

# Discussion Paper

## Domestic Animal Management plan 2021-2025

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The City of Melbourne is preparing its Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2021-25, 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 City of Melbourne requested to postpone the submission of the DAMP due to two major projects that heavily influence the direction of the plan, being the review of dogs in open spaces project and a recent restructure of the branch responsible for the animal management service. This request was approved by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

This 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 as well as with you – our community. You can share your views with us by simply taking the online survey or directly via email to [animal.management@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:animal.management@melbourne.vic.gov.au). Please remember, whether you're a pet owner or not, it's important that we understand views from a range of members of the community.

We will also be benchmarking with neighbouring councils and other capital cities to ensure we are in line with service standards and best practice and reviewing our 2017 – 2021 plan which will feed into the new plan.

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 Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) 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 DJPR by Tuesday 1 November 2022.

You can access the City of Melbourne's [current Domestic Animal Management Plan](#) from the website.

### 3 Key facts

#### Population

At 30 June 2021 an estimated 169,860 people were living in the City of Melbourne, down from 183,628 at the same time in 2020. The estimated population resides in 94,600 dwellings. We estimate that by 2030 the population could reach 262,242, however this has not taken into account recent trends as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On an average weekday (pre-pandemic) around 972,000 people use the city as either residents, workers or visitors, some of whom bring pets in with them.

In 2019 there were 87,300 overseas higher education students living or studying in the City of Melbourne, some of whom own pets.

A street count in 2018 revealed that almost 300 people were sleeping on the streets in our municipality, some of whom own pets.

*Please note, whilst care is taken to ensure this data and information is accurate and reliable (in the absence of recent information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics), the City of Melbourne cannot guarantee the accuracy of this. We note that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the City's population, including visitors and the data may not accurately reflect this impact.*

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 2019 (Local Law) requires dog owners to collect and dispose of their dog's waste in public places and always carry means for the effective collection and removal of any dog waste.

Under the Local Law there are prescriptions council can take to restrict the number of pets in a household. There is currently no restriction on the number of animals a person can keep without a permit.

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 currently have designated off-leash areas:

- Clayton Reserve
- Fawkner Park
- JJ Holland Park
- North Melbourne Recreational Reserve
- Princes Park
- Royal Park
- Yarra Park
- Gosch's Paddock
- Stawell St Reserve

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](#)

Note, the City of Melbourne has recently undertaken a review of dogs in open spaces and at the time of writing this report has not yet been endorsed by the council. Further information and the outcome of this review will be provided when appropriate to do so.

## **Resourcing**

The Animal Management Team 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 and after hours emergency services are provided by The Lost Dogs Home 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. Note, in 2019 our customer relationship management system was updated and started including enquiries resolved at first contact among other general enquiries.

<b>Service Type</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
<b>Noise - Barking Dogs</b>	114	123	89	160	152
<b>Collection of Lost/ Injured Cats, Dogs, Livestock</b>	372	451	276	303	298
<b>Dog Attacks &amp; Rushes</b>	62	54	58	113	96
<b>Leashing of Dogs</b>	82	83	94	200	150
<b>Animal Welfare &amp; Cruelty to Animals</b>	18	20	35	29	21
<b>Animal business-inspection/investigation</b>	15	2	6	8	5
<b>Stray Animal (including cat trespassing cats and dogs at large)</b>	90	63	67	108	61
<b>Customer Enquiry/miscellaneous</b>	330	365	1039	1817	1527
<b>Total</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>1161</b>	<b>1664</b>	<b>2738</b>	<b>2310</b>

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Registration and identification

Dogs and cats are required by State law to be registered annually. They are also required to be microchipped and wear a council identification marker (a council supplied registration tag) 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. A levy from pet registration is also provided to the Victorian Government to support their [education programs](#).

In April 2022, the City of Melbourne had 4750 registered dogs and 3740 registered cats.

This figure has dramatically increased in recent years, due to an increase in pet ownership during the COVID-19 pandemic and an amendment to laws relating to pet ownership in rentals. In 2021, we received 1,528 new pet registrations, however approximately 1,000 pets depart from the City of Melbourne each year due to their owner leaving the municipality, no longer owning the pet or the pet passes away. New pet registrations have increased from 894 in 2019 to 1260 in 2020 – highlighting the clear upward trend of pet registrations.

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 issue lifetime registration tags so tags are not required to be sent annually and utilise email and text messaging in the registration renewal process which has seen an increase in the number of registrations renewed on time.

There is the view that there are many unregistered pets living in high rise dwellings, however we have undertaken targeted doorknocking 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**

*Note, this data was taken at a similar point in time of the year and numbers do vary throughout the year*

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dogs	3292	3488	3942	4111	4750
Cats	1880	2166	2620	2933	3740
<b>Total</b>	5172	5654	6562	7044	8490

#### What do you think?

- What other measures could the City of Melbourne take to identify any unregistered animals?
- Do you think pet registration is an issue within the City of Melbourne?

## 4.2 Cat confinement

The City of Melbourne does not currently have a cat curfew or a council order relating to cat confinement. We do not receive a high number of reported complaints about cat nuisance from owned cats. We use existing State laws to manage trespassing and nuisance cat issues.

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.

We are aware of a number of unowned (feral) and semi owned cat colonies throughout our municipality which are being managed with the view of reducing the number in each colony.

