must be registered with Roxby Downs Council within 14 days of taking up ownership of the cat.*
- *Where new ownership involves a cat or kitten, the new owner has the following time frames to have or have arranged to have the animal micro-chipped and de-sexed;*
 - *14 days in the case of a cat of breeding age (at the eruption of adult teeth)*
 - *3 months in the case of a kitten*

Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community

- 1.8.5. *That amnesty period be implemented that allows cat registration fees to be offset against cat de-sexing and or micro-chipping costs. eg: no fee payable if proof of de-sexing and microchip number is provided at time of registration during amnesty period.*
- 1.8.6. *That cat registration involves a registration fee of an amount set for annual dog registration, less subsidies for micro-chipping and de-sexing etc. as for dogs.*
- 1.8.7. *Recognise that proven harbouring and or keeping or supporting of unregistered dogs or cats, is contrary to overall dog and cat management strategies and; any proven acts of harbouring or keeping supporting of any un-registered dog or cat without undertaking formal ownership by way of registration, shall incur penalty as if that person were the owner.*
- 1.8.8. *Limit the number of registered dogs and cats to two (2) per household without Council approval.*
- 1.8.9. *Inclusion of an exemption system for those people who can demonstrate special circumstances that give rise to a valid reason to own more than the limited number of cats or dogs. Eg A person has the limited number of animals and an aged parent dies leaving a loved pet behind- that person may receive an exemption subject to;*
- *Application for exemption*
 - *Being assessed by Council as not creating a problem in residential areas.*
 - *Undertaking full registration and normal ownership responsibilities for the animal.*

Objective

Minimise Dogs Wandering at Large

Commentary

A dog wandering at large can be a threat to livestock, native fauna and members of the public, particularly children and older people and Council is aware that serious attacks can arise in these circumstances. Council will therefore implement strategies to minimize its occurrence in the community.

Under the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act it is an offence to allow a dog to wander at large. A dog will be taken to be wandering at large if it is in a public place, other than a park, or a private place without the consent of the occupier and no person is exercising effective control by way of a physical restraint.

A dog will also be considered to wandering at large if in a park and no person is either exercising physical restraint or by command, the dog being in close proximity to the person and the person being able to see the dog at all times.

The strategies are in two parts; the first to encourage owners to have adequate fencing and control over their dog and the second is the actions of the Council to the dogs 'wandering at-large'. All dogs on street and roads must be restrained.

In addition micro chipping is to be introduced as a mandatory requirement for or cats, which often slip their collar.

Overall it is considered that containment makes enforcement of the Act more effective.

Proposed Actions

- 1.9. *That owners be made aware of their responsibilities to;*
- *Register their dog or cat,*
 - *Adequately fence their property to control their dogs and install pens for cats,*
 - *Train their dog or cat so as to not leave their premises,*
 - *To keep their dog or cat under effective control when in a public place.*

Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community

1.10. Council will undertake that:

- A dog & cat management officer will conduct random patrols of all public areas and detain dogs and cats wandering at large.
- Council respond to calls from the general public of a dog wandering at large and any cat caught and held.
- The priority of the Council will be to return the dog or cat to the owner.
- Un-identified dogs and cats will be impounded in accordance with the Act and Council bylaw.
- At the sole discretion of council, unclaimed dogs and cats that are suitable as pets will be eligible for distribution to persons seeking a pet. Dogs and cats being re-homed under this program will be required to be de-sexed, immunized, micro chipped and registered.
- Unclaimed dogs and cats, which are unsuitable as pets, will be euthanased.
- To encourage compliance, dog and cat management officers will be encouraged to reinforce complying behaviour, particularly in children, to give warnings to first offences that are of a minor nature where no harm to a person or property has occurred. Penalties prescribed by the Act will be applied for re-offenders.

Objective

Enforce Identification of Dogs and Cats.

Commentary

Identification of dogs and cats is imperative to provide sound animal management practices. Residents and visitors to the area must identify their dogs and cats at all times. Generally speaking pet owners do not allow their pets to wander at large.

