

# Domestic Animal Management Plan

Yarra Ranges Council 2013-2017



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#### Introduction

The level of pet ownership in Australia is one of the highest in the world. Yarra Ranges Council has the third largest dog and cat populations of any Victorian municipality. It is therefore no secret that dogs and cats are central to the lives of Yarra Ranges residents.

In this plan, Council seeks to continue to encourage more people to enjoy the pleasure and health benefits that come from owning a pet. In doing so seeks to ensure there is balance between the needs of pet owners and the community, by providing services that encourage animal companionship within a framework of responsible pet ownership.

The Domestic Animal (Dogs and Cats) Management Plan (DAMP) sets out how Yarra Ranges Council manages its responsibilities under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and delivers services to enhance and promote responsible pet ownership.

The DAMP will be implemented over four years and will require community input over that period to ensure that our approaches are representative of community expectations.

Yarra Ranges will continue to devote considerable resources to create a pet friendly environment. We look forward to you helping us creating an environment that promotes our region as a great place to own a pet.

Cr Jim Child Mayor Glenn Patterson CEO

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## **Executive Summary**

This plan meets the legislative requirements of the Domestic Animal Act 1994 and explores the emerging issues that relate to dog and cat ownership within Yarra Ranges.

Responsible pet ownership is a responsibility that pets owners have to ensure their pets are properly cared for and are well behaved at home and when they are being exercised.

As well as functions that are required to be delivered under the Act, data collated in the process has informed decisions about what actions need to be delivered over the next four years.

The key actions addressed in the plan are:

- Review the prescribed areas where dogs are prohibited or can be exercised on or off a lead.
- Reinstate the introduction of controls relating to cat confinement.
- Reduce the incidence of dogs and cats wandering at large
- Reduce the incidence of dog attacks

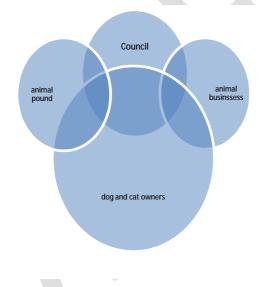
## Why a plan?

Section 68A of Domestic Animals Act 1994 requires all Victorian Councils to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan every 4 years.

Services well known to most residents like the pick up and reuniting of lost cats and dogs, investigation of barking dog complaints and dog attacks, and the administration of pet registration will continue as core functions of Council.

In continuing these functions the Council will be required to demonstrate the effectiveness of services it provides and its compliance with the Domestic Animals Act 1994. This will be achieved:

- By using a mix of educational and regulatory approaches to facilitate responsible pet ownership;
- Working with the community, the provider of contract pound services and animal business operators;
   and
- Prioritising animal management strategies over the next four years.



## Why only cats and dogs?

The State Government only requires Councils to address in this Plan matters concerning dogs and cats administered under the Domestic Animal Act 1994.

The Council, however, continues to provide services and responds to matters concerning other animals including; wandering livestock and animal keeping under it local laws.

## What is domestic (dog and cat) animal management?

Animal management includes:

- The registration and identification of dogs and cats.
- Protecting humans and animals from dog attacks.
- The confinement of dogs and cats.
- The overpopulation of dogs and cats.
- Any impacts of dogs and cats on the environment.
- · Nuisance behaviour.
- Access to public open spaces by dogs and their owners.
- The health and well-being of dogs and cats.

## Preparation of the plan

In preparing the plan, existing operations were reviewed as well as the previous DAM Plan 2008-2011.

Comments and input received through the public consultation phase has helped further shape the direction and actions to be undertaken.

A range of media through our website and local media outlets was prepared to promote the plan and allow residents and visitors to have their say.

## Key issues

The following key issues were identified following review of the first Domestic Animal Management Plan 2008-2011 and issues that have arisen through feedback provided to the Council by the community:

- Review of dog off lead areas
- straying cats and dogs
- · unaccounted for restricted breed dogs
- · consistently high numbers of serious dog attacks
- the feral cat population
- · unregistered dogs and cats

### Main themes

Council is required to check that its animal control services are adequate and officers administering the services and regulatory functions of the Act are adequately trained. In addition to its statutory functions, Council has the opportunity in the Plan to outline the services, programs and strategies it intends to pursue that deal with:

- promotion of responsible ownership of dogs and cats;
- ensuring people comply with the Act;
- minimising the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals;
- any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats;
- the registration and identification of dogs and cats;
- minimising the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance;
- the identification of all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs;
- review existing orders made under this Act and any local laws; and
- evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

## **Strategic objective**

Having a high level of pet ownership in Yarra Ranges indicates the importance of pets in the lives of its residents. The shared community vision and strategic objectives for Yarra Ranges recognises that animal companionship contributes to 'a rich social fabric' and is a community that values responsible pet ownership and high standards of animal welfare.

