



Animal Management Plan



June 2010



Executive Summary

The Northern Areas Council is situated approximately 200kms from the Adelaide CBD and has a population base of 5000 people in an area of 3070 sq.km. During 2009/2010 the Council registered 1500 dogs and impounded 10 dogs. In addition the Council investigated 30 dog attacks/harassments and numerous noise complaints.

This Animal Management Plan has been prepared by the Northern Areas 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 3 years.

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 the Environmental Services Department 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.

This Plan contains recommendations for a wide range of actions to be undertaken by the Council. These actions will enable Council to maintain a balance between competing interests and to reposition domestic animals management to accommodate new requirements.

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;
- provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats;
- ensure public safety and enhance the amenity and environment;
- harness the benefits of dog and cat ownership
- educate children in the community on safe animal handling
- ensure that the expenditure of registration fees addresses domestic animal issues.

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 through the encouragement of de-sexing and proper identification 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 3 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 for Environment and Conservation 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 a cat management officer for its area of responsibility.

While these provisions provide the legal framework for the Councils responsibilities and the penalties that can be imposed on dog 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 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

"To create an environment which encourages responsible pet ownership, where people and pets integrate safely and harmoniously within the Northern Areas Council community. To recognize that companion animals are part of the community, contributing to its quality of life, and to ensure that the needs of animals and their owners are accommodated while recognising the differing needs of all members of the community such as non pet owners".

Aims:

- Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community.
- Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership.
- Increase public safety through the reduction of public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats.
- Provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats.
- Acknowledge the importance of dogs and cats in society.
- Encourage the enjoyment of and benefits from dogs and cats by people.
- Ensure public safety and amenity in relation to dogs and cats.
- Protect native fauna and flora from the impact of dogs and cats.
- Promote education in schools in relation to dog safety at home and in public areas.
- Ensure the expenditure of registration fees addresses the needs of pet owners as well as domestic animal management issues.

Objectives**1. Provide effective management and a suitable environment for dogs and cats within the community.**

- Ensure that Officer of Council operate within the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.
- Ensure that Officers operate within predetermined guidelines in accordance with the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.
- Encourage education of dog and cat owners.
- Maximise dog registration.
- Minimise dogs wandering at large.
- Enforce identification of dogs.
- Encourage the community to report all dog attacks and harassments to Council.
- Provide suitable on and off leash activity areas.
- Maximise the public's understanding of the Dog Management Officers and the Council's role in the community.
- Limit the number of dogs per dwelling in residential zones through Council By-Law.
- Introduce data collection to better understand dog and cat management issues.

2. Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership.

- Provide education material to residents and visitors to the Council area.
- Enforce the provision of the Dog and Cat Management Act.

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

- Reduce the following detrimental impacts of dogs and cats;
 - Barking dogs

- Dog attacks/harassment
- Dog faeces in public places
- Nuisance caused by cats
- Dogs roaming at large
- Non-registration of dogs

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

- Ensure that impounded dogs are returned to owners as soon as practical.
- Ensure that all impounded dogs and cats have clean safe facilities while impounded.
- Ensure that off leash areas are suitable for dogs to be exercised.

5. Acknowledge the importance of dogs and cats in society.

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

6. Encourage the enjoyment of and benefits of pet ownership

- Provide information to promote the enjoyment and benefit to the community of pet ownership.

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

- Conduct regular patrols in the Council area to ensure compliance with Legislative requirements.
- Invite regular input regarding dog and cat management issues from interest groups throughout the community.

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

- Clearly define areas unsuitable for dog recreation and exercise.

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

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

Strategies:

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

Ensure that Officers of Council operate within the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.

The strategies to ensure that Officers of Council operate within the provisions of the Dog and Cat Management Act are to create a set of guidelines for use by Staff and 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.

Recommendations:

That Council review Staff training and development, to ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of animal management issues.

That Council introduce performance reviews for all Staff involved in animal management.

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

Council Staff cannot 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.

Recommendation:

That Council introduce procedural guidelines for all Staff to follow.

Encourage Education of dog and cat owners.

Council acknowledges that the majority of dog and cat owners are responsible for their pets. Registration of dogs and general compliance with the Act is relatively high throughout the community. Council will continue to ensure that residents and visitors understand their obligations to act responsibly with their pets.

Recommendation:

That Council introduce a brochure for all residents and visitors to the Northern Areas Council. The brochure should be distributed through as many outlets as possible including Council Buildings, Associations and Interest Groups.

Maximise dog registration.

Legislation in SA requires all dogs of or over 3 months of age must be registered. Councils cannot expect to obtain an acceptable level of dog management without obtaining maximum registration. This can therefore be seen to be the most important issue at hand and is the key factor controlling all other effective and successful dog management strategies. Dog registration ensures that:

- Owners are registered as well as their dogs.
- Maximum funding is available for Councils to carry out responsibilities under the Act.
- Responsible dog owners and the rest of the community do not have to financially support irresponsible and unthinking dog owners.

Recommendations:

That Council conducts a survey for unregistered dogs.

That Council provides registration information with rates notices and in Council newsletters.

ADEQUATE FENCING IS A NECESSITY FOR RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP.

A dog wandering at large can be a threat to livestock 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 e.g an approved leash.

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 must be restrained on street and roads.

Recommendation:

That dog owners be made aware of their responsibilities to;

- Register their dog,
- Adequately fence their property to control their dog,
- Train their dog so as to not leave their premises,
- Keep their dog under effective control when in a public place.
- That a dog management officer conducts random patrols of all public areas and detain dogs wandering at large.
- That Council respond to calls from the general public of a dog wandering at large. The priority of the Council will be to return the dog to the owner.
- Un-identified dogs will be impounded in accordance with the Act.
- Unclaimed dogs that are suitable as pets will be eligible for distribution to persons seeking a pet, **subject to Council approval**. Dogs being re-homed under this program will be required to be de-sexed, immunized and registered.

