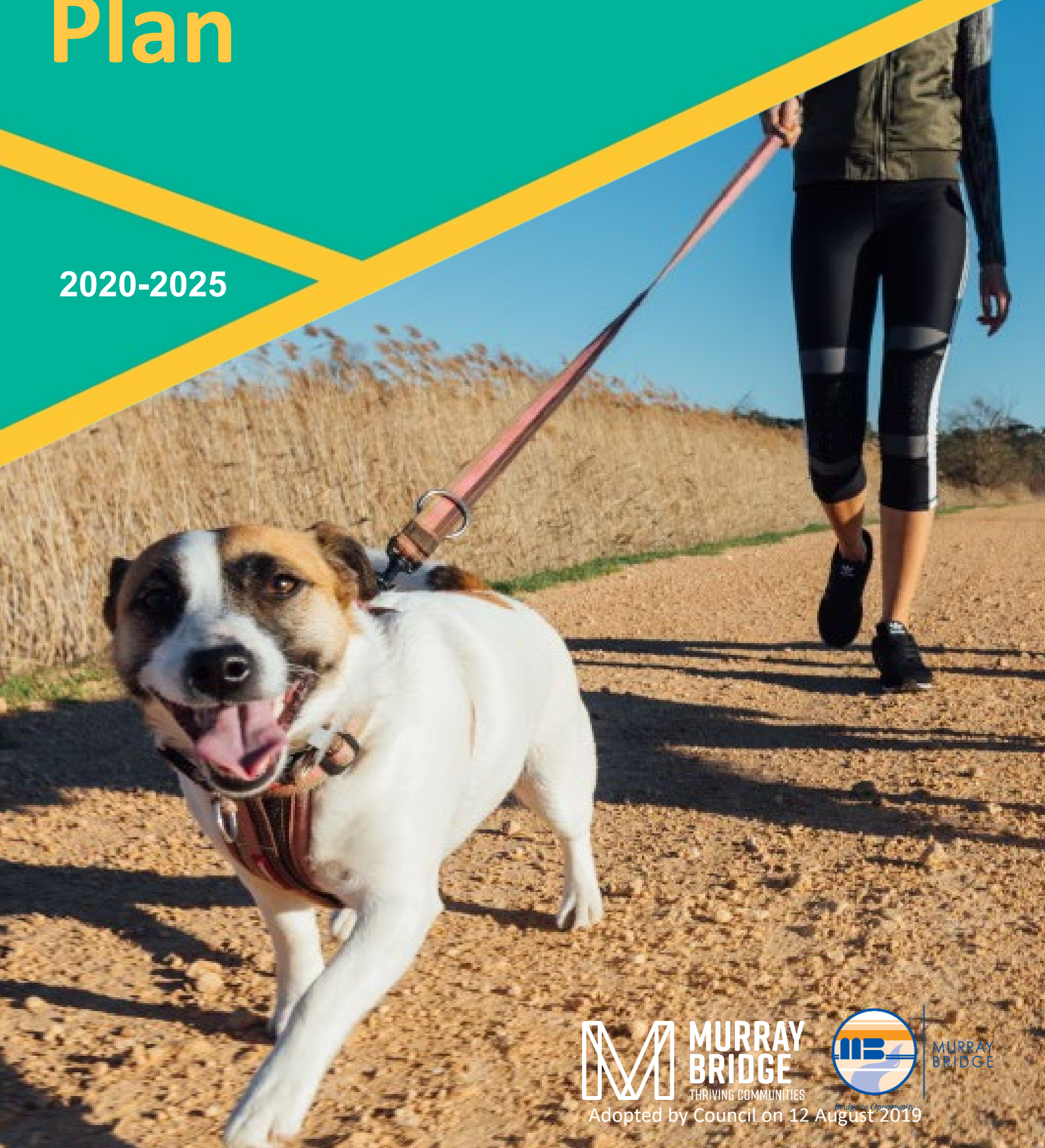


Rural City of Murray Bridge

# Animal Management Plan

2020-2025



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# Executive Summary

Every Council in South Australia is required by the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* to prepare an Animal Management Plan that will guide its management of dogs and cats. The plans are required to be prepared every 5 years and need to be approved by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

This is the Council's Animal Management Plan for 2020-2025. Central to the context for the plan is the introduction on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 of the new online portal - Dogs and Cats Online (DACO) – along with amendments to the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* that include a suite of new requirements relating to the keeping of both dogs and cats.

The Plan is structured on the following Action Plans:

ACTION PLAN 1	Registration of dogs
ACTION PLAN 2	Microchipping of dogs and cats
ACTION PLAN 3	Desexing of dogs and cats
ACTION PLAN 4	Dog and cat breeders
ACTION PLAN 5	Educating the community in responsible pet ownership
ACTION PLAN 6	Dog attacks
ACTION PLAN 7	Dogs wandering at large
ACTION PLAN 8	Dogs in Council reserves and other public places
ACTION PLAN 9	Barking dogs
ACTION PLAN 10	Cat management
ACTION PLAN 11	Unwanted/unowned dogs and cats
ACTION PLAN 12	Emergency management
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ACTION PLAN 14	Implementing the Plan

The specific actions and recommendations reflect local priorities and the views of the community. Key initiatives include:

- Community education on the suite of requirements applying to dogs and cats.
- Investigation of assistance for low income pet owners with the cost of desexing of dogs and cats
- Encouragement to local schools to participate in the Dog and Cat Management Board's *Living Safely with Dogs* Program.
- Encouragement to all dog owners to participate in puppy pre-school and dog training programs.
- Investigation of an animal behaviourist/trainer to assist with resolving difficult nuisance barking complaints.
- A Service Review/Feasibility Study of the case for introducing additional cat control and management initiatives.
- Investigation of two additional Dog Parks during the life of this Plan.
- Review of Council's role in relation to animal management during emergency situations.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the plan

This Plan has been prepared to guide the Rural City of Murray Bridge's management of dogs and cats for the period 2020-2025. It fulfils Council's legislative requirements to prepare a plan of management relating to dogs and cats. These plans are known as Animal Management Plans and they are prepared every 5 years. Each Plan needs to be approved by the Dog and Cat Management Board.

