Murrindindi Shire Council

Domestic Animal Management Plan

2021-2025

DRAFT

May 2021

Murrindindi Shire Council
Domestic Animal Management Plan
2021-2025

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Authorisation

This Domestic Animal Management Plan has been prepared by and with the authority of the Murrindindi Shire Council. The plan has been prepared in accordance with Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

This Plan:

Document Title:	**Murrindindi Shire Council** **Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-2025**
Version No.:	2.4
Date of Release:	12/7/2021

Signed: ..... Date: .....

Natalie Stewart
Manager Development Services
Murrindindi Shire Council

1 Introduction

The purpose of the new Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) is to outline Councils strategic approach to the delivery of animal management services throughout the municipality for the 2021-2025 period, building on the foundations and achievements of previous plans.

The DAMP has been developed in accordance with Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and will be reviewed annually.

The DAMP outlines programs, services and strategies which we will use to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership utilising a combination of educational and regulatory approaches.

1.1 Legislative Framework

The Domestic Animals *Act* outlines the requirements for all Councils to prepare and maintain a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP). Section 68A of the *Act* states:

(2) A domestic animal management plan prepared by a Council must—

(a) set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations; and

(b) outline programs for the training of Authorised Officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council's municipal district; and

(c) outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—

(i) to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats; and

(ii) to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any related legislation; and

(iii) to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and

(iv) to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and

(v) to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and

(vi) to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and

(vii) to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulations; and

(d) provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and Local 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; and

(e) provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary; and

(f) provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

(3) Every Council must—

(a) review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and

(b) provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and

(c) publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

1.2 Community Consultation

From 15 March to 15 April 2021, a survey was made available to get an understanding of the current trends and issues that were important to the community. These findings have created the foundation for this DAMP. A report of these findings are attached.

During the month of August 2021, the draft DAMP is available for public comment. During this time the Community Safety Unit will host a number of information sessions seeking further feedback from the community.

1.2 About Councils Community Safety Unit

Councils animal management services and deliverables of this DAMP are carried out by Councils Community Safety Unit. The Community Safety Unit consists of four officers who are authorised under various legislation to deliver education and enforcement objectives throughout the Municipality.

Specifically, the Community Safety team are authorised under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* and the *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994,* to undertake the following roles:

- Coordinate domestic animal registration and identification process
- Investigate dog attacks
- Investigate barking dog and other nuisance matters
- Investigate animal welfare issues
- Provide advice to pet owners and the community regarding the care of their animals
- Provide a 24-hour emergency response
- Implement Councils Community Local Law 2020
- Active patrols and collections to reunite dogs with their owners
- Impound domestic animals and livestock
- Investigate complaints relating to domestic animals and livestock
- Monitor compliance with Codes of Practice such as breeding, boarding and training.

1.3 Scope of the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP)

The DAMP has been developed as required by section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and consists of current processes and strategies relevant to:

Focus Area	Strategy	Legislative Requirement
Part 3		
Animals and Amenity (Nuisance)	Increase pet owners' knowledge of the principles of responsible pet ownership to enhance community safety and awareness Minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance	Section 68A(2)(c)(vi) of the Act requires the Domestic Animal Management Plan to: "Outline programs, services and strategies to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance" also addresses 68A(2)(a),(c)(i),(c)(ii),(d),(f)
Part 4		
Registration, Identification, overpopulation and high euthanasia	Maximise the number of dogs and cats that are registered within the Murrindindi Shire Address over population and euthanasia rates	Section 68A(2)(c)(v) of the *Act* states the Domestic Animal Management Plan should: "Outline programs, services and strategies to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats" "Outline programs, services and strategies to address any over population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats" also addresses 68A(2)(a),(c)(i),(c)(ii),(d),(f)
Part 5		
Community Engagement	Communicate with the community and its visitors in an efficient and effective way	Additional to the requirements of The *Act*
Part 6		