#### **Position Statement**

Yarra Ranges is a municipality with great lifestyle strengths that balances pet ownership with the needs of the community and the environment.

#### **Guiding Principles**

The following principles underpin actions with regard to dogs and cats:

- The belief that pets contribute to our quality of life.
- A requirement to balance the needs of those who own pets and those who do not.
- To value responsible pet ownership.
- Proactive animal management and education.
- Ensuring the environment is protected from the negative impacts of dogs and cats.
- To work in partnership with contract providers and others.
- · Council playing a leadership role in animal management.

## Our approach

The Council and authorised officers acknowledge and recognise the responsibility that comes with administering and enforcing the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Council has a minimal tolerance to non compliance where activities may result in significant harm to our community and/or pose serious risk of personal injury, damage to property or the environment.

This approach will be managed by giving priority to activities that pose a high risk and allocating appropriate levels of resources proportionate to the level of risk.

How we deal with members of the community and the general public is important to us and we seek to instil community confidence in our compliance and enforcement through:

- The principles of Natural Justice / Equality and fairness by consistently applying the Educate, Ask, Tell, Enforce philosophy;
- Good Governance including:
  - Transparency
  - o Risk management
  - Accountability
  - Consistency
- Ethical practice including compliance with:
  - o Legislation
  - Regulations
  - Policies
  - Standard Operating Procedures
  - Management decisions and directions
  - Separation of Powers and undue influence
  - Responsible use of discretion
  - Conflict of interest.

In our dealings with residents and visitors to Yarra Ranges Council will ensure that

- Officers are respectful, professional and courteous at all times
- Officers are appropriately qualified and skilled to administer and enforce the Domestic Animals Act 1994
- Information and advice is accurate and timely.
- Responses are communicated to affected persons in a timely manner.
- Appealed decisions are conducted independently in accordance with legal requirements.
- Privacy and confidentiality is maintained.
- The laws, associated policies and guidelines are readily available and accessible to the community in hard copy and electronic versions

#### Our services

#### Registration and Identification

In relation to registration of cats and dogs Council offers the following services:

- Administration of pet registration, transfer and renewal.
- Issuing of 'Lifetime' registration and replacement tags free of charge.
- Discounted registration rates for pensioners and concession card holders
- Free new registrations from 1 February to 9 April each year
- User friendly online payments options for registration renewal.
- Mandatory registration of animals prior to release from the pound.

2007-08		2012-13	
Cat registrations:	8404	Cat registrations	7622
Dog Registrations:	23772	Dog Registrations	25106



registrations could be attributed to a population increase of 2.6% in Yarra Ranges over the same period. This shows that compliance with dog registration requirements is improving. There is no clear explanation for the decrease of cat registrations.

The introduction of mandatory micro-chipping in 2007 is seen as a significant step forward in identifying animals and then being able to return them to their owners.

## **Fees and Charges**

The Yarra Ranges Council applies the pet registration fees that are set by the State Government each year. Most years the pet registration fees increase by 2.5-3%.

From the pet registration fees collected councils are required to pay State Government \$2 for every cat registration fee, \$3.50 for every dog registration fee and \$10 for every domestic animal business registration.



## Your registration fees at work

The Council uses the pet registration fees to fund the following services:

- Dog and Cat collection, reuniting, and transport to a pound facility both during business and after hours;
- The hiring and collection of cat cages;
- Investigating dog attacks and nuisance dog and cat complaints;
- Patrols of parks and reserves;
- Inspection of Animal businesses including pet shops, boarding kennels and breeding establishments;
- Producing educational material to promote responsible pet ownership;
- Operation of pound contract; and
- Coordinating Animal Welfare activities in an emergency

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

**Encourage Dog and Cat registration** 

- · Conduct a campaign to increase dog and cat registrations
- · Promote the benefits of registration

## Cat and Dog Nuisance

The most common nuisance requests for cats and dogs are dogs wandering and barking dogs. However since 2009 there has been an increase of 13% of requests for dogs wandering and 33% for barking dog requests.

The increase in barking dog requests may be caused by increased density of living in many parts of the municipality, with 55% of requests coming from Urban areas in 2012 compared to 44% in 2009. Whilst the number of requests has increased, no increase in enforcement has been needed. Over the last five years, there have been only four infringement notices and one court prosecution for dog barking between 2009-2012. Most requests have been resolved by gathering data showing the frequency of barking and the impact on neighbours, and then educating owners on how to reduce or eliminate unwanted barking.