Accidental escape accounts for approximately 90% of dogs wandering at large. Often these dogs are not identified and therefore cannot be returned to the owner. The costs associated with impounding unidentified dogs and cats and the stresses placed on the animal and their owners can be avoided.

Proposed Actions

- 1.11. That Council staff enforce identification of dogs and cats.
- 1.12. That Council educate the public regarding the correct identification of dogs and cats.
- 1.13. That Council introduces micro chipping days throughout the year to promote identification of pets.

Objective

Encourage the community to report all dog attacks, and harassments, including those on people, birds and wildlife, to Council.

Commentary

Knowledge is the Councils best tool to reduce the number of dog attacks that occur in the community. Due to the high number of visitors to the area it is difficult for Council to implement a strategy to reduce dog attacks and harassment. The collection of data will enable Council to understand the situations that lead to such attacks and therefore the community must be encouraged to provide information regarding all attacks regardless of their severity.

Proposed Actions

- 1.14. That Council implement an education programme that targets the reporting of all dog attacks/harassments throughout the community.
- 1.15. That Council provide dog attack/harassment forms throughout the community.

<p>Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community</p>
<p>Objective Provide suitable on and off leash activity areas</p>
<p>Commentary Providing suitable on and off leash activity areas is vital to the success of animal management in the area. Dog owners must have suitable areas to exercise their dogs safely. Equally, other members of the community must have the ability to use the amenities without fear of harassment by uncontrolled dogs. In areas such as streets, roads, and places the public congregate such as shopping areas, dogs must be restrained effectively. In parks assessed by Council for their suitability, dog owners should be able to exercise their dogs without restraint providing the owner exercises effective control.</p>
<p>Proposed Actions <i>1.16. That Council does not restrict off-leash activities in parks and reserves unless it deemed unsuitable for the activities.</i></p>
<p>Objective Maximise the public's understanding of the Dog and Cat Management Officers and the Council's role in the community.</p>
<p>Commentary Many people have little or no understanding of the role performed by Animal Management Officers and Council in the community. This can lead to mistrust and in the worst cases a total lack of respect for the officers and the Council. Officers must become better at providing information regarding the very important role they perform in the community on behalf of Council.</p>
<p>Proposed Actions <i>1.17. That Council Staff undertake regular public information sessions to inform the public of their role and current animal management issues. (The Dog and Cat Management Board has a good video available for this type of event.)</i></p>
<p>Objective Limit the number of dogs and cats per dwelling.</p>
<p>Commentary At this point in time the Council does not have a limit on the number of dogs or cats kept on a property. This matter should be addressed, as there is strong evidence that placing limitations on the number of dogs and cats will have a positive impact on nuisance complaints. Council staff currently provide assistance for dog and cat nuisance complaints and in some cases remove stray unowned cats. This is done under the provisions of the Act.</p>
<p>Proposed Actions <i>1.18. As part of a by-law Council limits the number of registered dogs and cats to two (2) per household without Council approval.</i> <i>1.19. Assessment criteria are developed to guide Council staff when considering applications for variations to these numbers.</i></p>
<p>Objective Introduce data collection to better understand dog and cat management issues.</p>
<p>Council must have accurate information in order to fully understand animal management issues. Currently there is a reliance on the Officers knowledge of issues and complaints received. Works instructions are generated for complaints with the outcomes recorded but to date this information is only used for reference should further complaints be received. This information should now be analysed to better understand animal management issues.</p>

Aim 1 Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community

In addition Council also supports the Roxby Downs Pet Management Committee who have collected data and sought public opinion as part of developing and improved cat management strategy. This activity should be encouraged to continue.

Proposed Actions

1.20. In partnership with Council the Roxby Downs Pet Management Subcommittee be given an ongoing role in collecting, collating and analysing data in relation to dog and cat management.

Aim 2 Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership

Objective

Provide education material to residents and visitors to the Council area.

Commentary

There are three factors that contribute to successful pet ownership. They are:

The *owner*, who needs to be aware of responsibilities of pet ownership, ensure that the dog and cat is registered, immunized, and de-sexed.