Council's animal management responsibilities are prescribed by the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* (the Act) which includes the following objectives:

*To encourage responsible dog and cat ownership*

*To reduce public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats*

*To promote effective management of dogs and cats.*

The requirements of the Act form the basis for this Plan which has been tailored to meet local priorities and to respond to feedback and input from the community, industry stakeholders, elected members and Council staff.

It should be noted that the Plan only relates to the keeping of dogs and cats as other animals kept by the community are not covered by the Act.

## 1.2 How was the plan developed

Preparation of the Plan included a review of the existing Animal Management Plan and animal management service provided by the Council.

Initial input and feedback was received from Council staff involved in the animal management service and from the community and industry stakeholders.

Elected members were briefed on the draft Plan before it was finalised and released for a second round of community feedback.

Refer to Appendix 1 for more details on stakeholder and community engagement.

## 1.3 Structure of the plan

The structure of the Plan is as follows:

SECTION 2 provides a description of the Rural City of Murray Bridge, an overview of the City's responsibilities under the Act and a description of the Rural City's current animal management service.

SECTION 3 provides an overview of the Plan.

SECTION 4 contains the action plans required for Council to successfully carry out its responsibilities.

# Background

## 2.1 Profile of the Rural City of Murray Bridge

The Rural City of Murray Bridge is located in the Murraylands District, about 80km south east of the Adelaide CBD. It covers an area of 1,832 sq kms.

In 2018, its population was 22,165 up from 20,858 in 2016 and 19,742 in 2011. It is expected that it will grow to a population of 28,143 by 2041.

The community is centred in Murray Bridge which has a population density of 6.12 persons per hectare in the built up area and 1 person per hectare on its urban fringe. The rural areas and townships have an average density of 0.15 persons per hectare.

The population is expected to grow in all parts of the Council area although growth will be concentrated in the western fringe of Murray Bridge where 66% of the growth will occur, followed by the eastern fringe of Murray Bridge where 26% of the growth will occur.

In 2016, the population comprised 8,393 separate households including the following dominant household types:

- 28.1% couples without children
- 27.5% lone person households
- 23.1% couples with children

Tourism and recreation are strong features of the economy and social activity in the Council area.

The Council district is contained in the Murraylands Fire Ban District.

The implications of this analysis for the Animal Management Plan are that:

- There is likely to be an ongoing increase in the number of dogs and cats living in the Council area associated with ongoing population growth
- There are different animal management challenges in urban and rural areas of the Council area
- The animal management team has a large geographic area to cover
- The primary locations of urban growth may have implications for the location of new Dog Parks
- Tourism presents additional challenges for the Council's animal management service
- The needs of pet owners should be considered in planning for emergency management

## 2.2 Council's Animal Management Service

### **DOG AND CAT MANAGEMENT ACT 1995**

The Act provides the foundation for the Council's animal management service. Key features of Council's responsibilities under the Act are that:

- Dogs must be registered. Cats are not required to be registered. Council may give consideration to the introduction of cat registration following a detailed service review and community consultation.
- Dogs and cats must be microchipped and the details entered into Dogs and Cats Online.
- All dogs and cats born after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 must be desexed and the details entered into Dogs and Cats Online.
- Breeders of dogs and cats must be registered.

- People selling dogs and cats must give the new owner a written notice setting out the identity of the seller, the identity of the breeder, details of vaccinations and other treatments, information relating to the microchip, desexing and other relevant medical information and in the case of dogs subject to control orders, details of the order.
- Dogs are not allowed to wander at large, attack a person or animal, or cause nuisance, defecate in a public place unless the owner immediately removes the faeces and disposes of it in a lawful and suitable manner. Dogs are required to be leashed on streets and roads.
- Councils have the power to make a range of orders in relation to the keeping of dogs.
- Councils have the power to seize and detain dogs.
- There are specific requirements in relation to the detention/removal of cats from remote or fragile areas and in relation to unidentified cats in other areas.
- Councils have the power to make a range of by-laws in relation to the keeping of dogs and cats.

## **DOGS AND CATS ONLINE (DACO)**

DACO was introduced on 1st July 2018. It provides a statewide online portal that has replaced individual council registers. Dog owners now pay their registration fees online. The Board sends out renewal and reminder notices and registration discs, whilst Councils enforce the requirements.

DACO is funded by the Board through a percentage of dog registration fees remitted to the Board.

The new microchip requirements require cat owners to upload their details into DACO which then becomes a tool Council can use to manage cats.

## **FUNDING**

All monies received from dog registrations and expiations are spent on dog management. Council runs the animal management service at break-even or as near as possible. Council pays 12% of funds received from dog registrations to the Board to fund DACO.

## **COUNCIL BY-LAWS**

Council's By-law 2 relates to use of Local Government Land. Sections 7.5 and 8.1 regulate the presence of animals on Council owned land.

Council's By-law 5 relates to dogs. It sets out the Council's approach to the processes and standards to be applied with regards to applications to keep more than one dog at a single dwelling as required by the By-law.

## **COUNCIL PARKS AND RESERVES – LEASH AND ACCESS REQUIREMENTS**

Council has four Dog Parks where dogs can be exercised off the leash provided they are kept under the effective control of a responsible person. These parks are listed in Appendix 2. Elsewhere in the Council area, dogs are required to be leashed in public places.

