



2017-2020 Animal Management Strategy

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Introduction

The effective management of animals requires a commitment from the entire Rockhampton Region community.

Council's Local Laws Unit activities are aimed at improving the safety and social amenity of the region, but can only be truly effective with the cooperation of pet owners and the broader community.

Current services provided include:

- investigation of dog attacks and aggressive dogs,
- investigation of general animal customer requests for service,
- management of regulated dogs,
- registration of dogs,
- provision of property based approvals for the keeping of animals,
- impoundment and release of stray and wandering animals,
- patrols of public spaces,
- community education,
- disaster management response and recovery.

Rockhampton Regional Council as a responsible local government seeks to provide and maintain a safe, caring and healthy environment and recognises that effective animal management is part of that scenario.

Consequently, as part of its planning and delivery it requires an Animal Management Strategy:

- to provide clear and unambiguous direction from Council to its organisation on how it expects the Animal Management function to be conducted,
- to enable the Local Laws Unit to operate with clear and consistent rules of engagement so that all circumstances are treated equally and fairly, with best possible outcomes for the animals and the community,
- to provide the community with clarity as to the Council's approach to animal management and its expectations of animal owners.

Objective

The objectives of the Animal Management Strategy 2017-2020 are:

- to ensure that pet owners are educated and aware of the principles of responsible animal ownership,
- to ensure that animals in the community are appropriately controlled and contained,
- to improve animal identification and the reuniting of wandering and stray animals with their owners,
- to encourage voluntary compliance with State and Local Laws,
- to ensure that interventions that are necessary are conducted efficiently and humanely and are consistent with fairness and equity.

Guiding Principles

Education to raise awareness of responsible pet ownership behaviour.

Incentives to encourage voluntary compliance.

Intervention

- to seek owner cooperation in remedying minor non-compliance,
- to act decisively in cases of danger to public health and safety.

Penalties to deter repeated or deliberate breaches of legal obligations.

Links to Council's Corporate Plan 2012 - 2017

Rockhampton Regional Council's Corporate Plan 2012-2017 describes the desired outcome and activities relating to animal management as follows:

Outcome

A safe, caring and healthy community that we all belong to.

Service

Local Laws: administer local laws and manage pound facilities.

Activities

- Provide compliance and regulatory services in line with legislative and community standards.
- Plan and deliver Local Laws and associated programs, partnerships and education.

Key Issues

This Strategy details 10 key issues for animal management and outlines the strategic responses required to achieve Council's Corporate Plan objectives.

The issues are:

- 1 Animals not being under effective control
- 2 Unregistered dogs
- 3 Unidentified cats and dogs
- 4 Managing unwanted cats and dogs
- 5 Management of impound facilities
- 6 Barking dogs and animal nuisance
- 7 Animal Management Local Laws
- 8 Animal Management Policies and Procedures
- 9 Community education and awareness
- 10 Capability of staff

Vision

Your Pet, Your Responsibility

Objectives

Ensure pet owners are educated and aware of the principles of responsible animal ownership.	Ensure animals in the community are appropriately controlled and contained.	Improve animal identification and reuniting of wandering and stray animals with their owners.	Encourage voluntary compliance with State and Local Laws.	Ensure that interventions that are necessary are conducted efficiently and humanely and are consistent with fairness and equity.
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Outcomes

<p>There is an increase in the number of dogs that are registered, desexed and microchipped.</p> <p>There is an increase in the number of cats that are desexed and microchipped.</p> <p>There is a reduction in the number of matters requiring investigation, enforcement and prosecution.</p> <p>Responsible animal ownership initiatives are supported and delivered across the region.</p>	<p>There is a reduction in the number of public nuisances created by cats and dogs (wandering, attacking, barking).</p> <p>There is a reduction in the number of animals needing to be impounded.</p> <p>There is a reduction in the number of matters requiring investigation, enforcement and prosecution.</p>	<p>There is a reduction in the number of unidentifiable or unwanted cats and dogs.</p> <p>There is an increase in the proportion of wandering or impounded animals that are reunited with their owners.</p>	<p>There is a reduction in the number of matters requiring investigation, enforcement and prosecution.</p>	<p>Complaints about interventions and representation to Councillors and management about intervention processes are minimised.</p>
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Legislative framework