It may never be possible to prevent barking complaints as barking is a natural behaviour for dogs. Council's continued focus will be to respond and manage barking dog requests, equip residents being impacted on to resolve complaints with their neighbours in the first instance and educate dog owners to prevent barking dogs becoming a nuisance .

Encouraging dog owners to exercise their dogs in the dog on-leash and off-leash areas may have a flow-on effect to reduce nuisance requests over time, given unprovoked and incessant barking behaviour can be as a result of a dog not being regularly walked. A review of the off and on lead areas is a key initiative and a way to provide adequate spaces for owners to exercise their dogs while ensuring that those who don't own a dog are not being impacted on.

Dogs and cats wandering outside the confines of their homes continues to be a significant problem with over 1300 pets per year being picked-up by a Ranger. Dogs and cats being left to roam often leads to unwanted litters and dog attacks on people, livestock and other pets.

Requests received about excess cats and dogs in residential areas are managed by applying Council Local Laws. A person that keeps more than two dogs and/or two cats on a residential property requires a permit. Officers conduct assessments to ensure that properties are suitable for housing excess numbers of animals and that owners have the necessary skills and knowledge to manage their animals. Permits also have conditions attached to them, to ensure a balance between the needs of the animals and surrounding neighbours.

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Reduce the incidence of dogs and cats causing a nuisance

- Review Councils procedures for managing barking dog complaints
- Promote educational material for dog and cat owners on confinement



## Dog Attacks

The number of reported dog attacks has increased by 17% from 2009 to 2012. The reason that dog attacks still continue in such high numbers is mainly due to owners not adequately containing or having effective control over their dogs. Most of the attacks reported occur in the urban areas of the Council. Such as increase is alarming, despite recent tragic dog attacks reported in the media and our strong enforcement approach. On average 100 of the 200 dog attacks reported each year are prosecuted in Court.

The no tolerance approach to dog attacks will continue to ensure the safety of the community is protected. Dog attack requests will continue to be responded to as a high priority, both as part of the business hours, after hours and weekend 'on call' duties. Officers will continue to maintain best practice investigation processes to produce outcomes that reduce the incidence of attacks.

In addition to our responses to requests we will continue to educate about preventing dog attacks through factsheets, media releases and web information.

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Reduce the incidence of dog attacks

- · Gather data on the outcomes of dog attack prosecutions
- Review the enforcement approach for dog attacks
- Promote messages to prevent dog attacks

# Orders made under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 Act and local laws

Under section 26(2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 Council can make Orders for the regulation of Cats and Dogs in public places.

The Order details the controls for regulating the behaviour of dogs in public places. This Order was created in 1999 and was reviewed in 2003. It is important to note that the current Order does not contain any controls for the regulation of cats. Such controls previously existed in the former Animal Control Local Law 2007 which was subsequently revoked when the General Provisions Local Law 2012 was introduced. A key action in this plan is to reintroduce controls in the Order that regulates the behaviours of cats.

In summary the Order has controls for:

- Keeping dogs under effective control
- Areas where dogs are prohibited
- Areas where dogs can be off a leash

Council has the following Local laws that applying to the keeping of cats and dogs

- Number of cats and dogs that can be kept on any land without a permit
- Condition of the land where animals are kept
- Distance from neighbouring dwellings where animals are kept
- Size of enclosure where animals are kept
- Condition and structure of enclosure where animals are kept
- Feeding of stray animals without a permit
- Keeping of a dog or cat not to cause a nuisance
- Training of dogs on Council Land without a permit
- Fail to carry means of collection and disposal of animal's excrement
- Fail to immediately collect and dispose of animal excrement
- Fail to produce to Authorised Officer any means of collection and disposal

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Provide appropriate approaches for the regulation of cats and dogs

- Review the Order that prescribes areas where dogs are prohibited or can be exercised on or off a lead.
- Reinstate the introduction of controls relating to cat confinement.
- Promote Councils local laws that relate to the keeping of animals



## Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs

In Yarra Ranges, as at the 1 January 2013 the following numbers of dogs had restrictions imposed:

Restrictions	No.
Menacing Dogs	1
Dangerous Dogs ( guard dogs)	0
Dangerous Dogs (declared)	17
Restricted Breed Dogs	2
TOTAL	20



Our approach to ultimately impose restrictions on dogs and their owners is reliant on our Officers following the relevant Department of Primary Industries Code of Practice, correctly applying the delegated powers under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and adhering to the standard operating procedures.