## **POUND SERVICE**

Council's pound service is provided by a local dog kennel approved by the Dog and Cat Management Board Compliance Team in the last audit carried out in 2016.

## **OTHER ANIMALS**

Whilst animals other than dogs and cats are not considered by this Plan, Council has powers under the Local Government Act 1999 and the Local Nuisance and Litter Control Act 2016 to control animals on a property that is causing a hazard or nuisance including the keeping of excessive numbers of animals.

## ANIMAL MANAGEMENT DATA

The following is a summary of the relevant RCMB animal management statistics for the period 2017-2018.

<b>Animal Management Data 2017-2018</b>	
Total dog registrations	4346
Total number of microchipped cats	N/A – DACO introduced in 2018
Total expiations issued	91
Number of court cases	1
Total court actions for year	1
Number of official animal complaints (including cat complaints, dogs wandering at large and barking dogs)	186
Number of dogs collected and returned to owner before impounded	22
Number of dogs impounded	184
Number of dogs impounded and subsequently returned to the owner	139
Number of reported of dog attacks (including harassment)	43
Number of Authorised Officers	3

# Plan Overview

This section provides an overview of the Plan and the key recommendations contained in the following Action Plans.

The move to DACO and the new legislative requirements introduced in 2018 are significant changes to the way dogs and cats are managed in South Australia. It is appropriate that the new systems and procedures be reviewed mid-way through the implementation of this Plan.

The new system enables Council to cross match DACO data to ensure registration, microchipping and desexing requirements are met. This exercise will be undertaken each year. Spot checks of dogs will continue to be made in Council reserves and other public places.

The cost of desexing dogs and cats can be onerous for some members of the community. Council will consider ways to assist dog and cat owners on low incomes to meet this cost through involvement with a discounted desexing program.

The Dog and Cat Management Board provides resources to the community and Council on responsible pet ownership. This information will continue to be provided on Council's website.

A Council education focus for the life of this Plan will be the dissemination of a suite of requirements applying to dogs and cats. Council staff acknowledge that some confusion exists in the community about different requirements applying to different dogs and cats. Confusion was also confirmed in the statewide survey of cat owners undertaken by the Board in 2014.

This includes potential for confusion about:

- What is a statewide and what is a local requirement
- What applies to dogs and to both dogs and cats.
- What applies to all dogs and cats as compared to those born after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 (including what is the actual date).
- The difference between microchipping and registration (a common source of confusion).
- What is required under the Act or a Council by-law as compared to what is only encouraged.
- The different ages at which dogs are required to be registered and dogs and cats are required to desexed.

It is envisaged that it will be a simple matrix with a range of dissemination approaches used.

Reducing and managing dog attacks are core animal management functions. In addition to current initiatives, Council will encourage dog owners to enrol their dogs in both puppy pre-school and formal dog training. Council will also encourage every school in the council area to take up the *Living Safely with Pets* program offered to schools by the Board. It is noted that the new desexing requirement is expected to reduce the number of dog attacks over time.

Council recognises the importance of providing a range of places for dogs to be exercised on and off the leash. Four dog parks are presently available for residents and Council will investigate establishing two additional dog parks including one in Murray Bridge East. A policy will also be developed on where and when dog waste facilities will be provided in public parks and reserves.

Council responds to approximately 130 barking dog complaints a year. Most complaints are resolved in a few weeks. However some can drag out for months and in some cases for more than a year causing considerable angst to all parties and consuming many hours of officer time. Council will investigate and conduct a cost benefit analysis of involving a dog behaviourist or trainer on difficult cases. Whilst there may be a financial cost to Council, this could be outweighed by improved outcomes and a reduction in officer time spent managing these complaints. The



actions in the Plan that encourage dog owners to participate in puppy pre school and formal dog training could also assist in preventing barking dog problems.

Whilst Council does not have a cat by-law, Council believes there may be a latent concern about cats relating to cat nuisance, cat overpopulation and the impact of cats on wildlife. Council will undertake a service review and/or feasibility study of additional cat control and management initiatives that may be warranted taking into account legislative obligations, the views of the community and initiatives of neighbouring Councils.

In relation to emergency management, Council's will clarify its role in preparing for, responding to and recovering from bushfires and other emergencies including provision of information and clarification of Council's role in accommodating animals during emergency situations.

Improved animal management data collection and collation will be planned and commenced in Year 1. This is important to ensure consistency year to year and accurate reporting.



# Action Plans

The Plan contains the following Action Plans:

ACTION PLAN 1	Registration of dogs
ACTION PLAN 2	Microchipping of dogs and cats
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## Action Plan 1

### Dog registration

#### Objective

To ensure that dogs are registered in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

#### Discussion

Dogs over the age of 3 months are required to be registered.

With the introduction of DACO, dog registrations are now managed by the Board, which sends out annual registration reminders and tags. Council is responsible for promoting and ensuring people register their dogs.

New procedures have been implemented to manage and enforce these requirements. These procedures will be reviewed midway through the implementation of the Plan.

Council can set its own registration fees including any rebates. These need to be entered into DACO to allow the system to charge the correct fee.

There are two challenges associated with dog registration: obtaining the first registration and ensuring people re-register annually.

Council has information on its website about registration requirements and follows up those who have not re-registered their dog.

DACO allows cross-referencing of registrations against microchip data. For non-South Australian dogs or cats, further microchip information can be obtained by contacting Central Animal Records.

