

Discussion Paper

Domestic Animal Management plan 2017 - 21

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The City of Melbourne is preparing its Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2017-21, which guides our management of cats and dogs through this four-year period, and we need you to have your say on what you feel the key issues and objectives are, and what actions you’d like to see us take.

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act) requires Domestic Animal Management Plans to be prepared by every council in Victoria at four yearly intervals.

The plan will guide the City of Melbourne in its service to the community, increasing the likelihood of animals being reunited with their owners and reducing the number of cats and dogs in animal shelters and potentially being euthanased. It will also assist the City of Melbourne to promote increased liveability in the municipality through minimising the nuisance, and possible danger, created by some dogs and cats.

We’ll be developing our draft plan with feedback from our key stakeholders like The Lost Dogs’ Home, The Lort Smith Animal Hospital and RSPCA, as well as with you – our community. You can share your views with us at our community workshop, or simply take the online survey or participate in the live chat on this site. And remember, whether you’re a pet owner or not, it’s important that we understand views from a range of members of the community.

Note: The plan relates only to the keeping of dogs and cats. Other animals kept as pets are not addressed in the Act.

## 2 Background to this plan

Part 5 of the Domestic Animals Act requires every council in Victoria to prepare, at four year intervals, a Domestic Animal Management Plan. The Act requires the plan to:

* 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 the Act and its regulations
* outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer the requirements of the Act in the Council’s municipal district
* outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district
* promote and encourage responsible ownership of dogs and cats
* ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation
* minimise the risk of attack by dogs on people and animals
* address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
* encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
* minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
* effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and regulations
* provide for the review of existing orders made under the Act and local laws that relate to the Council’s municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable
* provide for the review of any other matter related to the management of dogs and cats in its municipal that it thinks necessary
* provide for the periodic review of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan

In addition, every Council must:

* review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan.
* provide the Secretary of the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan.
* publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

The Domestic Animal Management Plan is required to be completed and with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources by Friday 3 November 2017.

You can access the City of Melbourne’s [current Domestic Animal Management Plan](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/residents/pets/Pages/domestic-animal-management-plan-2013-17.aspx) from the website.

## 3 Key facts

### Population

In 2013, the resident population of the City of Melbourne was 116,431. The current population resides in 58,395 dwellings. Footnote This was up from 88,000 in 2008 and 52,400 in 2001. We estimate that by 2030, the population could reach 150,000. Visitor data added

It is noteworthy that in 2010 there were 26,323 international tertiary student residents, some of whom may own pets.

These are very rapid increases in population and we are yet see our pet population increase in the same way.

A street count in June 2016 revealed there are currently 247 people experiencing homelessness within the City of Melbourne some of whom own pets.

We realise that animals are important companions and we are sensitive to the precarious situation that people living on the street face and must balance this with the safety of all members of public. We provide education to all pet owners about responsible pet ownership and ensure registration and effective control to minimise the incidence of attacks and ensure the safety of pets in the city environment.

Where appropriate, we assist people to access organisations who provide animal welfare support such as low cost or free veterinarian services and emergency boarding.

### Local Laws and orders

Melbourne City Council’s Activities Local Law 2009 (Local Law) requires dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog’s droppings in public places and always carry a receptacle for the removal of any dog waste.

An amendment to the Local Law in 2015 allowed for Council to make a prescription restricting the number of animals a person can keep without a permit. Currently there are no prescriptions. The Local Law is due to be reviewed by 2019.

Melbourne City Council’s Order under Section 26(2) of the Act requires dogs to be leashed in public places except for designated off-leash areas. The following parks have designated off-leash areas:

* Clayton Reserve
* Fawkner Park
* JJ Holland Park
* North Melbourne Recreational Reserve
* Princes Park
* Royal Park
* Yarra Park.

The Order also requires dogs to be leashed within 20m of a children’s play equipment area or a permanent barbecue or picnic area.

Dogs are prohibited from entering designated spaces within Fawkner Park, JJ Holland Park and Royal Park.

[Further information on dog walking](http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/residents/pets/Pages/walking-your-dog.aspx)

### Resourcing

The Animal Management Team for the City of Melbourne is coordinated by the Animal Management Coordinator who is supported by a Senior Animal Management Officer, two Animal Management Officers and a team of administration support who process pet registrations. The team delivers services relating to investigations and complaint resolution.