Council's Local Laws Unit is responsible for the administration and enforcement of a range of State legislation and Local Laws throughout the Rockhampton Region. The legal framework associated with animal management includes:

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008*
- *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Regulation 2009*
- *Local Law No. 1 (Administration) 2011*
- *Local Law No. 2 (Animal Management) 2011*
- *Subordinate Local Law No. 2 (Animal Management) 2011*
- *Subordinate Local Law No. 1.5 (Keeping of Animals) 2011*

Local Government Act 2009

Although not containing specific provisions relating to Animal Management the *Local Government Act 2009* provides the framework on which Council operates and includes the requirement to develop local laws.

Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008

The purposes of the *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008* are to:

- provide for the identification of cats and dogs,
- provide for the registration of dogs,
- provide for the effective management of regulated dogs,
- promote the responsible ownership of cats and dogs.

The Act provides a consistent regulatory approach for the management of cats and dogs across Queensland.

Local Law No. 1 (Administration) 2011 and Subordinate Local Law No. 1.5 (Keeping of Animals) 2011

The purpose of *Local Law No. 1 (Administration) 2011* is to provide a legal and procedural framework for the administration, implementation and enforcement of the local government's local laws, subordinate local laws and specified regulatory powers under legislation and to provide for miscellaneous administrative matters.

Local Law No. 2 (Animal Management) 2011 and Subordinate Local Law No. 2 (Animal Management) 2011

The purpose of *Local Law No. 2 (Animal Management) 2011* and its subordinate local law is to regulate and manage the keeping and control of animals in a way that:

- balances community expectations with the rights of individuals,
- protects the community against risks to health and safety,
- prevents pollution and other environmental damage,
- protects the amenity of the local community and environment.

The purpose is to be achieved by providing for the:

- regulation of the keeping of animals in terms of how many, what type, how, and where animals can be kept,
- prescription of minimum standards for keeping animals,
- proper control of animals in public places and koala conservation areas,
- management of dangerous or aggressive animals other than dogs,
- seizure and destruction of animals in certain circumstances,
- establishment and administration of animal pounds.

Strategic links to other legislation

Local government must ensure that the plan does not breach the requirements of other legislation. Legislation that local government needs to consider includes the:

- *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*
- *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011*



Key Issue 1 – Animals not being under effective control

In 2015, Council received over 1,200 notifications of wandering dogs and over 850 requests to pick-up stray, private impound dogs.

These animals account for the majority of animals impounded by Council and generally have escaped under, over or through a fence, gate or property boundary and have not been in the effective control of their owner or keeper.

Dogs not securely enclosed or not under effective control (wandering) may result in:

- attacks causing physical injury to and emotional impact on the victim, the owner and families,
- rush and menace attacks occasioning fear in adults and children and other animals,
- attacks on animals (pets and livestock) causing injury or death,
- motor vehicle accidents,
- spread of disease (such as Parvo Virus) and parasites,
- propagation of unwanted litters,
- fouling of footpaths and properties,
- disturbance nuisance in the neighbourhood.

The impact of an attack or experiencing aggressive behaviour from a dog is not only immediate but often results in lasting physical and emotional trauma.

While dog attacks and complaints about aggressive dogs combined total around 300 per year, anecdotal evidence suggests that this figure is not indicative of the actual incidences occurring.

- victims may not report attacks or aggression because of the the potential ramifications for themselves, their families or friends,

- owners and victims may settle through agreement to provide compensation, payment of vet/medical bills etc,
- organisations such as hospital, police and vets not having established clearly defined reporting or recording mechanisms linking with Council,
- people accepting that attacks and aggressive behaviours are natural (dogs chase cats, dogs guard properties etc.).

Strategic Responses

1.1 Dog attacks and aggressive dogs to be given priority attention

Council will ensure that dog attacks and aggressive dogs continue to be given priority attention:

Dog attacks will be responded to immediately:

- a report of a dog attack will be allocated the highest response priority,
- dogs surrendered as a result of attack will be euthanised immediately,
- regulated dog declarations and penalties will be invoked according to the circumstances and legislative requirements.