It is known that many people mistakenly believe that if their dog is microchipped, this means it is registered. In addition, some people don't know if cats are required to be registered or not. An action for the life of this plan is to develop and disseminate to the community a simple matrix of the animal management requirements that apply to dogs, cats and new generations of dogs and cats. This will include the requirement that dogs are registered by the age of 3 months. Details on how the matrix will be disseminated to the community will be developed via Action Plan 5.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Undertake spot registration checks of dogs in Council reserves and other public places	Number of spot checks made	Within existing resources	Annual
Cross reference registration and microchip data to uncover unregistered dogs	Number of dogs that are registered in accordance with the requirements of the Act	Within existing resources	Annual



Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Include registration requirements in the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix.	Matrix completed	Within existing resources	Year 1
Review procedures for dealing with enforcing dog registrations	Review undertaken  Procedures updated as appropriate.	Within existing resources	Year 3



## Action Plan 2

### Microchipping of dogs and cats

#### Objective

To ensure that dogs and cats are microchipped in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

#### Discussion

With the introduction of DACO and amendment to the Act, all dogs and cats are required to be microchipped. Approved microchip implanters are required to upload the details of the animals they microchip on to DACO.

This will help to return pets to their owners and help to distinguish between owned and unowned dogs and cats.

New procedures have been implemented to manage and enforce these requirements. These procedures will be reviewed midway through the implementation of the Plan.

Community education is required to ensure pet owners are aware of the new mandatory microchipping requirement. An action for the life of this plan is to develop and disseminate to the community a simple matrix of the animal management requirements that apply to dogs, cats and new generations of dogs and cats. This will include the requirement that all dogs and cats are microchipped. Details on how the matrix will be disseminated to the community is detailed in Action Plan 5.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Undertake spot microchip checks of dogs in Council reserves and other public places	Number of spot checks made	Within existing resources	Annual
Include microchipping requirements in the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix.	Matrix completed  Number of dogs and cats that are microchipped in accordance with the requirements of the Act	Within existing resources	Year 1
Review procedures for dealing with enforcing microchipping of dogs and cats	Review undertaken.  Procedures updated as appropriate.	Within existing resources	Year 3

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Cross reference registration and microchip data to uncover unregistered dogs	Number of dogs that are microchipped and registered in accordance with the requirements of the Act		Annual
Include registration requirements in the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix.	Matrix completed	Within existing resources	Year 1
Conduct an annual review of the Plan's currency, implementation and performance against key measures.	Annual review conducted	Within existing resources	Annually

## Action Plan 3

### Desexing of dogs and cats

#### Objective

To ensure that dogs and cats are desexed in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

#### Discussion

With the introduction of DACO and amendment to the Act, all dogs and cats born after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 are required to be desexed. Veterinarians are required to upload the details of the animals they desex to DACO.

The desexing requirement may help to reduce the number of unwanted and unowned animals. It has the potential to reduce dog attacks, the number of dogs and cats found wandering at large and the number of unwanted/unowned dogs and cats over the long term.

New procedures have been implemented to manage and enforce these requirements. These procedures will be reviewed midway through the implementation of the Plan.

Council is now able to cross reference animals included on the database to check for animals that are not desexed and follow up as appropriate.

Partnerships with relevant stakeholders will be considered to provide discounted desexing especially for low income earners, pensioners and other concession card holders.

An action for the life of this plan is to develop and disseminate to the community a simple matrix of the animal management requirements that apply to dogs, cats and new generations of dogs and cats. This will include the requirement that all dogs and cats over the age of 6 months are desexed. It will encourage owners of older dogs to consider getting their dogs desexed since non desexed dogs are more likely to be involved in a dog attack than those that are desexed. Details on how the matrix will be disseminated to the community is detailed in Action Plan 5.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Check DACO database for dogs that are not desexed in accordance with the requirements of the Act.	Number of dogs and cats that are desexed in accordance with the requirements of the Act	Within existing resources	Annual
Include the mandatory desexing requirement in the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix.	Matrix completed  Number of dogs and cats that are microchipped in accordance with the requirements of the Act	Within existing resources	Year 1

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Investigate Council's involvement with a discounted desexing program.	Review undertaken and taken up	TBA	Year 1
Review procedures for dealing with mandatory desexing of dogs and cats	Review undertaken. Procedures updated as appropriate.	Within existing resources	Year 3





## Action Plan 4

### Dog and cat breeders

#### Objectives

To ensure the community is aware of the requirement to obtain dogs and cats from a registered breeder.

To ensure that breeders of dogs and cats are registered in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

#### Discussion

With the introduction of DACO, anyone who breeds a dog or cat is now required to register as a breeder with the Dog and Cat Management Board. The new legislation requires breeders to include their registration number in any relevant advertisement including sales online. People wishing to obtain a pet must do so from a registered breeder.

An action for the life of this plan is to develop and disseminate to the community a simple matrix of the animal management requirements that apply to dogs, cats and new generations of dogs and cats. This will include the requirement that all dogs and cats need to be bred from and obtained from a registered breeder. Details on how the matrix will be disseminated to the community is detailed in Action Plan 5.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Include the requirement to obtain dogs and cats from a registered breeder in the <i>Dog and Cats Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix.	Number of residents who are aware of the requirement	Within existing resources	Year 1 Ongoing
Enforce compliance with the breeder registration requirement	Breeders registered as required	Within existing resources	Ongoing

## Action Plan 5

# Educating the community in responsible pet ownership

### Objective

To implement appropriate community education activities designed to achieve responsible pet ownership.

### Discussion

Council provides information about responsible pet ownership on its website, social media channels and other communications channels. This includes links to the Board's website. This information will be maintained and reviewed where appropriate.

Council believes that any additional education efforts it undertakes should be carefully focused and targeted. This is because of the limitations of a small geographic area and limited resources available to an individual council.