Animal pound services are provided by the RSPCA and after hours emergency service for the collection of animals is provided by Melbourne Pet Ambulance, both under contract.

Table 1 – Customer Service Request statistics

The numbers below relate to the number of animal-related requests received from members of the public

| **Service Type** | **2012/13** | **2013/14** | **2014/15** | **2015/16** | **2016/17** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Animal Management - General Enquiry** | 138 | 115 | 94 | 110 | 58 |
| **Animal Welfare & Cruelty to Animals** | 47 | 19 | 39 | 49 | 7 |
| **Noise - Barking Dogs** | 112 | 146 | 133 | 119 | 59 |
| **Collection of Lost/ Injured Cats, Dogs, Livestock** | 393 | 324 | 369 | 350 | 188 |
| **Dogs at Large** | 44 | 39 | 33 | 28 | 14 |
| **Dog Attacks & Rushes** | 49 | 43 | 43 | 62 | 30 |
| **Dangerous / Restricted Breed Dogs** | 13 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Dog Waste Issues** | 22 | 14 | 22 | 16 | 14 |
| **Animal Registration - General Enquiry** | 218 | 237 | 240 | 280 | 86 |
| **Leashing of Dogs** | 47 | 37 | 42 | 36 | 28 |
| **Animal Registration - New Application** | 161 | 68 | 22 | 13 | 3 |
| **Pet Shop/Animal business-inspection/investigation** | 25 | 11 | 22 | 26 | 14 |
| **Trapping of Feral/Stray Cats** | 36 | 38 | 54 | 31 | 17 |
| **Trespassing Cats** | 11 | 7 | 13 | 7 | 4 |
| **Total** | **1365** | **1128** | **1144** | **1148** | **525** |

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Registration and identification

Dogs and cats are required by law to be registered annually. They are also required to be microchipped and wear an identification marker (a Council Supplied tag for example) when outside their premises.

Registration fees partially fund the Animal Management Team enabling proactive park patrols, responsible pet ownership education and investigation of dog attacks and rushes which go a long way to ensuring our public spaces are safe.

In 2016, the City of Melbourne had 3,365 registered dogs and 1,774 registered cats.

This figure has been fairly constant in recent years. It includes approximately 1,000 new registrations each year, however approximately the same number of animals are lost each year either because their owner leaves the municipality or their pet is no longer with them.

We are aware that not all pet owners register their pets and that registration rates are higher for dogs compared to cats. Securing initial and annual registrations is an ongoing challenge.

We have rolled out lifetime registration tags through 2016 and utilise email and text messaging in the registration renewal process which has seen an increase in the number of registrations renewed on time.

We have undertaken targeted doorknocking in the past to check for unregistered animals which confirmed the majority of pet owners were compliant.

We undertake regular park patrols to identify unregistered animals and find a high level of compliance with registration requirements amongst City of Melbourne pet owners.

Table 2 – Registration statistics

|  | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Dogs | 3088 | 3068 | 3029 | 3128 | 3449 |
| Cats | 1788 | 1711 | 1569 | 1603 | 1878 |
| **Total** | 4876 | 4799 | 4598 | 4731 | 5327 |

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| What do you think?  * What other measures could the City of Melbourne take to identify any unregistered animals? |

### 4.2 Cat confinement

In 2011, the Council undertook a comprehensive review of cat management and concluded that a cat confinement requirement was not warranted in the City of Melbourne. This was because the Council does not receive a high number of reported complaints about cat nuisance and being an inner suburban municipality, a confinement requirement to protect wildlife could not be justified.

Trespassing and nuisance complaints relating to owned cats has decreased over the recent period and the Animal Management Team continues to respond to all complaints.

The issues from cats not being confined to owners properties can include them being lost, injured, creating a nuisance and may contribute to the unowned (feral) cat population.

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| **What do you think?**   * Can you suggest any ideas we should adopt to further improve our management of cats? |

### 4.3 Dogs in public places

Dogs are required to be confined to their home property except in the company of their owner (or handler) in public places.