The owner is also responsible to ensure that the dog is trained, and to be aware of the dog's behaviour at all times, including when away from the home such as at work. The owner is also responsible for ensuring that the dog has adequate food, water and shelter and that the dog is regularly exercised.

The *breed* determines the size, and, to a certain degree, the temperament of the dog or cat and its susceptibility to breed specific genetic defects. When selecting a dog or cat it is important to seek appropriate advice on the soundness of animals being considered and its suitability to the home / yard in which it will be kept and the family that the dog or cat will be joining, particularly if small children are involved.

The *home environment* is made up of the part of the home to which the dog or cat will have access. In most cases this will include an enclosed yard and possibly part of the house. Important factors are the adequacy of the fencing, whether the dog can see out of the yard through a gate, adequacy of shelter, food / water and whether there are children, proximity of neighbours and other dogs or cats and access to on leash and off leash exercise areas are all important factors.

Successful pet ownership has both financial and time commitments and it is therefore important that people contemplating pet ownership endeavour to match their choice of pet for their particular home and family circumstances.

Proposed Actions

2.1. That people contemplating obtaining a dog or a cat be encouraged to consider the factors affecting the suitability of successful pet ownership in their particular circumstances. Sources of this information include: Advice being available from the Council Animal Management Officer. Advice that online information regarding breeds and assistance in pet selection is available on:

Pet Care Information and Advisory Service www.petnet.com.au

The Dog and Cat Management Board of SA www.dogsncats.asn.au

2.2. To discourage people from obtaining dogs or a cat from other than registered breeders, and to ensure that the dog or cat is sound from defects, immunized and de-sexed. That people contemplating obtaining a dog or a cat be encouraged to become familiar with the responsibilities of dog or cat ownership prior to obtaining a dog or a cat. That people who

Aim 2 Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership

obtain a new dog ensure that it is trained.

2.3. That Council publicise all pet management regulations and requirements throughout the community including on the website, through a "welcome package" and supplement this by appropriate signage when entering town

Objective

Enforce the provision of the Dog and Cat Management Act.

Commentary

Consistent enforcement of the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act is an important factor in educating the public to act responsibly with their pets. Responsible pet owners expect irresponsible pet owners to be dealt with through the provisions of the Act. Effectively there cannot be an incentive to act responsibly with our pets unless there is a disincentive for those who are not responsible.

Aim 3 Increase public safety through the reduction of public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats.

Objective

Reduce the following detrimental impacts of dogs and cats

Commentary

Barking dogs

Barking dog complaints are one of the most difficult and time consuming areas of Council responsibility. Barking dog complaints are subjective depending on an individual's tolerance for dog noise. Having said that, Council must investigate and resolve this type of complaint. In order for Council to resolve the complaint they require full cooperation from the complainant to collect meaningful evidence suitable to a Court of law. In order to do this Council has set up a standard operating procedure for all dog noise nuisance complaints.

The complainant must follow these standard operating procedures, as failure to do so will result in the matter being set aside by Council. On receipt of a complaint Council will provide information to the dog owner and diaries to the complainant. If and when the diaries are returned, an investigation will follow. Upon substantiation the Council will take the appropriate course of action.

Dog attacks/harassment

As previously stated all dog attacks/harassment must be recorded and investigated. In order to reduce the incidence of dog attacks Council must educate the public to act responsibly. The issue of dog attacks and harassment is of great concern to the general community, particularly in relation to children and the elderly. Overall from other statistics is the number of unreported attacks and the fact that the majority of attacks (85%) occur on private property.

While minority of dogs are involved in attacks and harassment, all dogs have the potential to bite, regardless of size, age, breed or temperament, particularly in situations where they are frightened, dominant, protective or possessive. How to avoid being bitten or how to read a dog's body language are important issues on which to educate the public.