Council will have one education focus for the life of this Plan. Its objective will be to ensure the community knows the different requirements applying to dogs and cats. This includes the varying requirements applying to dogs, to dogs and cats and to dogs and cats born after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. It will highlight the difference between registration and microchipping (a known source of confusion), the different ages at which registration and desexing must be completed, Council's local law requirements and set out other parameters of responsible pet ownership such as the benefits of confining cats and the training and socialisation of puppies and dogs. It will set out the requirements as simply as possible in a matrix that will be disseminated as widely as possible. Its fundamental objective will be to ensure that all residents are aware of the different animal management requirements applying in the RCMB. Developing and disseminating the program could draw on partnerships with local veterinarians and a range of other stakeholders where appropriate.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Review all education material presently provided by Council and expand and update as appropriate	Reviews undertaken	Within existing resources	Year 3 Year 5
Develop the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix	Matrix completed	Within existing resources	Year 1
Develop a dissemination strategy for the <i>Dog and Cat Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix Implement	Dissemination strategy developed and implemented  Number of residents correctly citing the requirements	Within existing resources	Year 1  Year 2-5

## Action Plan 6

### Dog attacks

#### Objectives

To reduce the number and severity of dog attacks.

To optimise Council's procedures for dealing with dangerous dogs.

#### Discussion

There are two main issues relating to dog attacks:

- Managing dogs that have attacked a human or animal.
- Preventing future dog attacks via patrols, enforcement of legislation and educating the community about dog behaviour and bite avoidance.



The number of reported dog attacks in the RCMB is not high (average of 40 attacks/rushes per year), however reducing risk and responding to those that do occur is a core animal management role. This includes dogs that attack, harass, chase or otherwise endanger the health of a person, animal or bird owned by or in the charge of another person (whether or not actual injury is caused).

The RSPA believes that a dog's individual tendency to bite depends on at least five interacting factors: heredity, early experience, socialisation and training, health (physical and psychological), and the behaviour of the victim. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) believes that additional factors include the sex and age of the dog along with a range of other social and environmental factors.

The RSPCA's Information Paper Preventing Dog Attacks in the Community (2011) say that a prevention strategy for dog attacks must contain the following key elements:

- Registration and microchipping of all dogs – so that all dogs are traceable to their owners and that owners can be directly informed of their responsibilities.
- Control of unrestrained and free roaming dogs.
- Provisions for the control of menacing dogs.
- Desexing of non-breeding dogs – this is because entire male dogs are at greater risk of aggression and female entire dogs add to this risk by attracting entire males.
- Education of the public, and in particular children in dog behaviour and bite prevention.
- Training of owners and dogs – training programs based on positive reinforcement techniques provide an opportunity to educate owners on responsible dog ownership, basic dog behaviour and use of appropriate training techniques.
- Socialisation of dogs with people and other animals – because unsocialised dogs are more likely to show aggressive behaviour.

Registration and microchipping of dogs is mandatory in South Australia, however not all dogs are registered or microchipped. It is an ongoing challenge for every Council (refer Action Plans 1 and 2).

Desexing is mandatory for all dogs over the age of 3 months born after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. Whilst this does not apply to older dogs, the impact of this new requirement will take effect over the next decade. Owners of older dogs will be encouraged to have their dogs desexed. This is addressed in Action Plan 3.

Council has standard operating procedures for dealing with dog attacks and dogs that are wandering at large. Council staff also patrol Council reserves and streets. It also provides basic information about avoiding attacks on its website along with a link to information provided on the Board's website. These procedures will be reviewed and updated where appropriate.

It is not known how many dog attacks occur in Australia because not all dog attacks are reported. The AVA's data suggests that in Australia, 73% of dog attacks occur in the domestic environment<sup>1</sup>. This differs from local government data which suggests that 62% of dog attacks occur in public places. The difference is thought to be explained in part by the fact that few people report bites by their own dog to Council.

If most dog bite incidents occur in the home, it is considered that it would be more effective to support activities which include bite avoidance education (with children aged 0-14 being the prime target) and socialisation and training of dogs<sup>2</sup>. This could have flow-on effects to reducing dog attacks that occur in public places.

Most veterinarians provide puppy pre-school programs (usually 4 x 1 hour classes held with a group of new puppy owners). These programs teach puppies how to interact with strangers, other puppies, loud noises and even children. Owners also gain knowledge about pet care. Council will encourage puppy owners to enrol in these programs.

Training beyond puppy pre-school is also important. Options include obedience classes and training in the home with a dog behaviourist. Council will encourage residents to have their dog undergo training by providing web links to information on the RSPCA's training classes and list of Force Free Trainers.

*Living Safely with Pets* is a structured learning program that aims to teach children how to live responsibly and safely with dogs and cats. It is delivered by the Board free of charge to school children from Reception to Year three across the state (following a school request). This is particularly valuable for children who don't have a dog at home. Council will ensure every school in the Council area is aware of and encouraged to avail themselves of this option.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Augment the information on Council's website about the known causes of dog attacks and the importance of socialising and training puppies and dogs. Provide links to puppy pre-school and force free dog training programs	Website updated	Within existing resources	Year 2
Write to each school in the Council area to remind them of the importance that all children receive training in bite avoidance and to consider participating in the Board's <i>Living Safely with Pets</i> program	Responsibility assigned	Within existing resources	Annually

<sup>1</sup> DANGEROUS DOGS - A SENSIBLE SOLUTION - AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION 2012

<sup>2</sup> DANGEROUS DOGS - A SENSIBLE SOLUTION - AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION 2012

## Action Plan 7

### Dogs wandering at large

#### Objective

To reduce the incidence of dogs found to be wandering at large.

#### Discussion

Dogs that are wandering at large are a risk to the safety of the community and themselves. A major contributing factor to dog attacks that occur in public places is inadequate confinement of dogs to their home property with many of these incidents occurred on the footpath or road bordering the dog owner's property. This highlights the importance of appropriate confinement of dogs.