The risks associated with dogs in public places (whether with their owned or wandering at large) include dog attacks on people and other animals and impacts to the enjoyment and safety of other people. There are also welfare concerns for dogs that are wandering at large.

We recognise the benefits of dog walking which includes the need for public parks where dogs can be exercised off leash however there are challenges in the provision of open space generally in a capital city environment.

The City of Melbourne has more than 1000 acres of parks and gardens and eight off-leash areas – totalling 38 acres – and a number of spaces where dogs are prohibited. Dogs are required to be leashed in all remaining public places.

Our challenges around dogs in public spaces include:

* compliance by dog owners with leash requirements and dogs prohibited areas
* effective control of dogs in off leash areas
* ensuring people remove their dog’s waste from public places
* communicating with visitors to off leash areas from who live outside the municipality
* managing the substantial growth in our municipality’s population and corresponding demands on public open space by all members of the community including dog owners.

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| **What do you think?**   * Do you have any suggestions about how Council could further balance the needs of pet owners and non-pet-owners in public places? |

### 4.4 Unwanted animals

The number of dogs impounded within the City of Melbourne in 2016 was 116 whilst the number of cats impounded for the same period was 132. These figures are lower than the figures reported in the current DAMP.

The Code of Practice for the Management of Cats and Dogs in Shelters and Pounds provides animals may be euthanased if they are;

* infected with an untreatable infectious disease
* unweaned or deformed
* known to have temperament issues including aggressive tendencies.

The euthanasia rate in 2016 was 6% for dogs (health and temperament issues) and 36% for cats (unowned or feral).

We are aware of several unowned and feral cat colonies in the city that are unwittingly exacerbated by residents who regularly feed these cats making them difficult to contain. The City of Melbourne participates in the “Who’s for Cats?” campaign and encourages people to take ownership of the cat.

Stray animals are taken to the RSPCA animal shelter in Burwood. The RSPCA is our contracted pound who provides leading foster care and rehabilitation programs for unwanted animals that has contributed to a decline in euthanasia rates.

Recent proposed legalisation changes by the State Government including the selling of unwanted animals only from pet shops aims to address the issues of unwanted animals and puppy farms.

While all Councils are tasked with finding homes for unwanted animals, most rely on the contracted services of the states recognised animals shelters.

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| **What do you think?**   * What more can the Council do to reduce the number of unowned dogs and cats? |

### 4.5 Nuisance barking

Nuisance barking is an ongoing issue in any Council. Barking dog complaints in the City of Melbourne remain constant. There were 146, 133 and 119 barking dog complaints in 2013/4, 2014/15 and 2015/2016 respectively.

The City of Melbourne investigates all barking dog requests and mediates the majority of issues to resolution by providing education and tools for reducing any issue found. Our ongoing education programs promote the exercise and socialisation for dogs including the provision of funded dog training.

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| **What do you think?**  What other measures could the Council use to address barking dog complaints? |

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### 4.6 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

The Act has special requirements for dealing with dogs that have been declared either a dangerous or menacing dog and for dogs that are a restricted breed of dog.

The City of Melbourne has no registered dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs.

In 2015, following a moratorium on the euthanasia of restricted breed dogs, a Parliamentary Inquiry on the legislation regarding restricted breed dogs was established. City of Melbourne Officers made submissions to the inquiry and the details can be [read here](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/registration-legislation-and-permits/domestic-animal-legislation-and-latest-news).

### 4.7 Dog attacks

There were 43 reported dog attacks in 2013/2014, 43 in 2014/2015 and 62 in 2015/2016, despite our best efforts in proactive patrols and the distribution of available literature.

A review of the dog attacks in the City it was found that since 2014, alarmingly 90% of reported attacks and rushes occur in our parks, while owners are with their dog.

Sadly 13 of these attacks resulted in serious injury including surgery and hospitalisation or veterinarian care, and in three cases, the death of a dog. The total cost to all victims in terms of medical or veterinary expenses was almost $19,000

To increase socialisation of dogs, the City of Melbourne has provided free dog training events with a professional dog trainer which has been rolled out though 2016/2017.