Dog faeces in public places

The management of dog faeces is an important environmental and health issue. Anecdotally, large amounts of dog faeces pollute public places each year and it is an issue on which the community has strong feelings. Although the responsibility lies with dog owners, an increasing number of Councils are providing leadership in this area by providing dog tidy bags to promote the picking up of dog faeces. It is widely acknowledged that Councils that provide faeces removal dispenses dramatically reduce the incidence of discarded faeces in the community.

Aim 3 Increase public safety through the reduction of public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats.

Nuisance caused by cats

Under the current provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act an un-identified an unidentified cat can be trapped when found wandering on private property. If an occupier traps a cat and it is identifiable the cat must be released unless the cat is more than one kilometre from a genuine place of residence. Under the provisions of the Act a cat must be identified by way of a collar with ownership details or by way of a microchip if an M is tattooed in the ear.

Given Roxby's fragile environment and keen community response to this issue significant improvements are desirable.

Proposed Actions

- 3.1. *That Council implements a Standard operating procedure for the investigation of noise nuisance complaints. That Council implements an education brochure for dog owners to be sent out in the event of a complaint regarding dog noise nuisances.*
- 3.2. *That Council collates statistics related to dog attacks. Examine the types and breeds of dogs registered in the Council area to determine any trends applicable. Promote the level of risk relating to litigation and public safety. Invite guest speakers on this topic to information sessions.*
- 3.3. *That Council implement strategically placed signs to encourage responsible dog ownership in the area of faeces removal. That Council investigates the feasibility of providing dispensers and dog tidy bags.*
- 3.4. *That Council continues to provide cat traps to residents experiencing problems with cats. That the Council continue to loan out cat traps for a refundable deposit to ensure the return of the trap.*

Aim 4 Provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats

Objective

Ensure that impounded dogs and cats are returned to owners as soon as practical and that all impounded dogs and cats have clean safe facilities while impounded

Commentary

Although Council's dog holding facilities are of a good standard they will be in need of upgrading to house cats and more dogs as the population of Roxby Downs is about to grow rapidly.

To ensure that this continues the Council operates its dog holding facilities in accordance with the "Code of Conduct for Pounds and Shelters" as set down by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

Proposed Actions

- 4.1. *That Council continue to conduct regular reviews of pounds and shelters for compliance.*
- 4.2. *That Council's pound be extended to accommodate cats and be designed to such that further extensions can be accommodated should the town expand.*
- 4.3. *Council to provide shade over the entire area.*

Objective

Ensure that off leash areas are suitable for dogs to be exercised

Commentary

There has been ongoing use of the Roxby Downs Main Oval and School Oval for off leash exercising of dogs and is used in an unofficial capacity where the dog owners respect the use of the oval by sporting bodies and the school and only use the oval when not in use. This needs to be addressed as soon as practical.

Aim 4 Provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats

It is understood that the imminent expansion of the town and the expectation of a master plan to be released no formal decision can be made at this time.

Once the Master Plan is released only then can council identify on and off leash areas.

Proposed Actions

4.4. That once the Township Master Plan is made available that Council formally identifies such areas that will be suitable for off leash areas for exercising dogs also to identify areas not suitable as off leash areas.

4.5. That Council clearly identify off leash areas by way of signage.

Aim 5 Acknowledge the importance of dogs and cats in society

Objective

Provide residents and visitors with up to date information regarding the benefits of responsible dog and cat ownership

Commentary

There is a wealth of scientific evidence to support the benefits of owning pets and their use in therapy. However, until recently this evidence has not been considered by local government, which has focused instead on the negative aspects alone.

Evidence of a link between pet ownership and better health has been demonstrated by a range of different studies. More work needs to be done to determine whether this link is causal or merely correlation (ie, do pet owners share some other factor which yields health benefits?), and not all studies demonstrate a link between pet ownership and better health outcomes. However, as the evidence mounts, the public health profession is starting to take note, eg:

- The National Health and Medical Research Council's Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Overweight and Obesity is considering dog walking as one key to getting overweight and obese people moving.
- A public health symposium was hosted by the National Centre for Health Promotion in Sydney in 1998 to generate a research agenda for dog ownership and public health.