Complaints about an aggressive dog will be given high investigation priority to reduce Council's risk exposure to the potential of the aggressive behaviour, subsequently resulting in an attack causing injury or even death.

Complainants will be informed of the outcome of investigations and Council actions in relation to dog attacks and threats of attack – subject to normal privacy considerations.

1.2 Dog off-leash areas will be effectively managed

Dog off-leash areas are valued by the community and provide the opportunity for owners to exercise and socialise their dogs.

Council will require dogs to be under effective control within off-leash areas and be on-leash in transit to and from the facility.

- a. Off-leash areas will be designed to separate large and small dogs and located to minimise nuisance to the adjoining community.
- b. Rostered local law patrols will include dog off-leash areas and their access routes.
- c. Dog off-leash areas will be used to publicise activities relating to dog training, behaviour and barking control to encourage voluntary compliance.
- d. Users of dog off-leash areas will be alerted to region wide disease outbreaks.

"Manners" for owners and their dogs using the off-leash areas will be attached to regulatory signs to encourage appropriate behaviour and voluntary compliance.

The Local Laws Unit will continue to provide advice and guidance as to suitable locations and designs for future off-leash areas.

1.3 Wandering animals will be returned on first offence

- a. Non-aggressive dogs found wandering will be returned to their owner on the first offence prior to being impounded where the owner is able to be contacted and available to secure the animal immediately AND the dog is registered and microchipped. Otherwise the dog will be impounded.
- b. The owner will be given advice by the Local Law Officer as to the requirement to contain the dog at all times and arrangements will be made to conduct a gate and fence check with the owner to ensure the dog can be secured on the property in future.
- c. If impounded, and the dog is a "first impound", the dog will be released free of charge – but only if the dog is registered and microchipped, is claimed within one day and it has not been previously returned to the owner under condition a) above, otherwise normal pound release procedures will apply.
- d. Other animals, not being stock, found wandering will be returned to their owner prior to being impounded where the owner is able to be contacted and available to secure the animal immediately. If the animal is a cat it must also be microchipped. Otherwise the animal will be impounded.

1.4 Wandering stock and other animals will be addressed by effective processes

Council's responsibilities for animal management extend beyond cats and dogs. Roaming and unregistered stock and other large animals pose specific problems particularly at night.

Council will maintain an effective process for wandering stock and other animals.



Key Issue 2 – Unregistered dogs

The *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008* places a mandatory requirement for dogs over 12 weeks of age to be registered with the relevant local government.

The *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008* also places a mandatory requirement on the owner of a dog to give notice of changed information to Council within seven days of the changed information.

“Return to sender” registration notices and tags received following the annual mail out of renewals indicate that a large number of owners do not update their personal address details with Council. This impacts on Council’s ability to reunite animals with their owners.

Strategic Responses

2.1 Community education

Council will:

- educate the community on the need to register all dogs, that registration is renewable annually and of the need to keep name, address, mobile and landline telephone and email information up-to-date at every interaction with Council.

2.2 Ensure efficient data management

Council will:

- conduct data cleansing of all unpaid dog registrations to confirm resident contact details,
- review its information technology systems and consider the use of emerging technology.

2.2 Use incentives to promote registration

Council will:

- investigate the introduction of life-time tags (annual renewals apply),
- promote the registration of puppies under 12 months of age at the desexed rate provided veterinary evidence is provided by the owner within the 12 months that the dog has been desexed.

2.3 Use Systematic Inspections as a “soft” intervention initially

Council will:

- conduct periodic Systematic Inspections for unregistered dogs in accordance with legislation and available staffing resources,
- review the Council’s Enforcement Strategy relating to Animal Management to encourage voluntary compliance through an initial notice and compliance period before infringement action is considered.

2.4 Impounded dogs not released unless registered

All impounded dogs must be registered before their release.



