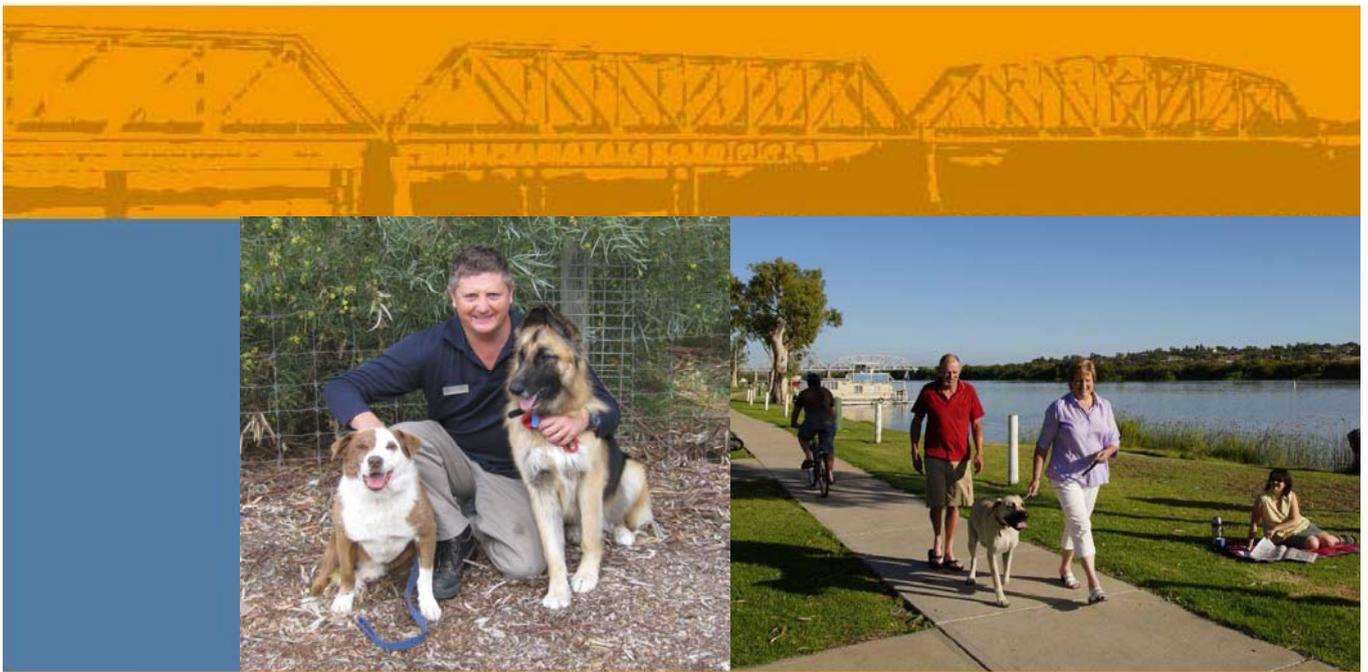




The Rural City of
**MURRAY
BRIDGE**

Bridge to Opportunity

Animal Management Plan 2011/2016



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Revision 1



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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THIS PLAN

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 Section 26A it is a requirement for Council to develop an Animal Management Plan.

The Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 Section 26A states the requirements of the Plan are:

- (a) *set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations; and*
- (b) *outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council's municipal district; and*
- (c) *outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—*
 - (i) *to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs, and*
 - (ii) *to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and legislation; including council By-Laws*
 - (iii) *to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and*
 - (iv) *to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs; and*
 - (v) *to encourage the registration and identification of dogs ; and*
 - (vi) *to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and*
 - (vii) *to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in the district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulations; and*
- (d) *provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local By-Laws that relate to the Council's area with a view to determining whether further orders or Council By-Laws dealing with the management of dogs in the Council area are desirable; and*
- (e) *provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs in the Council's area that it thinks necessary; and*
- (f) *provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.*

By endorsing this Animal Management Plan, Council will be able to improve its service to the community increasing the likelihood of animals being reunited with their owners and reducing the number of dogs being surrendered or brought in to animal shelters and consequently euthanised.

Another objective of this Plan is to have dog owners accept responsibility for the animals in their care ensuring they are healthy and content. This in turn will promote community harmony.

It is equally important that non pet owners gain an appreciation of the important role domestic animals play within the social fabric of our society. The Plan will also increase the awareness of the Community as to the importance of the role pets have in supporting their owners' physical, social, and psychological health.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1.2.1 Rural City of Murray Bridge Vision

The vision of the Rural City of Murray Bridge is:

'BRIDGE TO OPPORTUNITY'

"A vibrant regional centre on the river with an urban and rural heart:

- strong community pride
- enhanced natural environments, conserved heritage and cultural diversity
- thriving and quality rural, industry, business and tourism sectors; and
- well planned opportunities for growth, employment and quality of life"

1.2.2 Rural City of Murray Bridge Mission

The Rural City of Murray Bridge will provide excellent governance and a range of services that will contribute to achieving long term community sustainability

1.2.3 Rural City of Murray Bridge Core Values

Accountable - Effective, equitable, open, honest governance and administration.

Respectful - Respect and support for the diversity of our ideas and culture.

Innovative - Strong commitment to continuous improvement in all business processes.

Collaborative - Focus on teamwork within our organisation and create external partnerships to achieve our vision.

Inclusive - Value and incorporate local knowledge and viewpoints through effective community engagement.

Integrity - Being open and honest in all our dealings and maintaining the highest ethical standards at all times.

1.2.4 Core Purposes of the Animal Management Service

The core purposes of the Rural City of Murray Bridge animal management services are:

- To create an environment where people and pets can peacefully co-exist within the community.
- To inform and educate the community about the needs of companion animals and promote responsible pet ownership.
- To increase the understanding of normal animal behaviour within the non-pet owner population.

- To ensure that the needs of the wider community are reflected through Council's animal management plan.
- To enforce the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995, the Dog and Cat Management Regulations 2010 and Council By-Laws.

1.3 PROCESS APPLIED IN DEVELOPING THIS PLAN

The Animal Management Plan is driven by two factors:

- The needs and concerns of the residents of the Rural City of Murray Bridge.
- The statutory requirements for the Animal Management Plan to address specified matters.

In November 2006 an initial Animal Management Plan was prepared to provide guidance to Council in the management of animals. A key part of the initial Animal Management Plan was that Council undertook a program of community and internal cross-functional consultation – all aimed at establishing the needs and concerns of the residents of the Rural City of Murray Bridge in the management of dogs.