In recent times since the changes to the restricted breed laws, Council Officers have responded to reports from the community which has required the standard for restricted breed dogs to be applied. Two such cases have been challenged in VCAT.

The decision to declare of dangerous dogs is considered following the seriousness of the attack, potential risk to the community and the outcome of a prosecution in Court of a dog attack. The strict requirements placed on dog owners are monitored by officers to ensure safety of the community is not put at risk.

In 2011, tougher restrictions were imposed on owners of certain breeds of dogs. The challenge remains to identify restricted breed dogs and educate owners on the appropriate management of these dogs.

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Miminise incidents associated with dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

- Continue to conduct annual inspection of premises with dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs.
- Identify certain dog breeds on the animal registration database.

## Overpopulation and Euthanasia

According to Yarra Ranges Animal Registration data base 95% of cats and 75% of dogs are de-sexed.

Having a high number of cats de-sexed, micro chipped and registered goes some way to managing overpopulation. To further encourage the de-sexing of pets, vouchers are offered to pensioners and concession card holders to have their pets de-sexed.

The estimates of the stray and feral cat populations in Yarra Ranges is unknown, but is estimated that at least 50% 'owned' cats remain unregistered and many more 'unowned' cats reside in urban and bush land areas. Most "stray" cats are not lost, but simply have no owner. No responsible owner is looking for them so they continue to survive in neighbourhoods by residents feeding them to prevent starvation. In so doing enable the cats to breed which exacerbates the problem.

Council's pound contractor, Animal Aid delivers services to manage the welfare of lost unwanted pets. Food, shelter and vet care is provided to pets waiting to be reunited with the owner or re-housed with a new owner. Re uniting and re-housing rates for dogs and cats remains higher than most other providers. Euthanasia rates are at 11% for dogs is lower than the national average of 30-37%. Rates of 53% for cats is lower than the national average of 60-74%. Generally, higher euthanasia rates have been the trend over the past four years, which tends to indicate cats are undervalued by the community.



#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Miminise the number of stray, abandoned and unwanted pets

- Work with the pound services contractor to identify ways to increase reuniting and re-housing rates for cats.
- Continue to educate and provide programs to encourage dog owners to de-sex their pets.

#### **Domestic Animal Businesses**

Domestic Animal Businesses such as animal shelters, breeding and boarding establishments, pets shops and dog trainers are required to be registered under the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Council has the following Domestic Animal Businesses:

Businesses	No.
Pet shops	4
Animal Shelters	1
Boarding establishments	15
Breeding establishments	1
Boarding and Breeding	1
Dog training	2
TOTAL	24

Permits to keep excess dogs and cats under the local law provides an effective way control dog and cat numbers. Changes to the DAAct in 2011 also meant that breeders with fewer fertile female cats and dogs would require to be registered as a Domestic Animal Business. Both of these controls reduce the opportunity for illegal breeding activities.

Annual compliance checks conducted by Rangers ensure that anyone buying pets or having them cared for can be assured that a high standard of welfare is being maintained by the operators of businesses.

#### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses in the municipality

- Continue to educate new and existing Domestic Animal Businesses operators.
- Annually inspect Domestic Animal Businesses to ensure compliance with the Act.

## **Emergency Management**

The 2013 Animal Control Program Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan is a sub plan to the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) for the Yarra Ranges Council.

This plan recognises that the Department of Primary Industries is ultimately responsible for animal welfare during and an emergency and focuses upon the management of livestock and companion animals (pets) during emergencies in the Yarra Ranges.

Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan developed in late 2008 was put to the test through the Feb 2009 Black Saturday fires. One of the few Councils at the time to have such a plan ensured there was a planned approach to response and recovery activities.

The result of Council continuing to review its approaches to providing emergency relief has meant that provision of animal welfare has become fundamental to the set-up and functioning of relief centres.

In the plan, human life and safety will always take precedence over animal life

### Actions to be delivered over 4 years

Improve the functionality of the Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan

- · Annually review the Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan
- Actively participate in exercises to test the Plan

#### Our staff

There are seven Animal Management Officers commonly known as 'Rangers'. Rangers are suitably qualified and skilled to enforce the Domestic Animals Act 1994. Most of the Rangers have their own cat or dog and are animal lovers, so they have an appreciation and understanding of the relationship between a pet and its owner.

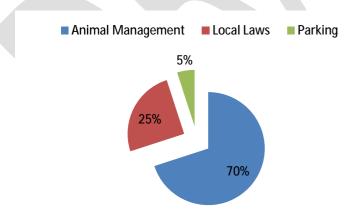
For Rangers most of the day is spent in the field. Their field based work is supported by the administration provided by the Business Support Team located at the Council Offices in Lilydale.