Dogs encourage people to enjoy the outdoors. They have been shown to stimulate conversation between strangers in public places and they improve people's sense of security - both in the home and with their owner in public places. Pets are also wonderful companions. In some cases helping combat loneliness and social alienation. These benefits are as important for the elderly and single person households as they are for households with children.

Part of the challenge involves removing barriers to owning pets.

Local government has a role to play in harnessing these benefits - not to encourage people to buy a pet but to even up the balance in the consideration of domestic animals issues and by removing unnecessary barriers to pet ownership but to provide residents and visitors with up to date information regarding the benefits of responsible dog and cat ownership

Proposed Actions

5.1. That Council promote the benefits to the community of responsible pet ownership with the Dog and Cat Management Boards publication "You and Your Dog" and "You and Your Cat".

Aim 6 Encourage the enjoyment of and benefits from dogs and cats by people.

Objective

Facilitate dog activity days for dog owners

Commentary

With due regard for the benefits of pet ownership, there is an opportunity for Council to facilitate a day for dog and cat owners to get together and celebrate their best friend, be it a dog or a cat. By doing so, there is an opportunity for Council and the public to interact and exchange information.

Proposed Actions

- 6.1. *That Council implement a day out for dog owners with invited guests and interest groups.*
- 6.2. *Explore possibilities for meetings and get togethers for cat owners and invited guests.*

Aim 7 Ensure public safety and amenity in relation to dogs and cats.

Objective

Conduct regular patrols of the township to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and invite regular input regarding dog and cat management issues from interest groups throughout the community.

Commentary

Council has one part time officer and several administration support staff. These staff are trained in all areas of animal management and is the public face of animal management in the area. The officers educate, mediate and enforce the provision of the Act and have a good understanding of the issues effecting public safety and amenities in relation to dogs and cats. Council is providing adequate patrols for non-compliance with the Act.

Proposed Actions

- 7.1. *That Council continue regular patrols of the area to ensure compliance with the Act.*
- 7.2. *That Council invite members of the public to an input into animal management.*

Aim 8 Protect native fauna from the impact of dogs and cats.

Objective

Clearly define areas unsuitable for dog and cat recreation and exercise.

Commentary

It is widely accepted that we live in a fragile area where people and native fauna integrate to the best of their ability and it has been identified that--
Containment and retainment (restraint) are the key to minimising impacts to wildlife and is to be addressed in current legislation or in the proposed new bylaw.

Proposed Actions

- 8.1. *That Council with the assistance of the Pet management Committee conduct regular patrols for compliance.*

Objective

Educate the community as to the impacts of cats and dogs on native fauna

Commentary

Due to the remote location of Roxby Downs it is a golden opportunity to hold educational days and provide promotion material to the residents to learn about our responsibilities and the consequences of our actions.

Aim 8 Protect native fauna from the impact of dogs and cats.

Proposed Actions

- 8.2. *Target School classes with guest speakers*
- 8.3. *Provide media information, articles, booklets and & multimedia information*
- 8.4. *Work in conjunction with Roxby Pet Management Committee to gather information and data suitable to educate the community as a whole.*

Aim 9 Ensure the expenditure of registration fees addresses the needs of pet owners as well as domestic animal management issues.

Objective

Conduct regular reviews of income and expenditure to ensure that Council is using best practice with available funds.

Commentary

Under the provisions of the Act, Council must utilise money generated from dog and cat management in the area of dog and cat management. The implementation of this plan is a clear demonstration of Council's desire to fulfil this obligation.

In addition Council's Finance Manager is responsible to ensure that an independent reconciliation of all income and expenditure is kept and that this is available for scrutiny by the Dog and Cat Management Board

Proposed Actions

- 9.1. *Council regularly review the amount of all income and expenditure for dog and cat management.*

FURTHER INFORMATION AND COMMENTS

Further information maybe obtained by contacting Council's Municipal Works Officer Peter Keller at the Council Office Richardson Place Roxby Downs during work hours. Phone 08 8671 0010 or email roxby@roxbycouncil.com.au

Peter Keller
Municipal Works Officer

August 2007