The initial 2006 consultation program incorporated the following the setting up of an Animal Management Plan Committee. The Committee consisted of representatives from SAPOL Murray Bridge, Murray Bridge Veterinary Clinic, PIRSA, Murray Bridge Dog Club and Council staff.

It was considered that as this was just a review of the Animal Management Plan focusing on dogs this review would be handled on a more informal basis and as a result the Animal Management Plan review group was formed consisting of representatives from the Murray Bridge Veterinary Clinic, Murray Bridge, SAPOL and Council staff.

Several other Animal Management Plans from other Councils were reviewed to ascertain the most appropriate direction for this Council to pursue.

1.4 RURAL CITY OF MURRAY BRIDGE – DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFILE

The Rural City of Murray Bridge is located approximately 75kms from the Adelaide CBD covering an area of 1,831 square kilometers and has a population of approximately 19,500 residents (as at 30 June 2009) living within the town boundaries and surrounding rural towns and district.

The Rural City of Murray Bridge has just undertaken the Imagine Your Rural City Community engagement initiative.

The Rural City of Murray Bridge has a diverse range of community members, with 21.1% coming from overseas countries and 5.5% speaking a different language at home. The Rural City of Murray Bridge is one of the fastest growing regional centres in South Australia and the total population is projected to grow to 33,000 by the year 2038. It is estimated that the Rural City of Murray Bridge will need to accommodate approximately an additional 13,600 persons and 6,000 dwellings by 2038.

Demographic trends indicate smaller household sizes which are expected to decrease from the existing 2.6 persons per household to an average of approximately 2.2 persons

by 2038. This will occur through a net increase in lone person households and a decrease in family households. The increase in lone person households may reflect in an increased demand for animals for companionship. This is consistent with the projection that the 60-69 age group will almost double and the 70-80+ age groups triple by 2038. There is a correspondingly projected fall in the 0-14 age group in Rural City of Murray Bridge by approximately (20%) by 2038 which may result in a reduction in demand for dogs and cats as children’s pets.

It is anticipated as allotments become smaller due to affordability, urban renewal will occur. The increased density of population within the Council’s CBD will impact on Council’s management of both the demand for open space and supporting infrastructure. Smaller properties and multi-unit developments will mean smaller areas in which to confine pets and will therefore impact on pet selection and exercising options and as a consequence of this off-lead areas for dogs will become an important issue.

The average cost of dwellings in the Rural City of Murray Bridge is slightly below the state average and well below the national average making it attractive to first home owners.

Home ownership in the Rural City of Murray Bridge is approximately 60% and this means that approximately 40% of dwellings are rental properties and of these only 3-4% of dwellings are available for renting at this time. The high proportion of rental properties has implications for the permanency of residents and hence the reason for the high number of unregistered dogs. Anecdotally, Council’s Compliance Officer’s have reported that a disproportional number of problem animals are associated with rental accommodation. Therefore, Council’s prospects for coping with animal management problems associated with rental accommodation will continue into the future.

One of the implications of the changing demographics is the importance of the requisite annual review of this Plan.

1.5 DOG STATISTICS AND DATA

The following table sets out key statistics for animal management relating to the Rural City of Murray Bridge comparative.

TABLE 1: KEY ANIMAL STATISTICS 2010/2011

	Rural City of Murray Bridge
Population	19,500
No. of residential assessments	8,358
Area (sq km)	1,832
No. of EFT Authorised Officer (animal control)	1.6
Hours training per officer annually	30
No. of Registered dogs	4,591
Estimated dog population	7,500
No. of registered declared dogs/dangerous	1
No. of animal exiated completed	

Notes on Table 1:

The above statistics are for the 12 month period ending 30 June 2009.

These figures are also drawn from estimates developed by BIS Shrapnel Pty Limited for a report in September 2006 on the 'Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy' prepared for the Australian Companion Animal Council Incorporated, a non-profit organisation described as a peak body representing pet ownership and the pet industry in Australia. The survey is based on research by TNS Social Research.

The proportion of households which own cats and dogs are estimated at:

Dogs 38.5% of household have one or more dogs

Cats 25% of household have one or more cats

The number of pets per pet-owning household is estimated at:

Dogs 1.03 dogs per dog owning household

Cats 1.40 cats per cat owning households

Applied to the Rural City of Murray Bridge these statistics mean that there are households with one or more dogs and a total of approximately 7,416 dogs within the Council district.

The Rural City of Murray Bridge issues infringement notices for breaches of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995

The following table sets out the details of numbers of animals impounded and the outcomes of those impoundments.

TABLE 2: IMPOUNDED DOG STATISTICS

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
No. of dogs impounded:	290	460	397	455
Percentage of dogs returned to owner	64%	70%	64%	54%
Percentage of dogs sent to shelter	-	91	21	28
Percentage of dogs re-housed	0			
Percentage of dogs euthanised	36	31	15	18

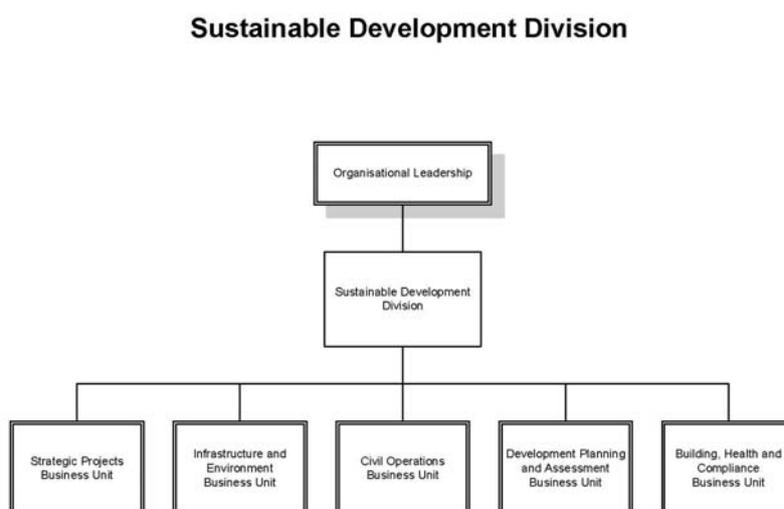
From 2006 the Rural City of Murray Bridge Council has continued to utilise the services of a local animal shelter, licensed kennel to hold impounded dogs or dogs that are not registered or unclaimed after the prescribed time under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995. Dogs that have a suitable temperament are either re-homed or sent to licensed contracted animals shelters.