Dog Attacks	Minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals	Section 68A(2)(c)(iii) of the *Act* requires that the Domestic Animal Management Plan: "Outline programs, services and strategies to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals" This also addresses Section - 68A(2)(a),(c)(i),(c)(ii),(d),(f) of the *Act*.
Part 7		
Compliance	Improve voluntary compliance with relevant legislation	Additional to the requirements of The *Act*
Part 8		
Authorised Officer Training	Identify training requirements for authorised officers	Section 68A(2)(b) of the *Act* requires the Domestic Animal Management Plan to; "Outline programs for the training of Authorised Officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this *Act* in the Council's municipal district."
Part 9		
Animal health and welfare	Identify strategies to promote responsible pet ownership aimed at improving animal welfare Consider animals in planning for and responding to emergencies such as fire and flood	Additional to the requirements of The *Act*
Part 10		
Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs	Ensure declared dogs are kept compliant with the Act and its regulations	Section 68A(2)(c)(vii) of the *Act* requires the Domestic Animal Management Plan to: "Outline programs, services and strategies to 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 this Act and the regulations" This section also addresses Section 68A(2)(a),(c)(i),(c)(ii),(d),(f) of the *Act.*
Part 11		
Domestic Animal Management Plan Review	Ensure Council meets the legislative requirements under the *Act* regarding the review of its Domestic Animal Management Plan	Section 68A(3) sets out the following requirement; Every Council must; - review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and - provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and - publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report

2 Animal Statistics and Data

Key Statistics 2020/2021	
Population	13,693
Area sq/kms	3,889
No. of animal management officers (Community Safety Officers)	4
No. of registered dogs	2,864
No. of registered cats	696
No. of registered dangerous dogs	0
No. of restricted breed dogs	0
No. of registered domestic animal businesses	6
No. of animal management requests	919
Total number of Community Safety Unit requests	3,141
No. of barking dog reports	57
No. of dogs impounded	90
No. of dogs returned to owner	79
No. of dogs rehoused	6
No. of cats impounded	149
% of cats returned to owner	8%
% of cats rehoused	32%

3 Animals and Amenity (Nuisance)

While dogs and cats play an integral role in the health and wellbeing of the population, they too have the ability to have a negative impact on the amenity of our residents and visitors. Common animal nuisance matters that are reported to Council include but are not limited to; wandering cats and dogs, barking dogs and excessive numbers of animals being housed at properties.

3.1 Current Situation

During the 2020/21 financial year, Council received 919 animal management requests from the community. A large majority of these were regarding lost / found and wandering pets. 57 of these requests related to barking dogs.

Councils recent survey found 45.92% of participants had concerns with wandering cats. A large majority of the issues recorded in the survey relate to the impact cats have on wildlife.

Council provide traps free of charge to community members who are experiencing issues with nuisance cats. A total of 149 cats were trapped by Council officers with the assistance of the community during this time.

Further, 35% of survey respondents had an issue with wandering dogs. These issues were primarily raised as a result of dogs being walked off lead.

3.2 Current Policy and procedure

In addition to the nuisance provision within the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*(s.32) and other relevant legislation, Councils Community Local Law 2020 provides the community with further guidance on animal ownership aimed at reducing the likelihood of amenity issues created by animals. These include:

- Restrictions on the number of various animals permitted to be housed on either residential or rural land
- General housing requirements for domestic animals and livestock
- Responsibility of owners of domestic animals and livestock for removal of excrement in a public place
- Requirements to contain animals

Where permit applications for additional animals are received, Council undertakes to obtain feedback from surrounding residents to ensure the issuing of permits for additional animals does not have negative impact on neighbourhood amenity.

Councils approach to education before enforcement is exercised in its procedure for wandering dogs. All dogs are returned directly to their owner free of charge if registered and found wandering for the first time.

Other Council policies for nuisance complaints include:

- Procedure regarding noise nuisance complaints for dogs and/or cats, the *Act*, s32
- Procedure associated with the surrender of dogs and/or cats by owners, the *Act* s33A
- Procedure associated with issuing notices to comply, infringement notices and filing charges for prosecution regarding dogs and cats causing a nuisance.

3.3 Current Activities

Murrindindi Shire Council conducts a number of education activities aimed at resolving nuisance animals reports. Communication on the management of nuisance animals is provided to the community via various media streams and officer interactions.

Council gives animal owners reasonable time and resources to resolve substantiated animal nuisance matters. Where required, enforcement action is undertaken to remedy any unresolved animal nuisance matters.