- Unclaimed dogs, which are unsuitable as pets, will be euthanized.
- To encourage compliance, dog management officers are encouraged to reinforce complying behaviour and 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.

Enforce identification of dogs.

Identification of dogs is imperative to provide sound animal management practices. Residents and visitors to the area must identify their dogs 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 the stresses placed on the animal and their owners can be avoided.

Recommendations:

That Council Staff enforce identification of dogs. That Council educate the public regarding the correct identification of dogs. That Council introduces micro chipping days throughout the year to promote identification of pets.

Encourage the community to report all dog attacks and harassments to Council.

Knowledge is the Council's 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 the severity.

Recommendations:

That Council implement an education programme that targets the reporting of all dog attacks/harassments throughout the community. That Council make available dog attack/harassment forms.

Provide suitable on and off leash activity areas.

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 which ensures that the dog reacts positively to owner's commands and returns to the owner when called.

- *Council is currently undertaking an audit of playgrounds, sporting ovals and other public use areas to ascertain their suitability for dog recreation and exercise. Signs will be erected defining these areas when the audit is completed.*

Recommendation:

That Council does not restrict off-leash activities in parks and reserves unless it is deemed unsuitable for the activities.

Maximise the public's understanding of the Dog Management Officers and the Councils role in the community

Many people have little or no understanding of the role performed by Council's 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.

Recommendations:

That Council Staff undertake regular public information sessions to inform the public of their role and current animal management issues.

Limit the number of dogs per dwelling

Council will be developing a By-law to limit the number of dogs per dwelling in residential areas. The proposed By-Law will place a limit in a township to one in a small dwelling and on premises other than a small dwelling the limit to be two.

Outside a township working dogs used for the purpose of tending stock and established kennel operations will not be considered in the by-law provisions. In all other cases the limit will be four dogs. It is possible under certain circumstances to obtain permission to keep more than the prescribed number of dogs with the written consent of Council.

Introduce data collection to better understand animal management issues.

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. Work 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.

Recommendation:

That Council analyse all works instructions received over the past twelve months to better understand any trends regarding animal management issues.

Encourage responsible dog and cat ownership.

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

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 is registered, immunized, and desexed.
- The owner is also responsible to ensure that the dog is trained, and to be aware of the dogs behaviour at all times, including when away from the home such as at work. The owner is also responsible to ensure that the dog has adequate food, water and shelter and that the dog is regularly exercised.
- The *Breed* determines the size, and often the temperament of the dog and its susceptibility to genetic defects. When selecting a pet it is important to seek appropriate advice on the soundness of animals being considered and their suitability to the home / yard that the dog will be kept in and the family that the dog will be joining, particularly if small children are involved.

The *Home environment* is made up of the part of the home that the dog will have access to.

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, closeness of neighbours and other dogs 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.

Recommendations:

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.

That sources of this information include: Advice being available from the Council Dog Management Officer.

Advice that Online information regarding breeds and assistance in pet selection is available on:

Petcare Information and Advisory Service

www.petnet.com.au

The Dog and Cat Management Board of SA

www.dogsncats.asn.au

A breed selection quiz, 'Selectapet' is available on the Dog and Cat Management Board website.

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 obtain a new dog ensure that it is trained.

Council's Dog Management Officers will continue to visit Schools in the Council area making presentation on responsible dog and cat ownership.

Enforce the provision of the Dog and Cat Management Act

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.

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

Reduce the following detrimental impacts of dogs and cats;

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. However, 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 may be initiated. Upon substantiation the Council will take the appropriate course of action.

Recommendations:

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.

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.

Also of great concern is the number of unreported attacks and the fact that the majority of attacks occur on private property.

While a 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.

Recommendations:

That Council collates statistics related to dog attacks. Examine the types and breeds of dog 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.

Dog faeces in public places

The management of dog faeces is an important environmental and health issue. Anecdotally, large amounts of dog faeces pollute our waterways and 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 dispensers dramatically reduce the incidence of discarded faeces in the community. Problems associated with vandalism have been overcome by placing the dispensers in areas of high visibility such as Council buildings.

Recommendations:

That Council investigates the feasibility of providing dispensers and dog tidy bags.

Nuisance caused by cats

Under the provision of the Dog and Cat Management Act an un-owned 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.

Recommendations:

That Council continues to provide cat traps to residents experiencing problems with cats. That Council implements the procedure and contract agreement for the loan of cat traps.

Provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats.

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

Council's dog holding facilities are of a particularly good standard. 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.

Recommendation:

That Council continue the above practice and conducts regular reviews of pounds and shelters for compliance.

Acknowledge the importance of dogs and cats in society.

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

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 correlational (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.

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

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.

Recommendation:

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".

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

Conduct regular patrols of the Council area to ensure compliance with Legislative requirements.

Invite regular input regarding dog and cat management issues from interest groups throughout the community.

Council has two Dog Management Officers and several Administration Support Staff. These Staff are trained in all areas of animal management and are 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.

Recommendation:

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

Protect native fauna and flora from the impact of dogs and cats.

Clearly define areas unsuitable for dog recreation and exercise.

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

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

Under the provisions of the Act Council must utilize money generated from dog management in the area of dog management. The implementation of this plan is a clear demonstration of Councils desire to fulfil this obligation. In addition Council's Finance Manager is responsible to ensure that an independent ledger of funds is kept and is available for scrutiny by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