Statistics are not available as to the destiny of those animals once they have left the shelters.

1.6 RURAL CITY OF MURRAY BRIDGE – ANIMAL MANAGEMENT STAFFING AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

Dog compliance functions at the Rural City of Murray Bridge are conducted by the Health, Building & Compliance Business Unit within the Sustainable Development Division of Council. This Division has responsibility for development planning, health/building & compliance, strategic projects, infrastructure, environment, open space and civil operations.

The organisational relationship is depicted below:



1.7 CURRENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES – SERVICE LEVELS

Council's animal management service deals with a broad range of issues associated with the management of domestic animals in our community. The services, service levels and volumes are:

Program/Service	Service Level	Volumes (2010/11)
Dog attack investigations	Commenced within 30 minutes – all days	7 per annum
Dog 'rush' investigations	Commenced within 1 hour – all days	6 per annum
Investigation of dangerous/aggressive dogs at large complaints	Commenced within 30 minutes – all days	
Inspection of non-compliance/complaints of declared dogs	Commence within 30 minutes on business days	
Barking dog investigations	Commenced within 2 business days	250 per annum
Investigation of dog (unregistered and unsecured) complaints	Commenced within 2 business days	28 per annum during business hours

Program/Service	Service Level	Volumes (2010/11)
		54 per annum after hours
Dogs in public places	3 on lead parks, all other off lead	
Registration of dogs	Annual renewal process conducted annually from June through to the end of August	5,290 dog registrations
Licensed dog property inspections	Conducted annually	175 per annum
Routine street patrols	During business hours whilst undertaking traffic control and parking infringement investigations	
Multiple animal permits on issue	Permits	
Identification via door knock campaign, of unregistered dogs	Commencing late September 2011 and every three years (last undertaken in 2006)	
Pound – hours open	47 hours per week, over seven (7) days	
Impounded animal photographed	On Council web within 2 business days	
Community education (media items)	2 responsible pet ownership items per year	
Pet Pep School information sessions (responsible pet ownership)	Compliance Officers attend together with a vet from the Murray Bridge Vet Clinic	
Educational material – brochures, posters, website	Revised annually	
Cat trapping (hire of cages)	3 cages available for hire by the public	Average approx 60 hire events per year at \$50.00
Dog – Fox trap	1 cage available for hire at \$70.00.	

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE RURAL CITY OF MURRAY BRIDGE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The incidence of pet ownership in Australia is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 63% of households owning some kind of pet. There are over 38 million pets of various species throughout Australia. The current estimate of cat and dog populations is 2.43 and 3.75 million respectively.

Each year in Australia tens of thousands of mostly healthy dogs and cats are euthanised (put to sleep) in animal shelters and veterinary clinics because there are simply not enough homes for them. This occurs despite an apparent progressive decrease in the total population of dogs.

The Animal Management Plan is required to address a range of prescribed matters some of which are key issues of particular concern to residents of the Rural City of Murray Bridge.

The key issues identified as concerns within the Rural City of Murray Bridge can be summarised as:

- The number of dogs which are euthanised particularly because they are unregistered, unidentified and cannot be reunited with owners, or are unwanted by their owners.
- Dog attacks and dog aggression in public places threatening public safety.
- Barking and noisy dogs, wandering dogs and dogs exercised in public places all causing nuisance in the community.

Often these issues are complex and interdependent. For example, wandering dogs are more likely to be unregistered and causing a nuisance.

2.2 UNREGISTERED, UNIDENTIFIED AND UNWANTED ANIMALS

2.2.1 National Animal Population

BIS Shrapnel in their study, 'Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy 2006', reported that the number of dogs in Australia has been decreasing over the past few years. The study concluded that as population density increases in urban areas, the percentage of households owning a dog and the incidence of multiple dog ownership will decrease, continuing an overall decline in the dog population.

The BIS Shrapnel study found that dog and cat ownership had decreased from 59% of householders in 1994 to 53% in 2006 with 37.3% owning a dog and 25.3% owning a cat. (It should be noted that estimates to 1999 advanced by the Cat Coalition and the Cat Preservation Society maintain that the decline in the numbers of cats has 'plateaued').

One of the problems with planning for animal management is the quality of reliable data available about animal population trends. (As distinct from the numbers of dogs registered which are well known to Council). This lack of authoritative data leads to

differing views prevailing and detracts from consensus on the optimum approach to addressing animal management issues.

Irrespective of whether the population is declining or has plateaued there is agreement that there is a surplus of animals – particularly cats – leading to very considerable levels of euthanising.

The last authoritative data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics was produced in 2002-03. Prior to that 'A National People and Pets Survey' was undertaken in 1995 for the Urban Animal Management Coalition (A coalition drawing its representatives from the major institutional interests concerned with the well-being, health and safety of People & Pets-the scientific community, animal welfare agencies, and the pet industry) In 2006 BIS Shrapnel produced 'Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy' for the Australian Companion Animal Council with estimates based on market research by TNS Social Research. No information is available as to how TNS undertook their research.

Strategy

Council will advocate to the Dog and Cat Management Board that it should undertake a definitive study to determine the population of dogs and cats and the trends and composition for each Council across the State. (The Dog and Cat Management Board receive 10% of the registration fee for a dog; to fund the promotion of responsible dog and cat ownership and to fund research into dog management.)

2.2.2 Animal Population

Based on the BIS Shrapnel data the total estimated dog population in the Rural City of Murray Bridge is approximately 7,500 dogs. Notwithstanding the projected decrease in the population of dogs, the number of dogs that cannot be returned to their owners, or are ownerless within the Rural City of Murray Bridge continues to be a community problem. The proportion of the impounded dogs euthanised in 2010 was seventy two (72) or 1.25% of registered dogs. The fact that the Rural City of Murray Bridge makes every attempt to reunite dogs with their owners is likely to account for these differences in returned animal rates.

2.2.3 Registration Levels

The Rural City of Murray Bridge current estimated proportion of dog registrations is significantly down on what it should be and as a result is the reason that Council is proposing to carry out a door knock to identify unregistered dogs.

2.2.4 Proportion Of Registered Dogs

Evidence shows that owners who register their dogs are more likely to act as responsible pet owners. Council favours achieving high level of dog registration (and microchipping and desexing) through education, incentive and encouragement and is proposing a blend of initiatives to achieve improvements in registration levels.