Key Issue 3 – Unidentified cats & dogs

The *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008* places a mandatory requirement for cats and dogs to be microchipped before they are supplied (given away, sold, exchanged) and for a person who is the owner of or becomes an owner of a cat or dog to have the animal microchipped before 12 weeks of age.

The Act also requires the owner of a cat or dog to give notice of the changed information within seven days of the changed information eg ownership transfer of the cat or dog must be supplied to the original microchip provider to be able to ensure an animal is returned to its owner.

Many animals cannot be reunited with their owner as the microchip details are not up to date, particularly the current owner's name and phone number.

Local Law Officers carry microchip scanners and are able to identify the owner of a dog or cat if the animal is microchipped and the microchip details are up-to-date.

Strategic Responses

3.1 Community education

Council will:

- ensure emails and mobile numbers are collected at the point of registration and explore emerging technology to publicise cat and dog microchipping requirements and the need to keep records up to date,
- promote key messages via all communication channels including social media, encouraging owners to microchip their cats and dogs,
- develop a process to ensure owners are reminded to update the microchip details of their cats and dogs when moving house or changing telephone numbers,
- include animal microchipping information in details provided to new residents.

3.2 Use incentives to encourage microchipping

Council will:

- consider offering a fee based microchipping service and investigate the training and qualifications needed by staff for this implementation,
- recommend owners use the National Pet Register which is best suited for Local Government purposes,
- compulsory microchipping of claimed impounded cats and dogs at the point of release takes place and is in keeping with the intent of the *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008*.

3.3 Enforcement of micro-chipping legislation

Council will:

- continue to require owners to observe legislative requirements in relation to microchipping.



Key Issue 4 – Unwanted cats & dogs

On average Council receives over 2,000 requests to collect animals from the public and over 300 animals are surrendered to Council by their owners.

The principal cause of the growth in numbers of unwanted animals is the failure of owners to desex cats and dogs.

Entire cats and dogs represent a high proportion of all impounded animals. Entire dogs are also twice as likely to be involved in bite related incidents.

The high volume of unwanted animals being committed to Council's custody means an increasing rate of euthanasia, which is distressing to the community and especially to the veterinarians and Council staff who must deal with the final act.

Strategic Responses

4.1 Community education

Council will:

- conduct regular promotions to encourage responsible pet ownership including desexing,
- ensure through an ongoing program of education that the community is aware of cat and dog ownership responsibilities and that ownership is regulated and infringement penalties apply.

4.2 Use incentives to encourage desexing

As an incentive to desex dogs, Council will continue to offer:

- reduced registration fees for desexed and microchipped animals,
- desexing vouchers for qualifying persons.

Council will:

- review the schedule of Animal Management Fees and Charges to reward responsible owners who have

desexed their animals by reducing impound release fees provided the animal is also registered and microchipped and claimed within the statutory five days.

In conjunction with the above, the owner of a Regulated Menacing Dog will be encouraged to desex the dog to receive the registration incentive and to close the current loophole in the *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008* which does not require the dog to be desexed.

4.3 Community engagement

Council will initiate structured engagement with its community to gauge attitudes toward any proposal to require cats and dogs to be desexed prior to the point of sale or exchange of ownership.

Consultation with licensed cat and dog breeders will form part of this engagement process.

4.4 Work with State Government

Council will liaise with the State Government to support legislation to eliminate puppy farming.

4.5 Develop an unwanted animal re-homing policy

The Council will:

- review the existing Animal Management - Surrendered and Unclaimed Animals Policy (Community Policy) 8 December 2015,
- offer a suitable unclaimed microchipped and desexed cat or dog which has served its pound time and become the property of Council free of charge to seniors who have registered interest; registration included free to 30 August in any financial year,
- promote positive media stories about the life changing experiences for seniors in owning a suitable pet to promote take up of the program,
- review outsourcing arrangements for the rehoming of unwanted cats and dogs for clarification in the policy.



Key Issue 5 – Management of pound facilities

On average 128 dogs and 74 cats are impounded each month as a result of wandering, stray, seized or surrendered animals.

Conditions and disease transmission management at the existing Pound are recognised as a priority.

Council has approved Stage 1 of a staged development of new pound facilities which is due for completion early 2017. The available holding capacity in the Stage 1 design requires the existing and new pounds to be conducted in parallel.