3.4 Strategy: Minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance

Cats

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Year 1	Implement community education programs for cat owners about the importance of keeping their animals secured for the protection of native wildlife.	Evidence of public education program developed and implemented
Year 2	Develop options for the introduction of cat curfew	Development of Project Plan
Year 2	Promote the 'Aussie backyard bird count'	Statistics on participant uptake and bird numbers
Year 3	Offer free first time registration of cats to encourage registration	Program developed, implemented and evaluated
Year 3	Promote the benefits of confining your cat	Competition and prizes for best cat enclosure
Year 4	Implement a requirement for cat owners to keep their cats confined to their property.	Action plan implemented
Year 4	First time offences for registered cats will receive an official warning.	Comparison with previous year statistics
Year 4	Promote the 'Aussie backyard bird count' following the introduction of a cat curfew aimed at the protection of native animals	Data comparison of bird numbers following implementation of cat curfew
Ongoing	Assist residents and businesses to deal with cat nuisance problems by maintaining and providing cat trapping programs	Cat trapping data Operational data .

Dogs

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Year 1	-Implement a requirement for all dogs to be on leash in public areas (excluding designated places) -Creation of designated off leash places off leash	order created under s.26 of *Domestic Animals Act 1994*
Year 2	Evaluation of on/ off leash areas	Report on effectiveness including statistics on wandering/ nuisance dogs and attacks reported
Year 3	Explore the creation of fenced off leash dog areas	Development of project plan
Ongoing	Promotion of 'First ride home free' procedure	Data comparison of first and multiple wandering instances ride home Review Standard Operating Procedure
Ongoing	Proactively monitor social media for reports of found/ missing/ wandering dogs to ensure officers are aware of unreported instances of wandering dogs	Update Standard Operating Procedure to include response to social media reports
Ongoing	Maintain dog poo bags in public areas	Audit of location and condition of dispensers.

4 Animal identification, registration, overpopulation and euthanasia

Animal identification and registration are a legal requirement under the *Act*. As well as being a legal requirement, registration and identification gives pets that are found a much higher chance of being returned to their rightful owner.

Animal registration also allow Council to better understand the number of pets that reside within our communities and provides valuable information to ensure that Councils animal management services are adequate and delivered appropriately.

4.1 Current situation

Under the Act, it is a requirement that all dogs and cats over the age of three months be registered with Council (S10(1)). Animals must also be microchipped before they are registered with Council (S12A(1)).

As well as being a legislative requirement, pet owners that microchip and register their animals increase the chance of being re-united with them should they become lost.

At the end of 2020, there were a total of 3554 animals registered with Council in comparison to a total of 3499 in 2019. In 2017 there were 3152 registered dogs and cats within the municipality. This is a 12% increase in animal registrations over a four year period.

There were a total of 532 new registrations during 2020. During this time a total of 377 cats and dogs were removed from the database due to leaving the municipality or passing away.

Key Statistics 2020/2021 (financial year)	
No. of registered dogs	2,864
No. of registered cats	696
No. of dogs impounded	90
No. of dogs returned to owner	79
No. of dogs rehoused	6
No. of cats impounded	149
% of cats returned to owner	8%
% of cats rehoused	32%
No. of registered desexed animals	2,844
No. of registered entire animals	716
No. of registered breeders	2

Recent survey results noted that on a scale of importance from 1 to 10, 93% of survey respondents believed that desexing cats was seen to be very important with an average rating of 9.2 out of 10.

Further, 89% of respondents stated that desexing dogs was seen to be also very important with an average rating of 8.5 out of 10.

The survey results revealed respondents two main areas of concern were:

- High euthanasia rates in cats (48%)
- People not desexing their animal (61%)

During 2020, 97% of dogs were returned to their owner or rehoused. In contrast only 31% of cats that were impounded were returned to their owner or rehoused. The remainder were euthanised on grounds of being wild, uncontrollable or diseased.

4.2 Current policy and procedure

Council has a Section 84Y agreement in place with Coldstream Animal Aid. This agreement allows Council to engage Coldstream Animal Aid for its pound and animal rehousing services. Further to this, the agreement allows Coldstream Animal Aid to act as an agent of registration for Council ensuring all animals are microchipped and registered before being returned to their owner or in the case of being re-housed that the animals are microchipped, registered and de-sexed prior to their release.

Under the *Act,* Council has the ability to euthanise cats that are seized in accordance with the legislation that are wild, uncontrollable or diseased and that do not bear an identification marker or permanent identification device.

4.3 Current Activities

Between 2017 and 2021 Council conducted two (2) reduced fee microchipping events. These events also included discounted registration fees for people who got their animal's microchipped on the day.

Registered pets found wandering in the first instance are returned home free of charge. On return of the pet, Officers will educate the pet owner on ways to avoid dogs and cats wandering, like ensuring that the fencing is adequate to confine their pet.