Figures confirm that approx 40% of registered dogs are desexed at the time of registration.

Most responsible dog owners have their dog microchipped, wearing tags and carrying doggy bags when exercising the dog. Conversely 80% of dogs impounded were not wearing tags even though some are registered.

Strategy

Council will:

- *Conduct a door knock to identify unregistered dogs*
- *Analyse the results of the door knock to*
 - *determine indicative levels of unregistered dogs*
 - *assess the feasibility of property inspections*
 - *identify optimum techniques for increasing registration levels*
- *Implement a program of follow up for dogs where previous year registrations are not renewed*
- *Implement a process for linking to microchipping databases in order to identify unregistered (but microchipped) animals*
- *To lobby the Dog and Cat Management Board to bring in compulsory microchipping for all new registered dogs.*

A number of measures have been successful in addressing animal identification and population issues and further measures are widely advocated as additional solutions. Microchipping has proved most advantageous in improving the identification of wandering animals. Desexing is cited as a major contributing factor to a reduction in the population and compulsory desexing is widely advocated as a means of further population reduction.

2.2.5 Registration and Microchipping Requirements

In South Australia microchipping is not compulsory although it is encouraged. Microchipping is carried out by inserting an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tag - electronic tags for storing data beneath the skin of an animal.

The most important benefit of registration together with microchipping is that lost and stray animals can be identified as owned and reunited with their owners at the earliest possible time, reducing stress for both the pet and the family members. The ability to identify dogs when they are first found wandering also impacts the overall cost to the community. If an animal can be returned to their owners directly, without the animal being transported to the kennels/pound, then the cost saving is significant (\$61) per dog.

2.2.6 Desexing

The Rural City of Murray Bridge recommends to pet owners that their pets be desexed if they are not intended for breeding. Whilst not without dispute, it is generally agreed that desexing will have the following benefits:

Health

- Reduced risk of getting cancer or other diseases of the reproductive organs, such as testicular cancer, prostate cancer/disorders in males, and cystic ovaries, ovarian tumors, acute uterine infections and mammary cancer in females, and also other diseases like perianal tumors and perianal hernias.
- Females can suffer from physical and nutritional exhaustion if continually breeding.
- Pets generally live longer and healthier lives.

Behavioural

- Pets are less prone to wander, fight, and are less likely to get lost or injured.
- Reduces territorial behaviour such as spraying indoors.
- Less likely to suffer from anti-social behaviours that are hormonally influenced. Become more affectionate and become better companions.
- Eliminates "heat" cycles in female cats and their efforts to get outside in search for a mate.

Cost

- Reduces the cost to the community of having to care for unwanted puppies and kittens in pounds and shelters.
- No additional food or vet bills for the offspring.
- No need to find homes for unwanted or unexpected litters of puppies or kittens.
- Save money from expensive surgeries from car accidents or fights, which are less likely to occur if your pet doesn't roam around.
- Dumping puppies and kittens is an ethical cost, as well as being illegal and inhumane.
- The price of desexing is more affordable to those in financial need with the assistance of organisations such as the National Desexing Network.

One of the initiatives Council is continuing to pursue is to emphasise the benefits of desexing animals, as often the wider advantages to owners and animals are not well recognised.

The statistics show that approximately 40% of registered dogs are desexed within the Rural City of Murray Bridge. However, more research should go into a decision to require the compulsory desexing of dogs especially as they pose less of a problem with their population declining faster than for cats.

Microchipping has attracted the same discounted registration fee as desexing.

Strategy

It is proposed that the fee structure be revised again for 2012 with a view to further increasing the differential in fees favouring dogs which are both desexed and microchipped in order to further encourage desexing and microchipping.

2.2.7 Compulsory Desexing

One of the more contentious proposals in animal management is the compulsory desexing of animals, other than those which are exempt. This is despite a large proportion of owners with registered dogs who have had their animals desexed.

Conversely, whilst the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) supports desexing of companion animals and says that desexing is important in population control and has other benefits for the behaviour and health of animals, the AVA does not support compulsory desexing, and considers that owner education is the most effective approach to encouraging owners to have their dogs desexed.

2.3 DOG ATTACKS AND DOG AGGRESSION IN PUBLIC PLACES THREATENING PUBLIC SAFETY

Of the approximate 1500 Customer Service and Compliance Officer Requests received by Council in relation to dogs in 2009/10, a total of 9 were related to dog attacks and a further 5 related to dog rushes (rush' means to approach a person to a distance of less than 3 metres in a menacing manner, displaying aggressive tendencies that may include snarling, growling and raised hackles). These are significant levels of undesirable incidents.

Dog attacks and dog aggression in public places represent the highest risk aspect of animal management – both to the community and to Council's Compliance Officers who must pursue and resolve these problems.

Dog attacks and dog aggression in public places are one of the most emotional and concerning issues raised by the public.

It is clear from research that respondents are concerned about such things as dogs wandering, aggression in public places and dog attacks. Whilst this plan will address these issues through a range of other recommendations it is important to respond to this perception.

Strategy

Council will actively promote and reinforce the law in regards to on and off lead management of dogs in public places. This will include instigating a program of regular surveillance particularly at on lead parks to ensure compliance with the current provisions. This will also include enforcement where there is found to be non compliance with the relevant provisions.

The dog attacks that took place in 2009-2010 within the Council area were mainly due to inadequate confinement of dogs on their properties. Most incidents occurred on the footpath or road bordering the dog owners' property, as a result of dogs displaying territorial aggression towards people passing by or attempting to access the front door. It is further reported that if owners ensured their dogs were adequately confined to the house or back yards, over 80% of dog attack incidents in public places could be prevented.

Strategy

2012/13 Council will actively promote and instigate a program to address dog attacks in the following stages.

Education Stage

The education stage involves three months of intensive education activities including:

- Letters and brochures distributed to residents in the targeted areas.
- Dog attack brochures distributed with every infringement notice issued.
- Publication of articles regarding the prevention program in local papers.
- Display of campaign posters in places such as police stations and employment agencies.

Enforcement Stage

- Council staff will rigorously police the adequate confinement of dogs through patrols or afterhours notification.
- Impounding of dogs at large.
- Issuing of infringement notices to owners.

Post Project Monitoring

- Staff continued to monitor the frequency of dog attacks.