Council has standard operating procedures for dealing with dogs that are wandering at large including trapping/capture of wandering dogs, park and street patrols and information and education material. This material will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.



Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Review Council's procedures for dealing with dogs wandering at large and update as appropriate	Quarterly reviews held	Within existing resources	Year 2
Review existing education material for its content on the importance of securely confining dogs and the implications if a dog is found wandering at large	Review undertaken	Within existing resources	Year 2



## Action Plan 8

# Dogs in Council reserves and other public places

### Objectives

To provide appropriate places for dogs to be exercised off the leash.

To ensure dog owners comply with the requirements that dogs are exercised on the leash where required and under effective control of a responsible person in off leash areas.

### Discussion

Dog parks are places where dogs can be exercised off the leash providing they are kept under effective control of a responsible person at all times. They provide an alternative form of exercise and are a place where dogs can socialised around other dogs and humans. They are also popular with dog owners.

Dogs are required to be leashed in all public places except designated dog parks. There are no public places in the Council area where dogs are prohibited.

Council officers patrols public places to ensure dogs are leashed/kept under effective control as required and that owners dispose of their dog's droppings appropriately.

Council presently has four dog parks where dogs can be exercised off the leash:

- Kuchel Park - off Burdekin Avenue
- Lot 41 Industry Road - western end of Tim Overall Reserve
- White Park - off Gladstone Street
- Johnstone Park - Dog Obedience area

Council will investigate creating two additional dog parks during the life of this Plan, including one in Murray Bridge East.

Dog owners are required to remove and dispose of their dog's droppings from public places. Dog waste disposal bags are provided in several Council reserves and are maintained by Council's outside staff. Council receives periodic requests for additional dog waste bag dispensers to be provided. A council policy will be developed on the number and location of dog waste bag dispensers.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Continue to patrol Council's streets parks and reserves to ensure dog owners are complying with the requirements relating to leashing, effective control and disposing of dog faeces	Number of patrols	Within existing resources	Ongoing

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Investigate the creation of two additional dog parks in the RCMB area, including one in Murray Bridge East	Reviews undertaken	Within existing resources	Year 2 and Year 5
Include the requirements relating to dogs in public places in the <i>Dog and Cats Requirements in Murray Bridge</i> matrix	Number of residents who are aware of the requirement	Within existing resources	Year 1 Ongoing
Develop a policy on the number, location and maintenance of dog waste bag dispensers	Policy developed	Within existing resources	Year 4

## Action Plan 9

### Nuisance barking

#### Objectives

To reduce the number of barking dog complaints.

To optimise procedures for resolving of barking dog complaints.

#### Discussion

The Council is responsible for investigating barking dog complaints. If a complaint is proven, the owner can be fined or taken to court.

There are two issues with nuisance barking: reducing the number of complaints and optimising the way that complaints received are managed.

The reasons dogs bark excessively can include:

- External stimuli (e.g. passers-by, other dogs barking, possums)
- Separation anxiety
- Territoriality (visitors to the property)
- Boredom
- Neglect
- Poor health
- Lack of space or exercise

Often the owner is not at home to hear or stop the barking which can also become a learned response/entrenched habit. With difficult cases, the owner may not have the skill and/or commitment to resolving the problem.

Council receives on average 130 barking dog complaints a year and has standard operating procedures in place to deal with them. Council provides information to assist people to reduce the incidence of problem barking. Council staff can also assist owners with suggestions on reducing a nuisance barking problem.

#### Prevention

Prevention should be the starting point because once excessive barking becomes entrenched it is often harder to resolve.

New dog owners will be encouraged to attend puppy pre-school and/or dog training to reduce the incidence of excessive barking. This can be instrumental in achieving awareness and prevention. The importance of regular exercise and an enriching home environment will also be emphasised as these can help to reduce the number of problems.

#### Resolution

In most cases, nuisance barking is resolved quickly using Council's standard operating procedures. However in some cases, the barking has become entrenched and/or the owner does not have the skill to resolve the problem. In these cases, many hours of officer time is spent trying to resolve the problem. It is considered that the involvement of a professional dog behaviourist or dog trainer could help to identify the cause of the barking and actions required to reduce the nuisance.

Council will investigate the use of a dog behaviourist or trainer to assist with difficult nuisance barking complaints. Such a program could include consultation with a dog behaviourist/trainer in one or more sessions. To be eligible, it would require commitment by the owner and their acknowledgement of the problem. Whilst there would be a cost to Council, this could be outweighed by the potential for improved outcomes and a reduction in officer hours



spent investigating barking dog complaints. Council's financial input could put a greater onus on the dog owner to commit to the work required to resolve the problem. An investigation and cost benefit analysis of this type of program will be undertaken.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Continue to use Council's standard operating procedures for investigating nuisance barking complaints	Number of nuisance barking complaints successfully resolved	Within existing resources	Ongoing
Update education material on the importance of early socialisation and training of puppies and dogs to reduce the incidence of nuisance barking  Disseminate the information via Council's website, social media and other communications platforms	Information updated  Number of visits to the relevant page on Council's website  Number of posts to Council's social media and other communications platforms	Within existing resources	Year 2
Investigate and conduct a cost benefit analysis of the involvement of a dog behaviourist/trainer in difficult nuisance backing complaints	Cost benefit analysis completed  If appropriate program trialled and reviewed  Number of nuisance barking complaints successfully resolved	\$25,000	Year 3  Year 3-5

## Action Plan 10

### Cat control and management



#### Objective

To implement a cat control and management regime that reflects the views of the local community.

#### Discussion

The new microchip and mandatory desexing requirements are important steps in addressing cat control and management (refer Action Plans 2, 3 and 4).