#### Experience and training

Each of our Rangers has either experience in Municipal Laws or Animal Management or an equivalent qualification by completion of a Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation. Refresher training in Animal Handling and Conflict Resolution is conducted annually.

Rangers also attend as required seminars, training courses run by the Bureau of Animal Welfare and through other training providers, such as Animal Aid.

Apart from responding to matters to do with cats and dogs Rangers also respond to a diverse range of requests including the investigation and enforcement local laws and other State Government laws. The breakdown of the average daily work duties for a Ranger are:



## Identifying us

Rangers are easily identified by the uniform they wear, their identify cards and by the vehicles they drive. Being visible and easily identifiable is particularly important at night so residents can be confident with who they are dealing with.



## **Animal Transport**

The vehicles used by the Rangers are purpose built for the transport of cats and dogs and comply with Part 3 of the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds.

# **Action Plan**

The first year actions in the Plan are:

Actions	Responsible department	when
<ul> <li>Provide appropriate approaches for the regulation of cats and dogs</li> <li>Review the Order that prescribes areas where dogs are prohibited or can be exercised on or off a lead.</li> <li>Reinstate the introduction of controls relating to cat confinement.</li> <li>Promote Councils local laws that relate to the keeping of animals</li> </ul>	Local laws Recreation Environment Parks and Facilities	30 June 2014
Identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses in the municipality	Local Laws	30 June 2014
<ul> <li>Continue to educate new and existing Domestic Animal Businesses operators.</li> <li>Annually inspect Domestic Animal Businesses to ensure compliance with the Act.</li> </ul>		
Improve the functionality of the Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan	Local Laws Risk, Emergency and Community Safety	30 June 2014
<ul> <li>Annually review the Animal Welfare Emergency Management         Plan     </li> <li>Actively participate in exercises to test the Plan</li> </ul>	oonmunity safety	

## Monitoring and review

Each year the action plan will be reviewed and new a new action plan developed.

Council will monitor, review and continually improve the implementation of this plan to provide for the efficient and sustainable management of domestic animals. Through ongoing evaluation of the Domestic Animal Management Plan Council will be able to adapt its programs and actions to enable identified goals to be achieved.

To assist, the following indicators of performance will continue to be measured, and trends monitored:

- Number of animals microchipped.
- Number of animals registered.
- · Number of animals desexed.
- Number of complaints regarding nuisance behaviour of animals.
- Number of animals impounded.
- Number of dog attacks reported.
- Percentage of owners that comply with dangerous dog control requirements.

# Attachment 1 – Statistical Information

Statistical information	2012	explanation	2011	2010	2009
Population	149026	0.63% annual population growth	148773	147790	146862
Households	55344	remains steady	54884	54261	53689
Area	2,470 sq km		2,470 sq km	2,470 sq km	2,470 sq km
No of Animal Management Officers	6		6	7	6
No of Animal Management Supervisors	1		1	0	0
Hours training per officer each year	12		12	12	12
Registered Dogs	25033	1 in 2 households have a dog	24763	24334	23748
Estimated Dog population	35046	40% more than registered			
Registered Cats	7623	1 in 7 households have a cat	7407	8621	7701
Estimated Cat population	10672	50% more than registered			
No of Declared Dangerous Dogs	2	Total - 17	3	6	2
No of Declared Menacing Dogs		Total - 1	0	1	0
No of Declared Restricted Breed dogs	2	Total - 2	1	0	0
Number of prosecutions conducted	98		109	108	no data
No of dogs seized	103		55	no data	no data
No of Dog impoundments	1121		1094	1177	1120
Returned to owner	838	75% of dogs impounded	968	969	897
rehoused	123	11% of dogs impounded	121	130	116
euthanised	127	11% of dogs impounded	162	178	194
No of Cat impoundments	440		457	490	517
Returned to owner	66	15% of cats impounded	70	64	79
rehoused	142	32% of cats impounded	155	179	140
euthanised	232	53% of cats impounded	232	242	291
Customer Requests - Dogs and Cats	2012		2011	2010	2009
Cat - Pick up	271		303	360	354
Cat - Trap	237		325	307	300
Cat - Wandering	46		41	41	59
Dog - Attack	211		209	179	175
Dog - Barking	276		217	206	185
Dog - Pick up	1061		991	1071	1033
Dog - Rush	161		137	132	110
Dog - Wandering	474		484	507	411