The Australian Companion Animal Council (ACAC) believes that the harm caused by dog bites can be minimised, and supports strategies that aim to achieve a measurable reduction in the incidence of dog bites in the home and in public places. Legislation and punitive measures that target dangerous and stray dogs, and place controls on dogs in public areas have proven to be only marginally effective in addressing this problem.

Dog bites are often a human problem, associated with:

- Inappropriate selection of dogs;
- Ignorance of dog care and management; and
- Inappropriate behaviour around dogs.

Establishing an environment where dogs are carefully selected, properly cared for, socialised and trained, and supervised around children, is more likely reduce the incidence of dog attacks on humans. (See also earlier proposals for encouraging the desexing of dogs – with benefit of reducing aggressive tendencies.)

There are three classes of dogs which are subject to specific Legislative requirements.

Dangerous Dog

A dangerous dog can be two types of dogs:

- A dog declared as dangerous by a Council (includes a menacing dog).
- A dog kept as a guard dog for the purpose of guarding non-residential premises; or a dog trained to attack or bite any person or any thing when attached to or worn by a person.

Within the Rural City of Murray Bridge we have the following number of Declared Dogs registered:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| • Pet' Dangerous Dogs | 1 |
| • Menacing Dogs | 2 |
| • Restricted Breed Dogs | 0 |
| • Barking Dogs | 0 |

Menacing Dog

A menacing dog is a dog declared menacing by a Council because:

- The dog has rushed at or chased a person.
- A dog declared a menacing dog under a law of another State.

The owner of a dog declared menacing must, when the dog is outside its resident premises, ensure that the dog is muzzled in a manner which is sufficient to prevent it causing injury by biting and is under the effective control of some person by means of a chain, cord or leash.

Restricted Breed Dog

Is a breed of dog whose importation into Australia is prohibited under the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956.

Persons applying to register their dog must make a declaration as to whether their dog is a restricted breed. A Council Authorised Compliance Officer also has the power to declare the dog a restricted breed. If declared by an Authorised Compliance Officer, the officer must serve written notice of the declaration on the owner within seven days, setting out the legal requirement applying to the keeping of a restricted breed dog and their rights of appeal.

Owners wishing to appeal the Authorised Compliance Officer's declaration must make application to the Dog and Cat Management Board within 30 days. A review panel of experts in breed identification will be arranged to review the officer's decision.

There is widespread dissent to the notion that restricting particular breeds helps reduce dog attacks. Breed specific legislative measures are not seen to address the multiple causal factors involved in dog attacks. Solutions are available but of necessity, they must involve a multidimensional approach involving dog owners, parents, children, the community at large, local authorities and legislators. (See also later comments on the importance of selection of an appropriate breed of dog.)

Compliance Officers

Dog attacks are potentially one of the most serious matters facing the community and Council's Compliance Officers. As a result, Council's procedure for dealing with dog attacks is a priority and officers respond immediately to ensure any risk or potential risk to the community is minimised.

Council's present approach to the prevention of dog attacks and aggression is for Compliance Officers to give priority attention to dogs being contained under effective control at all times by being on a lead or similar when in public places or being confined to their property to minimise risk to the community.

The main tools available to reduce the risk of dog attacks include:

- Breed choice that is appropriate to the dog owner's lifestyle.
- Desexing to reduce aggressive tendencies and wandering at large.
- Early socialisation and training of dogs.
- Confinement to the home property.
- Regular exercise in accordance with Council requirements for dogs in public places.
- Environmental enrichment at home to relieve pent up energy.

Council Liability

One of the risks for a Council occurs if it acts responsibly in declaring a dog dangerous, but thereafter does nothing to follow up to ensure that the rules are being complied with. This failure exposes the Council to risk. A reasonable follow up of compliance is necessary. Expert opinion in this area asserts that Councils must have guidelines in place for the:

- seizing and declaring of a dangerous dog;
- destruction of dogs;

- monitoring of compliance with the legislation by dangerous dog owners; And Council must effectively comply with these guidelines.

Compliance Officers must therefore receive initial and ongoing training in relation to the legislation and guidelines.

Once a first dog attack comes to the notice of the Council and we do not administer it correctly then it can lead to tragedy and legal liability. Importantly once the Council knows about the first attack it has to consider its response. The Council will be subsequently judged by the response that it makes.

Strategy

Council will review the guidelines for managing dangerous dogs and audit the implementation of the guidelines.

2.4 BARKING AND NOISY DOGS, WANDERING DOGS, DOGS EXERCISED OFF LEAD IN ON LEAD AREAS AND DOGS EXERCISED IN OFF LEAD AREAS – ALL CAUSING NUISANCE IN THE COMMUNITY

A dog will be regarded as a nuisance if it injures or endangers the health of any person or creates noise that unreasonably interferes with the peace and comfort of its neighbours. Legislation requires owners of dogs and cats to look after them responsibly so they do not become a nuisance or danger to others.

The type of behaviour which can cause nuisance includes:

- barking
- straying
- property damage
- faeces in public areas.

Acquiring of New Pets

One issue highlighted throughout the consultation process was that information (on the size, breed, grooming, animal behaviour/hierarchy, animal care, cost expectations, registration and microchipping requirements) needs to be made available to pet owners at the point that they acquire a pet, or preferably before. Whether it is through pet shops, registered breeders, shelters or an individual who has a dog or cat that has a litter, the objective is to provide this information at the point of acquisition.

The importance of acquiring a suitable pet is illustrated by the fact that due to behavioural problems the average age of dogs in Australia is only 3½ years. In fact the largest cause of death of puppies less than one year of age is euthanasia due to behaviour problems and is not due to accidents or illness. The selection of the right pet at the outset can obviate many problems.

Strategy

Council will seek to develop a partnership with animal businesses in the Rural City of Murray Bridge to achieve Council's Animal Management Plan goals.

Education

Education of new owners in responsible pet ownership is essential to the needs of the pet. With more numbers of properties being developed to accommodate multiple units, backyards are getting smaller and the need for dog owners to be conscious of the needs of their pet is of the utmost importance. Education of owners at the point of acquisition helps ensure that a dog which is trained, exercised, socialised, mentally stimulated and content will seldom become a nuisance barker.

It is important to include non pet owners in education programs, as often they are unaware of normal pet behaviour and of pet owners' rights. It is vital that they are included as a stakeholder in the animal management process. By educating the whole community, the social capital of pets can be appreciated, tolerances may be lifted and a greater understanding of the benefits to the whole community may be achieved.