Cats not being confined to their owner's property can result in a number of issues, including them being lost, injured, creating a nuisance to others and may contribute to the unowned (feral) cat population in addition to wildlife predation.

### What do you think?

- Can you suggest any ideas we should adopt to further improve our management of cats?
- Do you have an issue relating to cat confinement?

## 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 owner or wandering at large) include dog attacks on people, 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 physical, social and emotional benefits of dog walking, for both dog and owner 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 and we need to balance the needs of the whole community.

The City of Melbourne has more than 1235 acres of parks, gardens and reserves with nine 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 and educating 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



- Knowledge of off leash areas and signage or designation of these areas

#### **What do you think?**

- Do you have any suggestions about how we could further balance the needs of pet owners and non-pet owners in public places?
- Do you have any suggestions as to what can be done to reduce the number of reports received about people impacted by dogs off leash?

## **4.4 Unwanted animals**

The number of dogs impounded within the City of Melbourne in the 2020 – 21 financial year was 154 whilst the number of cats impounded for the same period was 383. These figures have increased in recent years as a result of the management of stray or unowned cats and an increase in the number of animals found outside of the City of Melbourne but delivered to establishments within the City of Melbourne therefore being impounded by us. We are working with neighbouring councils and establishments to improve the way this is managed.

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 this period was 3% for dogs (health and temperament issues) and 35% 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.

Stray animals are taken to the Lost Dogs Home in North Melbourne. The Lost Dogs Home is our contracted pound provider who provides leading foster care and rehabilitation programs for unwanted animals that has contributed to a decline in euthanasia rates.

Recent legalisation changes by the Victorian Government including pet breeding reforms, reforms to the pet shop industry and upcoming changes further allowing veterinary clinics to reunite animals with their owners aims to address the issues crowded shelters and pounds.

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

#### **What do you think?**

- What more can we 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, however the impact of barking has been reported to be more severe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and people spending more time inside their home.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people work and live, with many people working from home for the majority of 2020 and 2021. Spending more time at home has impacted the way many people experience life in their home and have been more affected by barking dogs than they would have been pre pandemic. This has not only resulted in an increase in the number of reports of nuisance barking, but we have also had to change the way we manage expectations, understanding that nuisance thresholds have changed and the impact to people's lives has changed – this has made it difficult to balance the needs and rights of people in their home and the nature of dogs barking.

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.

### What do you think?

- What other measures could we use to address barking dog complaints?
- Have you been impacted by a barking dog and how was your experience?
- Do you own a dog that barks and how is your experience with managing this?

## 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 one registered declared menacing dog and no registered declared dangerous or restricted breed dogs.

The City of Melbourne will take appropriate action should it deem a dog is required to be declared dangerous, menacing or restricted breed and if a declared dog moves into the City of Melbourne will take prompt action to ensure it is compliant with the requirements.

## 4.7 Dog attacks

There has been a trend of an increase in the number of reports received about dogs attacks, with the number of reports increasing from 62 in 2017 - 18 to 96 in 2021 - 22. The City of Melbourne takes dog attacks very seriously and takes prompt and firm action when a report is received. The City of Melbourne is disappointed in the increase in the number of reported dog attacks. Dog attacks sadly impact the lives of people with many victims of dog attacks left with financial expenses and lifelong trauma.

We issue fines to people not complying with leashing requirements or when their dog is involved in minor incidents, while we prosecute serious attacks which includes, where appropriate, seeking orders from a magistrate for dogs to be destroyed following serious incidents and concerns about public safety.

A review of recent dog attacks has found that alarmingly most reported attacks and rushes occur in public places while the owner of the attacking dog was with or nearby the dog at the time the attack occurred. This demonstrates that dog attacks may be preventable through appropriate control of dogs or better education.

We have also found that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic people have been remaining more local and have been accessing local parks and public places more often – this has created more conflicting use of public places possibly contributing to the increase in reported incidents.

To increase socialisation of dogs, the City of Melbourne has provided free dog behaviour training events in partnership with The Lost Dogs Home which was delivered to our community in 2019 and 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic additional dog training events were put on hold until there was community surety about gatherings and public events – we aim to continue these from August 2022.

Animal Management Officers proactively patrol public places and provide education and advice on the effective control and confinement of dogs to minimise the risk of attacks.

#### **What do you think?**

- What other measures could the City of Melbourne use to reduce the number of dog attacks/rushes?
- What else can we do to improve knowledge of and the risks of dog attacks?

## **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 four domestic animal businesses in the City of Melbourne that are published on our website including:

- one animal shelter and pound (the Lost Dogs Home)
- one pet shop (Queen Victoria Market Pet Shop)
- two boarding establishments. (the Pets Hotel and Cat Camp)

Domestic animal businesses must apply to register with their council 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 City of Melbourne issues infringement notices and prosecutes non-compliant businesses where necessary.

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.

**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 Victorian Government 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 [Victorian Government website](#), desexing vouchers to concession card holders, provision of free dog training events, various collateral for events including responsible pet owner merchandise and dog training vouchers.

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 available on our website.

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.

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.

**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@melbourne.vic.gov.au](mailto:animalmanagement@melbourne.vic.gov.au) or post to GPO Box 1603, Melbourne, VIC 3001 or respond to the attached questionnaire.