Council does not receive a large number of complaints about cats. However this could reflect the fact that Council has had only a limited role in cat management. Concerns about cats were prominent in the initial feedback received from the community in relation to this Plan.

Community concerns about cats usually relate to impacts on wildlife, nuisance from trespassing cats and the large number of unowned cats that need to be euthanised.

The Act provides Council with the opportunity to explore options relating the registration and/or confinement of cats to their home property. These issues will be considered in a Service Review/Feasibility Study into cat management taking into account legislative obligations, adjoining council cat management services and community views.

Council will also provide ongoing education activities including the benefits of confining cats to their home property.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Undertake a service review/feasibility study into cat management	Review undertaken	TBA	Year 1
Include information on Council's website on cat control and management including the benefits of confining cats to their home property	Responsibility assigned	Within existing resources	Year 1
Include the fact that cats are not required to be registered or confined to their home property in the Dog and Cats Requirements Matrix	Number of residents who are aware of the requirement	Within existing resources	Year 1 Ongoing

## Action Plan 11

### Unidentified, unowned and unwanted dogs and cats

#### Objective

To ensure unidentified, unowned and unwanted dogs and cats are dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

#### Discussion

Council utilises the services of a local licensed kennel to hold impounded dogs that are not registered or are unclaimed after the prescribed time under the Act. Dogs that have a suitable temperament are either re-homed or are sent to licensed contracted animal shelters.

Council needs to nominate a facility for detaining cats that are unowned or are unmicrochipped and cannot be returned to their owner.



Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Review procedures for dealing with unidentified, unowned and unwanted dogs and cats	Review undertaken.  Procedures updated as appropriate.	Within existing resources	Year 3
Decide on a facility for detaining cats	Responsibility assigned	Within existing resources	Year 1

## Action Plan 12

### Emergency management

#### Objectives

To clarify Council's animal management and welfare role in preparing for, responding to and recovering from bushfires and other emergencies.

#### Discussion

Council's role in planning for and preparing for emergency situations including bushfires needs to be clarified. This could include information and reminders about preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies. It could also clarify Council's role in accommodating dogs and cats before, during and following emergency events.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Clarify Council's role in preparing for, responding to and recovering from bushfires and other emergencies	Review undertaken	Within existing resources	Year 2
Disseminate information to the community as appropriate about emergency management and animal management/welfare	Information disseminated to the community	Within existing resources	Year 2

## Action Plan 13

### Training of Authorised Officers

#### Objective

To ensure staff involved in animal management have appropriate and required knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities.

#### Discussion

Council's animal management service requires specialist staff who also need ongoing training.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Ensure Authorised Officers and other staff involved in delivering the animal management service have appropriate training	Type and number of training sessions attended by staff.	Within existing resources	Ongoing

## Action Plan 14

### Implementing the Plan

#### Objective

To ensure the plan is implemented in accordance with the requirements of the Act and remains up to date.

#### Discussion

Procedures need to be in place to ensure the Plan is implemented.

Data collection and collation is vital to ensure the Plan can be evaluated against key measures.

Annual work programs for meeting the Council's animal management requirements will simplify the processes and ensure they occur in an orderly manner as planned.

An annual review of the Plan will evaluate its currency, implementation and performance against key measures.

Actions & Strategies	Key Measures	Resources	Timeline
Assign responsibility for implementing the plan to a nominated Council officer	Responsibility assigned	Within existing resources	Year 1
Establish an internal project team to meet quarterly to review progress	Project team established  Quarterly reviews held	Within existing resources	Year 1
Review existing measurement systems to ensure capture of all data to enable reporting against key measures	Review completed  Data collection system set up	\$5,000	Year 1
Establish annual work programs for meeting the Council's animal management requirements	Work programs set up	Within existing resources	Year 1
Conduct an annual review of the Plan's currency, implementation and performance against key measures	Annual review conducted	Within existing resources	Annually

# Appendix 1

## Community feedback in relation to the Plan

Council's first round of community engagement occurred In **February 2019** via two online surveys made available to the general community and to identified external stakeholders.

There was a limited response to both surveys:

- The community survey attracted 192 visits and 35 responses.
- The stakeholder survey attracted 16 visits and 3 responses.

The number of completed surveys provides some indication of the views of the general community and external stakeholders but the feedback received is not a statistically reliable representation of the community's views.

The responses provide the following observations:

- There was a predictable focus on a range of dog related issues especially dog attacks, removal of dog waste, compliance with leash laws and effective control of dogs parks.
- A notably high level of concern with cats.
- Concern about the fate of lost and unwanted dogs and cats.

The initial feedback informed the preparation of the draft Plan.

A second round of community engagement occurred in **May 2019** with the release of the draft Plan for community and external stakeholder feedback.

Feedback and comments were invited via the following means:

- Council's website and Let's Talk page;
- Council's Facebook page;
- Direct correspondence to identified stakeholders and those who previously commented; and
- A notice in the Murray Valley Standard.

A Fact Sheet was prepared to assist people reviewing the draft Plan.

One written submission was received. It included the following comments in relation to the draft Plan.

- The Plan is easy to follow and understand.
- The need for cat management is important (including the need for cat confinement, purchase of cats from a registered breeder, a limit on the number of cats per household and cat overbreeding).
- At present dog owners walk their pets off leash in Sturt's Reserve and don't pick up their mess. Reinforcing the message and education will be imperative.
- Keep up the good work.

Cat management is specifically addressed in Action Plan 10. It will also be considered in Action Plans 2, 3, 4, 5 and 11. Action Plan 10 includes the conducting of a *Service Review/Feasibility Study into cat management taking into account legislative obligations, adjoining council cat management services and community views*. The issues raised in this written submission will be considered in this review. No changes to the Plan were considered to be warranted.