Unregistered pets found wandering are impounded and not released until registration requirements under the *Act* are achieved. Once registration is received, the pet is released to its owner. Officers use each interaction with its residents as an opportunity to promote the benefits of securely confining their pet.

Councils registration renewal program ensures all pet owners pay their registration renewals in a timely manner. Those who fail to renew their animal registrations during this renewal program may be subject to enforcement action.

Council Officers actively seek out unregistered pets and take appropriate measures to ensure that the registration of such animals is achieved. This includes targeted patrols and doorknocks, community member reports, domestic animal business reports and information received whilst undertaking other duties.

Council offer discounted registration for desexed animals in an effort to provide an incentive for desexing pets. A reduced registration fee also applies for registered foster carers, to promote compliance with registration requirements for animals in foster care.

4.4 Summary

There has been a substantial increase in dog and cat registrations between 2017 and 2021. Council's 2017-2021 DAMP estimated that in 2021 there would be 3200 registered cats and dogs within the municipality. As of 30 June 2021, there were 3560 registered cats and dogs within the municipality.

Following community consultation, it was highlighted that high euthanasia rates and owners who do not desex their animals is seen to be of key concern to residents of Murrindindi. There remains a portion of registered 'entire' animals within the municipality therefore education programs should be targeted at the owners of these animals to ensure they are refraining from desexing their animals for the correct reasons.

Feral and semi-owned cats are the main contributor to high euthanasia rates. These types of cats are not specifically owned, therefore are indefinable, but their survival and growth relies highly on residents feeding them. As a result, when caught these cats are unlikely to be claimed and due to their poor temperament resulting from limited socialisation and handling limit their likelihood of being rehomed.

4.5 Strategy: Increase registration and reduce overpopulation

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Year 1	Raise awareness about semi-owned cat population	Media campaign to educate the community on the semi-owned cat population.
Year 1	Develop desexing subsidy scheme to further support and promote responsible pet ownership.	Completion of Project Plan including funding approval
Year 2	Implement a desexing subsidy scheme	Data collection on uptake of scheme
Year 2 & 4	Reduced fee microchipping event.	Increase in the number of registered domestic animals
Year 2 & 4	Undertake a community pet event with a focus on promoting animal registration/ responsible pet ownership	Number of people attending the event and accessing information
Year 3	Implement a pilot project to provide free first time cat registration	Increase in the number of registered cats. Evidence of Increase in animals being returned to their owner
Ongoing	Maintain Section 84Y agreement with Coldstream Animal Aid	Current Section 84Y Agreement in place
Ongoing	Ensure compliance with pension, Foster Carer and desexing discount registration	Standard Operating Procedure and guidelines. Media developed.

Ongoing	Promote half price (pro rata) animal registration from 1 January each year to encourage registration.	Communication/Media developed
Annually	Distribution and promotion of animal registration renewal notices within specified time frames	Renewal notices issued Media developed
Annually	Ensure all reminder notices are issued within specified time period	Reminder notices issued Communication/Media developed
Ongoing	Monitor local media for animal sale advertisements	Action non-compliant advertisements.
Ongoing	Implement animal registration renewal compliance program. Follow up properties where animal registration has lapsed	Report on the number of properties inspected. Increase in animal registrations as a direct result of the campaign
Ongoing	Ensure all impounded animals are registered to their owner prior to release	Standard Operating Procedure and guidelines reviewed.
Annually	Random door knocking properties in the municipality each year to check for unregistered and unidentified dogs and cats.	Report on the number of random properties inspected. Increase in animal registrations as a direct result of the door knock campaign

5 Community Engagement

5.1 Current Situation

The way Council engages and communicates with its community is integral to maintain community interest and input into its operations. It was identified in Council's DAMP review community survey, 41% of survey respondents were aware that Council provides a 'free ride home' program for registered dogs found wandering at large in the first instance. This is in comparison to 83% of survey respondents who knew how to contact Council if they had lost or found a pet. This information suggests that further focus is required on communicating with its residents and visitors.

5.2 Current Policy and procedure

In 2019 Council introduced a Customer First initiative designed to improve the customer experience when engaging with Council. The foundation of this project aims to seek feedback from each of its customer at the completion of an interaction to ensure ongoing service improvements.

The Customer Service Charter requires Council to return phone calls within 2 business days and acknowledge written correspondence within 2 working days.