A future development and funding plan for Stages 2 and 3 which also enables consideration of the provision of a livestock facility and an outsourced sales and rehoming facility is needed for Council's consideration in its Forward Capital Plan.

State and Federal Grant funding sources also need to be explored.

Strategic Responses

5.1 Educate the community on Council's new Pound facilities

Council will:

- develop promotional material to publicise the new facilities and their location and opening times,
- promote the new facilities as an example of good practice in ensuring the care, treatment and welfare of impounded animals meets regulations and community expectations.

5.2 Improve intervention for disease transmission management

Council will:

- continue to monitor the existing pound and the replacement facility to maximise the prevention of disease transmission,
- confirm the design with RSPCA QLD and Biosecurity QLD for sign-off on disease control mechanisms,
- staff implement strict quarantine measures particularly in respect of impounded or surrendered litters.
- Council will regularly promote the importance of keeping pets immunisation against Parvovirus and other infectious diseases up to date.

5.3 Adequately resource pound activities

Council will:

- identify capabilities and training required for full and/or permanent part time animal management pound attendant(s) and investigate resourcing capabilities.

5.4 Stage 2 and 3 Pound Development Plan

Cats and dogs must be managed in a routine and humane manner in accordance with statutory and welfare requirements.

Cages and kennels must be available daily for incoming cats and dogs that have been found wandering.

Council's ability to accept surrendered animals is directly related to its Pound's capacity.

Council will:

- consider a future report for the Staged Pound Development Program which includes funding and grant sources and which investigates the viability of an outsourced sales and rehoming facility.



Key Issue 6 – Barking dogs & animal nuisance

In 2015 Council received over 600 complaints regarding barking dogs and nearly 200 animal nuisance complaints.

It is natural for dogs to bark. This is the way that dogs communicate with people and other animals.

Dogs bark for various reasons and small amounts of barking are acceptable. Nuisance barking occurs when a dog barks persistently and disturbs the peace of the neighbourhood regularly and for lengthy periods of time.

Nuisance barking occurs for a variety of reasons including boredom, loneliness, anxiety, ongoing neighbourhood disturbances, pain, attention seeking, lack of food or water and/or excitement.

The first that owners may know about their dog's excessive barking in their absence, is a complaint from a neighbour or contact from Council.

The value and importance of neighbourhood conversations cannot be underestimated in the resolution of barking nuisances. Where dog owners show empathy and consideration by altering their day to day routines to attempt to solve the barking, better outcomes are achieved.

Otherwise, Council is required to undertake a comprehensive and impartial investigation to gather sufficient and impartial evidence to confirm that excessive barking is occurring and the complaint is not a vexatious one.

This process takes time during which community frustration about the noise nuisance and Council's perceived lack of a timely response exacerbates.

Strategic Responses

6.1 Community education

Council will:

- promote through its website helpful tips and advice about controlling nuisance barking,
- conduct information sessions particularly in neighbourhood areas where complaints of barking are prevalent,
- respond to nuisance barking complaints by telephone in the first instance.

6.2 Progressive intervention

Council will:

- review the current "Enforcement Strategy" relating to Animal Management to develop a "Voluntary Compliance and Enforcement Procedure" which includes guidelines for Local Law Officers in exercising discretion when handling first or minor offences,
- adopt an operational approach of seeking to encourage voluntary compliance from animal owners in the first instance where the matters concerned do not involve risks to public health and safety or blatant or repeated disregard for Council's local laws and relevant legislation.



Key Issue 7 – Animal Management Local Laws

Council's animal management local laws and subordinate local laws regulate and manage the keeping and control of animals within the region.

The laws regulate:

- the keeping of animals in terms of how many, what type, how, and where animals can be kept,
- the prescription of minimum standards for keeping animals,
- the seizure and destruction of animals in certain circumstances,
- the establishment and administration of animal pounds.

Council's local laws relating to Animal Management are due for review in 2016/17.