# Appendix 2

## Access by dogs to public places in the Council area

Section 26A(2) of the Act requires this Plan to include provisions for parks where dogs may be exercised off the leash and for parks where dogs must be under effective control by means of physical restraint. The Act also provides for parks to be designated where dogs are prohibited.

Council presently has four Dog Parks where dogs may be exercised off the leash and under effective control. They are:

- Kuchel Park - off Burdekin Avenue
- Lot 41 Industry Road - western end of Tim Overall Reserve
- White Park - off Gladstone Street
- Johnstone Park - Dog Obedience area

It is proposed that additional areas for dogs to be exercised off the leash be investigated during the life of this plan (refer Action Plan 8).

There are no parks in the Council area where dogs are prohibited.

In all other public places in the Council area, dogs must be under effective control by means of physical restraint.





# Appendix 3

## Limits on Dog Numbers Policy (under Section 6 of By law 5 – Dogs)

# LIMITS ON DOG NUMBERS POLICY (under Section 6 of By Law 5 – Dogs)



COUNCIL POLICY	
Reference Number	834215
Responsible Business Unit	Development & Regulation
Responsible Officer	General Manager Sustainable Communities
Legislation	Local Government Act 1999
Relevant Delegations	General Manager – Sustainable Communities Manager – Development & Regulation Team Leader – Regulation Compliance Officers (Authorised Officers)
Related Policies Management Guidelines Frameworks	By Law 5 - Dogs
Link to Strategic Plan	Objective 2.2 - Care for the Community
Council resolution	233.3
Date Adopted	12 December 2016
Review Date	2020
Previous Revisions	Nil

## POLICY STATEMENT

This policy sets out the Council's approach to the processes and standards to be applied with regards to applications to keep more than one dog at a single dwelling, as required under By Law 5.

## OBJECTIVES

To provide clear guidance for Authorised Officers and the public as to the process and requirements for permits sought in regard to the keeping of more than one dog as set out in Part 2 – Section 6 of By Law 5 – Dogs.

To provide the opportunity for residents to keep more dogs than permitted under By -Law No. 5 – Dogs, whilst maintaining the amenity of the area.

## SCOPE

This policy applies to permit application received to keep more than the limit on dog numbers as defined under By-Law No. 5 Dogs. When determining dog numbers, only dogs which must be registered, as required under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 will be counted.

## PRINCIPLES

To effectively monitor and control the number of dogs on properties within the Rural City of Murray Bridge, using a consistent approach for the benefit of the community.

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# LIMITS ON DOG NUMBERS POLICY (under Section 6 of By Law 5 – Dogs)



## IMPLEMENTATION

1. That Council staff enforce By-Law No. 5 Dogs and the provisions of the Dog and Cat Policy.
2. That Council staff enforce By-Law No. 5 – Part 2-Limits on dog numbers on private premises.
3. That Council fixes fees as adopted in Council's Schedule of Fees and Charges.
4. On receipt of an application, an Authorised Officer will undertake an inspection of the subject premises. The purpose of the inspection is to educate the applicant about responsible dog ownership and to determine the suitability of the premises to contain more than one dog and to ensure the amenity of the area. The Council may also make contact with adjoining neighbours to ascertain their position on the matter.

Permits will generally be issued in accordance with the following

**Small Dwelling** – will be suitable for no more than one dog;

**Medium Dwelling** – will be suitable for no more than two dogs; and

**Large Dwelling** – may be suitable for more than 2 dogs at the discretion of the Authorised Officer.

A permit may be issued if the dogs are suitable and are assessed as have an acceptable impact on the amenity of the area, in the opinion of an *Authorised Officer*. A permit of exemption to By Law 5 may be issued on advice of Authorised Officers, the Team Leader – Regulation or the Manager – Development & Regulation.

5. Where a permit of exemption is issued it will be subject to the following conditions:
  - 5.1 The property at which the dogs are kept is to be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times;
  - 5.2 The dogs must not become a nuisance to other residents or the general public;
  - 5.3 Registration of dogs must be maintained at all times;
  - 5.4 That the Rural City of Murray Bridge be notified within 10 working days if the permit holder or dog(s) move; and
  - 5.5 The Rural City of Murray Bridge may at any time vary or revoke this permit in accordance with By-Law 1 - Permits, Offences, Penalties And Repeal.
6. Permit holders who are permitted to keep more than the prescribed number of dogs and with a permit issued after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 need not reapply for exemption, for the duration of the life of the dogs on the permit.
7. Where a permit holder or dog/s move premises an application to vary the permit is required and may further require an additional inspection by an Authorised Officer.
8. Where in the opinion of the Team Leader – Regulation or the Manager – Development and Regulation a permit application should be refused or a permit be revoked, a right of review will be offered to the applicant with respect to the matter, which will be undertaken by the General Manager – Sustainable Communities.

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# LIMITS ON DOG NUMBERS POLICY (under Section 6 of By Law 5 – Dogs)



## DEFINITIONS

**Authorised Officer** is an officer appointed pursuant to *Part 3-Division 1 – Authorised Persons of the Dog and Cat Management (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act 2016*.

**Small Dwelling** is comprised of a residential flat or strata unit on land less than 400m<sup>2</sup> and without a secure yard of at least 100m<sup>2</sup>, which will be suitable for no more than one dog.

**Medium Dwelling** is comprised of house and land up between 401 m<sup>2</sup> and 800m<sup>2</sup> and with a yard in excess of 101 m<sup>2</sup> will be suitable for no more than two dogs.

**Large Dwelling** is comprised of house and land in excess of 801 m<sup>2</sup> and with a yard in excess of 101 m<sup>2</sup> may be suitable for more than 2 dogs at the discretion of the Authorised Officer.

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