5.3 Current Activities

The following communication activities are conducted to promote responsible animal management:

- Use of social media to reunite pets with their owners
- Use of media to promote current campaigns and legislative change

Extensive public consultation efforts such as attendance at community events, drop-ins, on-line seminars.
We currently operate a 24 hour/7 day a week emergency response service to respond to animal management issues such as dog attacks.

5.4 Summary

The role Councils play in communicating with the community cannot be underestimated. Many survey respondents acknowledge the role Councils play in ensuring the community is kept up to date. This was even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the community looks to Council for its information, it is important to ensure its media is clear, concise and relevant. Many survey respondents identified the need for more targeted media campaigns not only around animal management, but also other Council related matters.

5.5 Strategy: Ensure the community are kept well informed of Council services

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Ongoing	Targeted media campaigns prompting Council services and responsible pet ownership/ legislative changes – 4 a year	Communication/Media developed
Year 1	Evaluate after hours call centre service	Feedback on after hours customer experience Review referral processes
Year 2	'A day in the life of' – Community Safety Unit	Production of Community Safety Unit PR campaign
Ongoing	Support local obedience clubs through sponsorship and attendance at meetings to discuss and promote responsible animal ownership	Evidence of attendance and participation
Ongoing	Use of social media to promote Council services	Social media presence increased

6 Dog attacks

6.1 Current Situation

Although relatively uncommon, dog attacks do occur from time to time throughout the municipality. When they do occur, the can be highly traumatising for all involved. Attacks on livestock and other animals are much more prevalent than attacks on people. Of the 443dog attacks that were reported during the 2020/21 financial year, three incidents involved dogs directly attacking people, whilst additional three people were also injured during attack that occurred on their dog or livestock. A breakdown of the dog attack reports for 2020/21 FY are as follows:

Dog attack reports – 2020/21	
Dog attack on person – Serious/non serious	3/0
Combined – person and dog/stock	3/0
Dog attack on dog – Serious/ non serious	3/6
Dog attack on stock on stock Serious/ non serious	14/4
Dog rush	10

Survey respondents identified their main concern for dog attacks was in public areas where dogs are exercised and not appropriately controlled. This scenario was explored further in 3. 'Animals and Amenity'

6.2 Current Policy and procedure

The Community Safety Unit is available 24 hours a day to respond to reports of dog attacks. In accordance with its Compliance Policy, Councils response to dog attacks are outcome focused. That is, where an alleged dog attack has occurred, Council will seek to resolve the issue and work with relevant parties to reduce the likelihood of further incident.

6.3 Current Activities

Compliance activities include the following:

- Investigating dog attacks in accordance with the provisions of the Act
- Where required, seizing and holding dogs alleged to have being involved in an attack pending investigation/prosecution outcome
- Prosecuting matters pursuant to the Act
- Issuing infringements for dogs wandering at large
- Issuing infringements for minor attacks / dog rush incidents
- Declaring menacing or dangerous dogs where required

6.4 Summary

The majority of dog attacks within the municipality occur on livestock and other animals. As a result, it is important to acknowledge the detrimental impact these matters can have on both on business with regard to livestock loss and the emotional influence of being the victim of a dog attack.

Both the owner and animal who have been subject to a dog attack report increased levels of anxiety and lower confidence levels when in public with their animals.

As a result, priority is to be placed on the prevention of dog attacks. This can be achieved by specific patrols, targeted media, data analysis and the use of deterrence as a key tool for prevention.

6.5 Strategy: Reduce impact of dog attacks on community and business

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation

Year 1	Media campaign 'Confining your dog - Why it's important for you and your dog'	Develop campaign material and deliver campaign
Year 2	Raise awareness of livestock owner's rights and responsibilities in preventing and responding to dog attack	Evidence of implementation of campaign including response options for livestock owners when involved in dog attack scenarios
Year 3	Increase proactive patrols in locations identified through statistics as having higher risk of dog attack incidents	Data comparison of proactively patrolled areas and reactive response only
Year 4	Raise awareness of livestock owner's rights and responsibilities of preventing and responding to dog attack	Evidence of implementation of campaign Comparison of Year 2 and Year 4 data to identify effectiveness of campaign
Ongoing	Promote prosecution outcomes to the community to increase awareness.	Media developed
Ongoing	Advocate for the Responsible Pet ownership program in schools	Promote program to be implemented within Councils schools

7 Compliance

7.1 Current situation

Council aims to achieve voluntary compliance from its residents and visitors to promote the health and safety of the community. Both responsive and proactive compliance is centered on harm and risk reduction in accordance with these Policy principles.