Animal Training

Providing the owner has had their puppy appropriately vaccinated they are encouraged to ensure that their dog is trained and has the chance to meet other dogs and other people from the time it is young. The age between 6-12 weeks is ideal when events, situations and experiences have the most impact on a dog. Socialising and introducing positive experiences will assist in raising a happy and content dog that can be taken to public places and not cause a nuisance.

Strategy

Council will investigate and assist where possible with a training program with local training establishments for dog owners in the Council area.

Exercising Dogs And 'Off Leash' Areas

The exercising of a pet is seen as critical to the health of the animal. The Rural City of Murray Bridge will investigate and identify appropriate dog off leash areas and dog on leash areas over the life of this Animal Management Plan taking into account the following extract from the Dog And Cat Management Act 1995:

Councils are required to identify and to provide for on- and off-leash areas, and to make owners responsible for collecting dog droppings. The Rural City of Murray Bridge needs to consider public safety, and the environmental and social issues associated with dogs. Monitoring of impacts is desirable followed by the development of policies on restraint and dropping disposal. Community consultation and education will be important elements of any new policies and regulations.

A variety of approaches are taken by Councils in allowing access for animals to exercise in public areas such as, parks, footpaths, bike tracks, walking tracks, shopping centres and car parks.

Dogs may be exercised 'off leash' provided they remain under effective control of the person in charge of the dog in public parks.

Strategy

Evaluate the feasibility of more suitable 'off leash' reserves within the Council area.

An issue that needs to be addressed is that of waste collection at off-leash dog areas, dog waste appears to be not only an environmental issue but a social problem within the Rural City of Murray Bridge. Dog waste disposal bags (doggy bags), are provided in several Council reserves and are serviced and maintained by Council's outside staff. It is a legal requirement for the person responsible for the dog, to pick up dog faeces and dispose of it appropriately.

Strategy

Evaluate the feasibility of other options for managing dog faeces in public areas.

Barking Dogs

Out of the customer service requests attended to by Council's Compliance Officers in 2009/10 a total of 48 were in relation to barking dogs. A portion of these requests involves long periods of investigation and mediation and pose a significant challenge to resolve successfully.

Some of the reasons dogs bark can be

- territorial
- playfulness
- provoked intentionally or unintentionally by humans, wildlife or other domesticated pets
- hunger or thirst
- boredom
- neglect
- sickness or poor diet
- attention seeking or communication
- lack of space or exercise
- separation anxiety.

The preferable approach to the problem of dog barking is prevention and management. There are several ways that this can be achieved, including

- dogs should be engaged in training or puppy school at a young age (starting before 12 weeks) to aid in preventing them from learning the nuisance behaviour barking habit and promote desired behaviours
- exercise and attention
- avoid spoiling
- provision of a kennel to provide shelter and warmth for a dog
- provision of a large, raw bone to draw their attention for long period of time
- moving the pet to the backyard or away from the direct line of vision from people walking past
- environmental enrichment and mental stimulation for the dog including such things as, interactive toys, games, food items, and exercise to the occupy time and create mental stimulation
- consult with a qualified behavioral dog trainer
- veterinary consultation to evaluate and rule out medical causes for barking and provide management advice.

Notwithstanding all attempts in the first instance at education, mediation, and empathy every complaint has the potential to go to court and each case must be substantiated with evidence to be presented at court.

The current management practices for resolving barking nuisance complaints are often considered unsatisfactory for the following reasons

- they are argued on the basis of assumptions rather than objective measurements
- they are subject to the emotive assessment of stressed people and are often quantified only by the person making the complaint e.g. diaries
- they cause community angst because everyone (including the regulating authority) tends to end up feeling like a loser
- they fail to deliver either equity or transparency of the regulatory process that is involved
- tolerance levels vary between different neighbours.

One of the frustrations in managing the problem of a barking dog is collecting reliable evidence and the analysis of that evidence. The emergence of a bark counting collar and research into barking nuisance may assist in overcoming these issues. The device is collar mounted and when fixed to the dog, rests against the dog's throat and records the sound spike of each bark.

This is clearly an issue of significant frustration with the community having been raised as an important issue during the initial process. More efficient accountabilities need to be considered in managing ongoing complaints into the future.

Strategy

Council will

- *Provide information for education of dog owners and the wider community*
- *Review Council's By Laws to provide where possible for greater accountability for dog owners in regards to barking dog offences.*
- *Purchase dog barking counting collars and use them to carry out further research into barking nuisance.*

2.5 OTHER ANIMAL SPECIES

The responsibility for the control of other species of animals such as foxes, rabbits, native animals etc. are covered by various legislation and are the responsibility of other authorities and organisations as listed below.

2.5.1 Intensive Animal Keeping

Intensive animal keeping as defined in the Development Regulations 2008 -

are the keeping or husbandry of animals in a broiler shed, chicken hatchery, feedlot, kennel, piggery, poultry, poultry battery or other like circumstances but does not include horse keeping.

The management of intensive animal keeping is governed by the Development Act 1993, Development Regulations 2008 and Council's Development Plan. Industries such as poultry, livestock, pigs etc. can fall within this definition and all have their own standard and required practices.

Further information is available from the Department for Primary Industry and Resources SA - <http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/livestock/home>

2.5.2 Native Animals

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources has responsibility for granting permits involving the use of native plants and animals and the hunting of feral animals. Permits are granted in accordance with the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972 and/or the Animal Welfare Act 1985.

In South Australia you must have a permit from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources if you wish to:

- take native animals from the wild
- rescue sick or injured native animals from the wild
- keep native animals as pets in captivity
- sell or give away captive native animals
- operate as a snake catcher
- import or export native animals.¹

Further information is available from http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/Plants_Animals/Permits_licences

2.5.3 Animal Pests

All landowners have a legal responsibility to manage pest animals declared under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*. Existing animal pests are the European Rabbit, Brown Hare, feral goat, feral pig, feral deer, feral camel, Red Fox and the dingo/wild dog.

Landowners are required to be aware of pest species on their properties and take appropriate measures to control them. Council encourages residents to contact an Authorised Officer from the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board to assist them with developing a property management plan to manage the pests on their property.