Animal Management Officers proactively patrol public places and provide education and advice on the effective control and confinement of dogs to prevent attacks. The Council issues fines and prosecutes serious attacks and in instances where a dog is identified as a serious threat to the community, the Council or a Magistrate may order that a dog be destroyed.

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| **What do you think?**  What other measures could the City of Melbourne use to reduce the number of dog attacks/rushes? |

### 4.8 Domestic animal businesses

The City of Melbourne is responsible for the registration of premises as domestic animal businesses which include:

* pet shops
* animal shelters and pounds
* boarding facilities including day care, overnight and home boarding
* dog training and rearing establishments.

There are eight domestic animal businesses in the City of Melbourne that are published on our website including:

* two animal shelters
* four pet shops
* two boarding establishments.

Domestic animal businesses must apply to register with the City of Melbourne and must renew their registration every year. The City of Melbourne conducts inspections before approving applications and conducts annual audits to ensure compliance with the relevant Code of Practice.

Nevertheless every year, requests are made by the community for investigation of domestic animal businesses usually relating to welfare concerns for the animals kept in these establishments.

The State Government recently introduced changes to the Act to reform dog breeding and pet shops in Victoria and it is to be reassessed in 2017 in consultation with stakeholders.

The City of Melbourne issues infringement notices and prosecutes non-compliant businesses where necessary. A dog day care business was prosecuted for continuing breaches of the code and the proprietor issued with a banning order by the court for a period of three years. The business is no longer trading with the City of Melbourne.

The City of Melbourne strives for best practice to ensure the operation of registered domestic animal businesses is above those standards contained in the Code of Practice. The City of Melbourne has expressed in writing its willingness to participate in the next review of the Code of Practice for the operation of pet shops and will advocate for improved conditions for animals.

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| **What do you think?**   * Are there any other initiatives that you believe Council should undertake in relation to Domestic Animal Businesses? |

### 4.9 Education about responsible pet ownership and other matters.

The DAMP is required to consider programs, services and strategies that the City of Melbourne intends to pursue to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership of dogs and cats.

Educating the community about responsible pet ownership underpins the provision of the City of Melbourne’s animal management service. To be effective, the education activities need to be targeted to specific priorities and adjusted for the fact that any activities can only be undertaken at the Local Government level and much of the educational material is duplicated from the State Government Animal Welfare Branch and replicated across Victoria’s 79 Councils.

We provide a range of programs and services, including extensive education material published on our website and reference to the [State Government website](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets), desexing vouchers to concession card holders, provision of free dog training events, various collateral for events including:

* balloons with “My pets are registered”, “I pick up after my dog” and “I’m a responsible pet owner”
* drink bottles labelled “I’m a responsible pet owner”

We also host an online educational quiz that takes owners through important topics such as confinement and leashing. Participation is rewarded with an alternate metal registration disc that contact phone numbers can be engraved on. An educational video on a code of conduct for dog walkers is about to be launched.

Text messaging and emails are used to contact pet owners about registration requirements, upcoming fireworks and the City of Melbourne’s social media accounts are frequently used to promote responsible pet ownership including keeping pets safe in storms and hot weather.

Officers regularly attend community events with “Reg’’ (the registration tag sculpture of a dog) to educate children and the City of Melbourne community, including the Kensington Community Festival, Spring Fling, Where The Heart Is and Carlton Italian Festival.

Particular communications challenges for the City of Melbourne include:

* the transient nature of the population, as people move in and out of the municipality at higher rates than the metropolitan average, including the return of international students (who might be pet owners) to their home country
* higher than average numbers of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.
* the high number of users of the Council’s off-leash areas who reside outside the municipality
* effective control of dogs in off-leash areas.

However, ongoing improvements in technology, such as social media and SMS messaging, continue to improve the reach and cost of communications.

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| **What do you think?**   * What education priorities do you think the City of Melbourne should focus on? * Do you have any suggestions on programs or services that the City of Melbourne should consider? |

## 5 Next steps

The City of Melbourne is interested in your views on its animal management service and the development of its Domestic Animal Management Plan.

You may wish to prepare a separate written submission and email to: animalmanagement@melboune.vic.gov.au or post to GPO Box 1603, Melbourne, VIC 3001 or respond to the attached questionnaire.