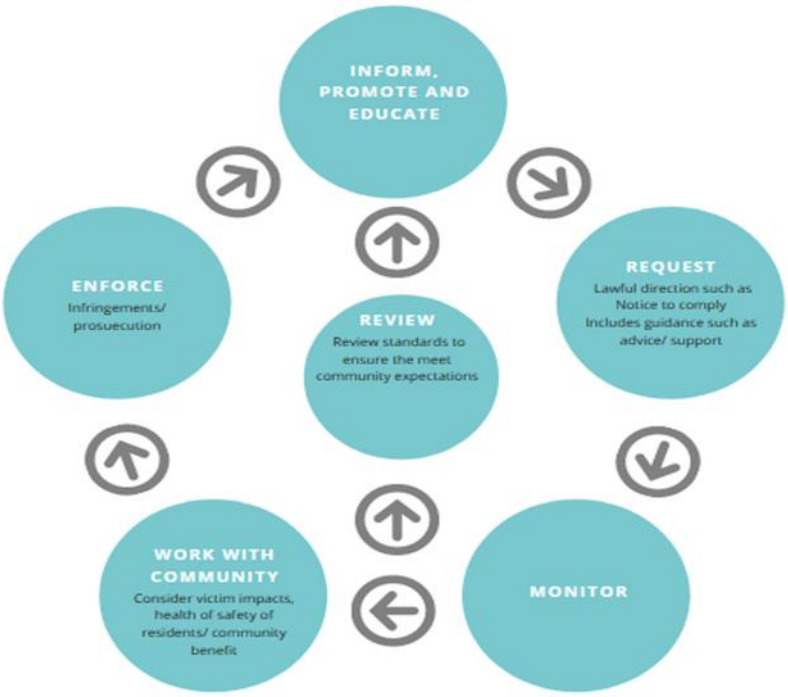
Compliance activities by Council are outcome focused. That is, when a non-compliant activity is identified, in the first instance Council will seek to resolve the issue and work with relevant parties to achieve compliance.

Prosecution is seen as a last resort for the mitigation of issues, however there is a need for prosecution of matters that present a risk a public safety and/or legislation determines the enforcement procedure. For example, dog attack causing serious injury s29(4) is not an infringeable offence and therefore a consequence is required to be determined by the Magistrates Court.

7.2 Current Policy and procedure

Council's approach to compliance aims to achieve the following objectives

- voluntary compliance
- consequences for repeat or culpable behaviour
- deterrence associated with enforcement



7.3 Current Activities

Council undertakes to promote voluntary compliance within the community by providing clear communication, consistent approaches and consideration of community expectation.

Council's obligation for enforcement action is reduced through achieving voluntary compliance.

Currently Council achieves voluntary compliance by providing:

- easy access to information about their rights and obligations under relevant legislation
- support to meet these obligations where appropriate
- an understanding of how Council will approach administration of this legislation and, in particular, how Council will approach compliance and enforcement and the consequences of non-compliance.

Where enforcement action is taken, Council ensures that all matters are followed up. Unpaid infringements are referred to Fines Victoria for further action.

7.4 Summary

Although Council undertakes to promote voluntary compliance, there is a need to issue infringements and official warnings to impose consequences for repeat or culpable behaviour and implement a deterrent element for the broader community. During 2020, 49 infringements and official warnings were issued for breaches of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994.*

7.5 Strategy: Improve voluntary compliance

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Year 1	Increase community awareness of Councils Community Safety team by participating in 'Coffee with a cop'	Evidence of people attending the event and accessing information.
Year 2	Review internal review process	Undertake review and implement findings
Ongoing	Promote prosecution outcomes to the community to increase compliance	Media developed

8 Training of Authorised Officers

The Community Safety Unit is accountable for ensuring Council's responsibilities under the Act are met. Ongoing training and development within this role is a critical element in ensuring that officers involved in animal management have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their work in a safe, effective and professional manner.

Over the next four years, Council will continue to ensure officers are appropriately trained and experienced to educate and enforce the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and to stay abreast of industry developments and best practice.

8.1 Current Activities

Officers currently undertake regular organisational focused training on customer service, workplace health and safety and workplace behaviour. Officers regularly attend industry related information sessions, seminars and industry specific training.