Further information is available from <http://www.samdbnrm.sa.gov.au/Land/PestAnimalPlantControlProgram/PestManagementProgram.aspx>

2.5.4 Feral Animals

Feral animals are referred to as introduced domesticated animals that have reverted to a wild state. Council recognises that populations of introduced animals can affect natural ecosystems, endanger natural plant and animal species, jeopardise agricultural production and can harbour pests and diseases. As such Council makes available the hire of 'trap cages' for residents to assist in the control of feral animals. Hire of the 'trap cages' can be arranged by contacting Customer Services Officers on 8539 1100.

Further information of feral animals is available from the following sources <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/ferals/index.html>

¹ Information provided from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

3.1 VALUES

Taking account of Council's Vision and Mission together with the core purposes of the Rural City of Murray Bridge animal management services there are a number of values which can be identified to support the strategic direction of Council's Animal Management Plan. These are that Council:

1. Commits to balancing the needs and wishes of dog owners with the amenity of other members of the community and with the environment.
2. Commits to achieving change in animal management policy and practice principally through community education, incentive and encouragement and secondly through regulation and enforcement.
3. Commits to adopting practical approaches in developing solutions to animal management issues.

3.2 STRATEGIES

The strategies proposed for the implementation of this Plan are:

1. Increasing animal registrations and encourage microchipping for dogs in order to reduce the level of dog euthanasia.
2. Reducing the threat to public safety from dog attacks and dangerous dogs.
3. Minimising any nuisance posed by dogs in the community.

Further, in order to support the implementation of this Plan two additional initiatives are proposed:

4. Ensure that Council's Compliance Officers have sufficient knowledge and skills to allow them to properly perform their functions and to deliver service at best practice standards achieved through the application of continual improvement techniques.
5. Provide mechanisms to evaluate the implementation of this Animal Management Plan and of Council's ongoing dog programs and services.

3.2.1 Strategy One: Increasing Animal Registrations and Encourage Microchipping in Order to Reduce the Level of Dog Euthanasia

Objective:

To achieve at least 85% level of dog registration in the life of this Plan (5 years).

Current/Ongoing Activities:

- Issuing annual dog registration renewal notices.
- Placement of advertising and editorial promoting registration and identification in local papers.
- Encourage microchipping of dogs for first registrations and dog transfers from another Council.
- Annual inspections of all licensed dog businesses.
- An extensive web page on Council's website dedicated to dog registration and identification.
- Registration applications and information brochures available at veterinary clinics.
- Conducting random door knocks on a regular basis.

- A program of follow-up for new pet owners.
- Discounted microchipping.

Planned Programs and Initiatives:

- Investigate the introduction of a trial discounted desexing voucher scheme in conjunction with local veterinary clinics.
- Implement a program of follow up where previous year registrations are not renewed.
- Implement a process for linking to microchipping databases in order to identify any unregistered (but micro chipped) animals.
- Investigate an amnesty for unregistered dogs through widespread publicity offering registration without fines or retrospective fees in association with the proposed property inspection and implement conclusions.
- Seek a partnership with domestic animal businesses to achieve Council's Animal Management Plan goals.
- Offer workshops to provide animal businesses with appropriate information in relation to legislation requirements.
- Review the webpage content and create a dog information page.
- Issuing of reminder notices for unpaid registrations.
- The use of the telephone system 'on-hold messages' to promote registration and microchipping.

Action Plan:

ACTIONS	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Investigate discount desexing	Year 2 of Plan	\$3,000 allocated
Undertake property inspection of unregistered dogs	Year 1 of Plan	Self funding – provided for in 2011/12
Prepare a submission to the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA advocating that they undertake a definitive study to determine the population, registration and microchipping numbers of domestic animals and the trends and composition for each municipality across the State including owned and semi-owned cats.	Year 2 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Analyse the revenue implications of free registration of desexed and microchipped dogs under the age of five months for first year of registration and prepare a report and recommendation on the basis of this analysis, including publicity proposals.	Year 2 of Plan	Within existing resources.

ACTIONS	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Examine the feasibility and economics of extending agents agreements with domestic animal businesses to capture point-of-sale registrations and provide new pet owners with local information.	Year 3 of Plan	Funding requirements yet to be assessed.
Examine the feasibility and economics of using real estate agents to promote animal registration with new property tenants.	Year 2 of Plan	\$2,000

3.2.2 Strategy Two: Reducing the Threat to Public Safety from Dog Attacks and Dangerous Dogs

Objective:

To minimise the risks of dog attack from dangerous dogs to the community.

Current/Ongoing Activities:

- Initiate immediate investigation as to the cause and circumstances surrounding the dog attack.
- If necessary initiate immediate court action and dog seizure following a dog attack.
- Investigate dog attacks through to resolution.
- Promote and encourage the reporting of dog attacks whether on private or public property.
- Annual audit for compliance of the premises housings the declared dogs in the Rural City of Murray Bridge.
- Record all declared dogs on the Council’s Declared Dog Register.

Planned Programs and Initiatives:

- Introducing patrols of all commercial and industrial areas to identify dogs on premises.
- Further education for Customer Services staff on dangerous dogs’ legislation and requirements to enable them to better inform the community.
- Investigate forming a partnership with local Australia Post offices, meter readers, and similar parties to proactively identify potential risk situations where dogs may escape confinement and attack.
- Review the in-house matrix for managing dangerous dogs and policy to ensure best practice.
- Continuing lobbying for improvement to the workability of the Declared Dogs Register.

Action Plan:

ACTIONS	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Develop roster and conduct patrols of on lead parks. Roster to include surveillance being undertaken at prime times for dog patrols including weekends, early mornings and evenings.	Year 1 of Plan and ongoing	Re-allocation of existing resources.
Define knowledge needs for all Customer Services staff on Dangerous Dog legislation and requirements and deliver through Customer Service Officer meetings.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Review in-house guidelines for managing dangerous dogs and policy in line with legislative changes to ensure best practices.	Annually	Within existing resources.

3.2.3 Strategy Three: Minimising any Nuisance Posed by Dogs in the Community

Objective:

To improve the amenity of the Rural City of Murray Bridge by encouraging owners to manage dogs in a way that protects the welfare of the animal and progressively minimises the nuisance caused by dogs.

Current/Ongoing Activities:

- Reactively investigate Customer Service Requests for animal management nuisance issues.
- Provide ongoing after hours on-call and back-up service for emergency calls.
- Participate in the Pet Pep Program to local pre and primary schools.
- Making available published information on Council's website.