Strategic Response

7.1 Local law review process

Council will:

- conduct targeted community engagement on key issues to be regulated under the revised local laws, and particularly in respect of attitudes towards requiring desexing of cats and dogs,
- frame its new local laws with relevance to the view and needs of its communities and recognise good practice trends in animal management,
- develop the local laws and subordinate local laws so as to be consistent with the implementation of its Animal Management Strategy when adopted,
- in accordance with legislative requirements and Council's local law making policy seek appropriate community consultation on the content of the draft local laws.



Key Issue 8 – Animal Management Policies and Procedures

Animal Management Policies and Procedures set the framework for employees to follow in conducting their operations in a consistent, reasonable, transparent and effective manner.

Adherence to well established procedures provides employees and Council with direction and the ability to confidently defend allegations of legal or regulatory violations.

The existing instruments include but are not limited to:

- Animal Management - Desexing Voucher Policy (and Procedure)
- Animal Management - Rehoming Incentive Procedure
- Animal Management - Surrendered and Unclaimed Animals Policy
- Animal Management - Seized Cats and Dogs Registration and Microchipping Policy

Strategic Response

8.1 Review animal management policies and procedures

Council will:

- review existing policies and procedures and create new policies and procedures in response to continuous improvement and emerging trends in animal management and consistent with the Animal Management Strategy,
- proceed to set Agreed Service Levels to guide response times and cross-organisation interactions,
- review the Schedule of Fees and Charges in response to any policy change.



Key Issue 9 – Community education and awareness

Ensuring the community is adequately informed of responsible pet ownership obligations is an essential element of animal management.

Effective communication of information and working with key stakeholders is critical in improving animal management outcomes.

Strategic Responses

9.1 Community education

Council will:

- develop a comprehensive Community Education Program scheduling appropriate events and promotions across the year and including information to new residents to reinforce responsible pet ownership and voluntary compliance with State legislation and Council's local laws,
- ensure the currency and accuracy of promotional materials which are available on Council's public information sources,
- use relevant media to promote factual, legislative and local law requirements and to remind dog owners about responsible pet ownership,
- develop a responsible dog ownership campaign to ensure that;
 - owners understand the risks of owning a dog,
 - the community knows what is required of individual dog owners,
 - the community participates in defining irresponsible dog ownership as unacceptable,
 - owners take action to meet community expectations.

9.2 Provision of prep, pre-school and school-based programs

Council will:

- review current programs engaging with students about all Council matters to determine the feasibility of combining information about pet ownership in the first instance,
- review the resourcing required to staff a part-time community education officer,
- alternatively, investigate the outsourcing of the provision of a school-based education program.



Key Issue 10 – Capability of staff

Council recognises that competent and motivated staff are its greatest asset.

Recruitment of appropriately skilled personnel and continuing professional development must be provided to ensure staff deliver high quality and consistent customer service in accordance with established Legislation, Policies and Procedures.

Strategic Response

10.1 Review staffing resources

Council will:

- ensure the provision of appropriately qualified and trained personnel,
- provide ongoing professional development.



Review & Reporting

Strategy implementation review and performance reporting

To monitor and measure the effectiveness of the implementation of this strategy Council will prepare and maintain an Action Delivery Plan incorporating operational requirements aimed at successfully progressing the strategic responses.

The operational actions will be assigned appropriate indicators so that performance against the desired outcomes can be regularly assessed. Appropriate reporting frameworks will be put in place to ensure management can monitor performance and adjust operational effort according to circumstances.

Continue research and strategy development

Council will:

- gather and use business intelligence concerning animal management to identify causes, trends and factors associated with the identified issues so as to assist in establishing sound priorities and allocating proactive resources.

Strategy Review and Reporting

Council will:

- review the Strategy annually to ensure that;
 - it aligns to the objectives of Council's corporate and operational plans,
 - it identifies and reflects changing priorities, operational capacity and the legislative framework,
 - the outcomes are achievable and align with community expectations,
 - the strategy has been afforded adequate financial and staffing resources.
- present a report on the outcomes to Council annually in the month of the launch of the initial Strategy; identified and emerging priorities will be highlighted for inclusion in the Action Plan for the following year of the Strategy's implementation.



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