It is a requirement of the role to undertake CERT IV Animal Control and Regulation within the first 12 months of employment.

Refresher and specialised ongoing training is required to further build officer skills and knowledge.

8.2 Current Policy and procedure

Councils Community Safety Unit consists of a Coordinator Community Safety and three Community Safety Officers. Three of the four members of the Community Safety Unit have completed their CERT IV Animal Control and Regulation. The fourth Officer is currently undertaking this training.

8.3 Strategy: Ensure that all staff involved in animal management obtain and maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their work efficiently, effectively and safely

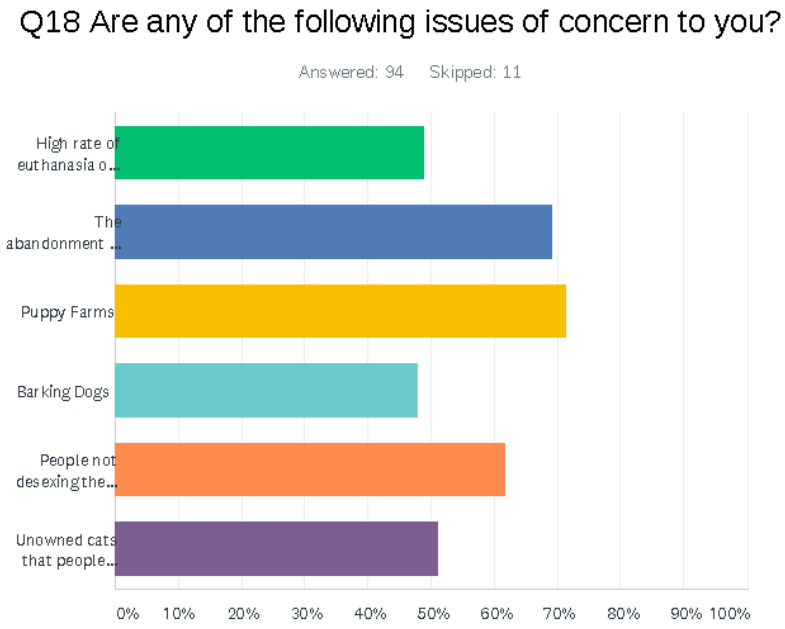
Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Ongoing	Develop a training plan that clearly identifies minimum training requirements and any additional training needs that should be undertaken by Authorised Officers to ensure Officers can properly administer and enforce the DAA.	All staff meet performance standards in annual employee performance reviews.
Ongoing	Self-defence, conflict management, mediation skills, prosecutions training Research the implementation of Body Worn Cameras/ Policy development	Training plan updated and training completed Evidence of improved officer safety through use of cameras and other surveillance Production of Body worn cameras policy.
Ongoing	Maintain North East Authorised Officers Association membership and attend meetings and seminars.	Regular attendance at seminars and meetings.
Ongoing	Attend Bureau of Animal Welfare seminars and information days	Regular attendance at seminars and meetings
Year 3	Industry training – Prosecutions	Training complete and register updated
Ongoing	Complete annual development plan and review process for each staff member identifying training needs to deal with skill gaps and emerging issues or legislative changes	Training complete and register updated
Ongoing	Maintain s72A authorisations for contract Animal Management Officers	Authorisation register maintained
Ongoing	Annual firearms training for Authorised Officers	Officer training register maintained. All staff meet performance standards in annual employee performance reviews.

9 Animal Health and Welfare

9.1 Current Situation

Council received 73 reports of cruelty or injured animals in 2019-20.

Approximately 70% of survey respondents were concerned with animal welfare issues such as puppy farms and the abandonment of pets. 58 people chose to provide qualitative data and raised concern regarding wildlife and animal neglect / cruelty.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
High rate of euthanasia of cats and kittens	48.94%	46
The abandonment of pets	69.15%	65
Puppy Farms	71.28%	67
Barking Dogs	47.87%	45
People not desexing their pets	61.70%	58
Unowned cats that people feed, but do not take full responsibility for	51.06%	48
Total Respondents: 94		

9.2 Current Policy and procedure

Community Safety Officers are authorised under S18 and S24 of *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* 1986, allowing the investigation and prosecution of matters under such legislation. A large portion of municipalities do not authorise officers under POCTA, therefore councils ability to respond efficiently and support RSPCA in cruelty matters is exemplary.

9.3 Current Activities

Council officers work closely with RSPCA to respond to and undertake primary investigation into reports of animal cruelty.