Planned Programs and Initiatives:

- Developing pages for the website to educate children on responsible pet ownership with interactive information and/or provide link on Council website to "fun stuff for kids."
- Investigate a free training program with local training establishments for dog owners in the Rural City of Murray Bridge.
- Conduct information displays in shopping centres around the municipality.
- Promote the work of volunteer groups within Council who assist frail older pet owners and people with a disability in the community with pet care.

Flyers will be distributed via Council Community Care business unit and through stands in shopping centres.

- Conduct a Media Release Strategy targeting seasonal issues in local papers, incorporating 'snippets' weekly in a Council section.
- Use telephone system 'on-hold messages' for important programs.
- Identifying and evaluating options for the control of dog faeces including collar and lead pouches, signage, education and enforcement, dog toilets and dung beetles.
- Monitoring the progress of the bark counting collar and research into barking nuisance.
- Instigate barking dog management.
- Purchase dog barking counting collar as part of barking dog procedure.
- Investigate the options of installing fenced off-leash areas in parks.
- Continuing promotion of State Government initiatives and opportunities.
- Review the current provisions of Council's By Law to ensure alignment with this Plan.
- Incorporate dog registration information pack to pet shops and breeders.
- Included an information sheet regarding dog attack, registration, and infringement fees with next rates.
- Update Council's website with the above information and definitions – including links to the Dog & Cat Management Act and Regulations.

Action Plan:

ACTION	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Develop partnership with the RSPCA to promote their education programs offered on pet selection and animal behaviour to further educate the community.	Year 1 of Plan	\$2,000
Develop pages (or links) for the website to educate children on responsible ownership.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources
Examine options for conducting a free training program with local training establishments for dog owners within the Rural City of Murray Bridge.	Year 3 of Plan	Funding requirements yet to be addressed.
Conduct a Media Release Strategy targeting seasonal issues in local papers, incorporating 'snippets' weekly in a Council section.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources
Monitor the progress of the bark counting collar and research into barking nuisance.	Year 2 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Investigate the options of installing fenced off leash areas in parks.	Year 1 of Plan	Funding requirements yet to be addressed. Potentially \$20K to \$30K per dog off leash area.

ACTION	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Use telephone system 'on-hold messages' for important programs.	Year 2 of Plan	Funding requirements yet to be addressed.

3.2.4 Strategy Four: Ensuring the Council's Compliance Officers have Sufficient Knowledge and Skills to Allow Them to Properly Perform Their Functions

Objective:

To ensure that all staff involved in animal management have the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their work and to deliver service at best practice standards achieved through the application of continual improvements techniques.

Current/Ongoing Activities:

Seek Certification in IV in Local Government for all Compliance Officers.

Planned Programs and Initiatives:

- Achieve Certificate IV in Local government for all Compliance Officers
- Skill Compliance Officers in animal behaviour – identifying risk behaviours and managing barking dogs.
- Skill Compliance Officers in mediation.
- Attendance by staff and involvement in industry committees.
- Conduct Customer Service training.

Action Plan:

ACTIONS	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Define the knowledge and skill required in the role of dog management.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Complete skill audits for Compliance Officers and produce gap analysis of skills.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Schedule Compliance Officers for animal management skill training	Years 1, 2, 3 & 4 of Plan	\$10,000
Define the knowledge required by each Customer Service Officer on domestic animal administration and deliver through Customer Service Officer meetings.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Identify industry groups with relevance for Compliance Officers attendance and report back.	Year 2 of Plan	\$1,500

3.2.5 Strategy Five: Monitor Council’s Performance in Implementing the Animal Management Plan and in Ongoing Dog Management

Objective:

To establish and report against a set of Key Performance Indicators.

Current/Ongoing Activities:

Planned Programs and Initiatives:

- Implementing the adopted Animal Management Plan.
- Report against the Animal Management Plan targets and on the ongoing performance of Council’s Animal Management Services using adopted Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s).

Action Plan:

ACTIONS	WHEN	RESOURCES REQUIRED
Assign responsibility for the implementation of the Animal Management Plan.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Evaluate the set of Key Performance Indicators (below) and adopt a set for reporting purposes.	Year 2 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Review existing measurement systems to ensure capture of all the proposed data to enable reporting against the adopted Key Performance Indicators.	Year 2 of Plan	\$5,000
Commence quarterly reporting against adopted Key Performance Indicators.	Year 2 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Produce an annual report on the progress in implementing the Animal Management Plan, with recommendations for amendments presented to Council and for inclusion into Council’s Annual Report.	Year 1 of Plan	Within existing resources.
Conduct a review of the Animal Management Plan every five years.	Year 4 of Plan	\$10,000

Key Performance Indicators	Target (over the Life of the Plan)	Current
1. Dog Registration Rate (% dogs registered/estimated dog population)	85%	60.5%
2. Dog Complaints (number of dog complaints per 1,000 population)	Maintain current levels whilst increasing public awareness	21.7
3. Dog Attacks (number of dog attacks causing injury per 4.1,000 population)	Maintain current levels whilst increasing public awareness	1.14
5. Dog Re-housing Rate (% total dogs re-housed/total dogs impounded)	Maintain current levels whilst increasing public awareness	91%
6. Declared Dog Compliance Rates (number declared/number complaint/number of audits)	100%	100%

3.3 STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The table below lists the Sections of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 that this Plan is required to cover, and cross references to the strategies set out above.

Requirement of the Act		The Strategy which responds to the Plan requirement					
		3.2	3.2.1	3.2.2	3.2.3	3.2.4	3.2.5
S 26A	Method of monitoring performance and evaluating the effectiveness of services						
S 27	Appointment and Training of authorised officers						
S 26A	Promote and encourage responsible pet ownership						
S 26	Ensure compliance with Act and Regulations						
S 30	Minimise risk of dog attacks.						
S 26A	Over-population and high euthanasia rates						
S33	Encourage registration and identification of dogs						
S 26A	Minimise potential for Nuisance						
S 50, 51	Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs						
S 26A, 90	Review of Orders and By-Laws						
S 26A	Any other matters						
S 26A	Periodic evaluation of programs, services and strategies						
S 26A	Review of Animal Management Plan						

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following documents were referenced in the revision of this Animal Management Plan:

- Dog and Cat Management Act 1995
- Dog and Cat Management Regulations 2010
- BIS Shrapnel Pty Limited Report (September 2006) - 'Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy'
- Australian Bureau of Statistics – 2002/03
- Urban Animal Management Coalition - 'A National People and Pets Survey' (1995)