The Community Safety Unit play an active role in RSPCAs Million Paws Walk event by setting up stalls to promote responsible pet ownership. Reduced fee microchipping and registration has also been offered by Council at this event previously.

Although Murrindindi Shire Council has a relatively low rate of neglected animal reports, animal neglect was seen to be of concern to the DAMP survey participants.

Across Victoria the RSPCA received 10,745 animal cruelty reports during the 2019-2020 financial year (*RSPCA Australian National Statistics 2019-2020*). As such, there is need to further educate the community (both owners and non-owners) of minimum standards of care and housing for pets.

9.4 Strategy: Promote animal health, welfare and emergency planning

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Year 2	Review Murrindindi Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan Sub Plan	Complete review of MEMP Sub Plan – Murrindindi Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan
Annually	Ensure all Domestic Animal Business are compliant with relevant Codes of practice	Annual audits undertaken and documented.
Ongoing	Collaborate with RSPCA to effectively and efficiently resolve animal welfare matters	Maintain POCTA authorisation for Council Officers
Ongoing	Attend events to promote responsible pet ownership and emergency planning	Evidence of attendance and participation
Annually	Participate in RSPCA Million Paws Walk	Evidence of attendance and participation

10 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

In accordance with *The Act*, Council may declare a dog dangerous if it has caused death or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking that person or animal.

There are a number of requirements placed upon an owner of a dangerous dog which include but are not limited to:

- Confining the dog in a prescribed enclosure in accordance with *Domestic Animals Regulations 2005*)
- Muzzling the dog whilst in public
- Ensuring the dog is on a lead at all times whilst in public

A dog may be declared menacing if the dog has rushed or chased a person, or the dog bites any person or animal causing injury that is not in the nature of a serious injury.

An owner of a menacing dog must muzzle the dog whilst in public and ensuring the dog is on a lead at all times whilst in public.

A menacing dog may be declared a dangerous dog and its owner has received at least two infringement notices for failing to comply with the requirements of a menacing dog.

10.1 Current Situation

There are currently two (2) declared menacing dogs kept within the Municipality. There are currently no declared dangerous or restricted breed dogs kept within the Municipality.

Owners of declared dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs are required to abide by specific regulations to prevent the risk of attack.

10.2 Current Policy and procedure

Council currently has only one Order in place in relation to two (2) menacing dogs.

Council does not currently have any Local Law's in place in relation to dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs. Council's policies and procedures for dealing with dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are conducted in compliance with the provisions of Council's legislative powers under the *Domestic Animals Act* 1994 and Domestic Animals Regulations 2015.

10.3 Current Activities

When responding to dog attacks, Council considers the process for declaring a dog dangerous or menacing as both a consequence and preventative measure for dog attacks. Currently, registration fees for dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs are 200% higher than non-declared dogs.

10.4 Summary

Although currently there are only two (2) declared menacing, dangerous or restricted breed dogs kept within the municipality, Council is aware of its responsibilities and authority to declare dog dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds. Recent survey data indicates the term 'dangerous dog' is used broadly and not within the definition of *The Act.*

As a result, it is important to increase the communities' awareness of dangerous dog legislation.

10.5 Strategy: Effective management of Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs

Timeframe	Action	Evaluation
Ongoing	Declare dogs dangerous in accordance with the Act	Annual audit conducted to ensure legislative requirements are being met.
Ongoing	Instigate declaration of Restricted Breed Dogs where appropriate	Ensure legislative requirements are being met.
Ongoing	Annual compliance inspections of properties with known dangerous, restricted breed or menacing dogs	Annual audit conducted to ensure legislative requirements are being met.
Ongoing	Maintain Victorian Declared Dog Registry data	Register updated as required
Ongoing	Provide media on legislation, changes and updates as required.	Media developed

11 Domestic Animal Management Plan Review

As required under the *Act,* Murrindindi Shire Council will review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually to assess whether any amendments are necessary in order to ensure the plans relevance and to monitor Council's performance against the DAMP objectives. Any adjustments to the plan will be reported annually and in the plans final year Council will undertake a major review and commence preparations on the new DAMP.

In accordance with the *Act*, the Murrindindi Shire Council will review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually to assess whether any amendments are necessary in order to ensure its relevance and to monitor Council's performance against the Domestic Animal Plans objectives.

In the final year of the plan, Council will undertake a major review and commence preparations for drafting the next Domestic Animal Management Plan.