



Coonamble Shire Council

**COMPANION
ANIMAL
MANAGEMENT
PLAN**

**Adpoted
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coonamble Shire Council has identified the need to develop a Companion Animal Management Plan to improve outcomes in the area of companion animal management. New legislation and changing community expectations mean new approaches are now required. In addition, there is increasing recognition that enforcement approaches will not, on their own, result in lasting changes in human behaviour. They need to be supplemented by a range of other tools that focus on passive and voluntary approaches to achieving responsible pet ownership.

Investigations include a detailed examination of the issues (Section 2) and analysis of the existing situation in the Coonamble Shire (Section 3). Part 1 culminates in a description of the Strategic Framework including the goal and aims. The Action Plans are contained in Part 2. They have been grouped into fourteen key issue areas i.e.:

- Animal Welfare And Safety
- Education And Dissemination
- Recognising The Benefits Of Pet Ownership
- Identification And Registration
- Desexing
- Excessive Barking
- Dangerous Dogs And Restricted Breeds
- Dogs In Public Places
- Wandering Dogs
- Faeces Management
- Cat Management
- Enforcement
- Funding And Review
- Coordination With Other Agencies

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What is a Local Companion Animal Management Plan?

The Companion Animals Act 1998 is now in operation throughout New South Wales. It has introduced changes to the way dogs are managed by local authorities and, for the first time, introduces controls over domestic cats.

A Companion Animal Management Plan (CAMP) is a document which provides guidance for Council to fulfill its responsibilities under the Act by determining relevant objectives and priorities along with a clear program of implementation.

1.2. Outline of this Plan

The CAMP is divided into two parts:

Part 1 (Sections 1-3) is entitled Strategic Framework. It examines relevant issues and responsibilities in relation to companion animal management. It culminates in a goal and aims for the CAMP.

Part 2 (Section 4) is entitled Action Plans. It outlines the actions necessary for Council to reach and achieve the goal and aims outlined in the Strategic Framework.

1.3. Scope of the Plan

This Plan integrates the developing expertise in companion animal management around Australia to produce a program of action to be undertaken by Coonamble Shire Council.

Issues include those prescribed under relevant legislation as well as the generally understood notion of socially responsible pet ownership.

This Plan is confined to an examination of domestic dogs and cats, their effect on the local environment and lifestyle of the Coonamble community.

NOTE: It is recognised that there are other companion animals covered by other Acts. These companion animals are not included in this plan at the present time.

2. COMPANION ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

2.1. Registration and Identification of Companion Animals

(Sections 8 & 9 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Registration and identification are crucial components of animal management:

- as a database for returning lost pets and identifying animals;
- as a way of communicating with pet owners; and
- as a source of funds for education and enforcement.

Under the Act a companion animal must be microchipped from 12 weeks of age (Section 8 of the Companion Animals Act 1998). A companion animal must be registered from 6 months of age (Section 9 of the Companion Animals Act 1998). Cats born before 1 June 1999 are exempt from the provisions.

2.2. Dogs Off-leash areas

(Section 13 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Council can declare a public place to be an off-leash area. Such a declaration can be limited so as to apply during a particular period or periods of the day or to different periods of different days. However under Section 13(6) of the Companion Animals Act 1998 there must at all times be at least one public place in any municipality that is an off-leash area.

Coonamble Shire Council currently has one designated off-leash area at McDonald Park in Aberford Street, Coonamble.

The case for additional off-leash areas is set out in the publication Public Open Space and Dogs which is available on the internet at www.petnet.com.au/openspace/frontis.html. Arguments include:

- The popularity of dog ownership - in Australia 42% of households own one or more dogs;
- Dogs need to be socialised around other dogs and humans;
- Exercise and outings play a part in alleviating unwanted behaviours in the home such as excessive barking and some forms of aggression;
- There are benefits for humans - exercise, socialising with other dog owners (this is well documented) and the fact that for some people a dog is their main form of recreation;
- To avoid concentration of off-leash activity in one or a small number of areas; and

- As a compliance tool - by providing reasonable off-leash opportunities, Council can expect and appeal for compliance with leash requirements in other areas.

Preliminary advice from the Local Government and Shires Association suggests that:

- Providing proper consideration is paid to siting issues (including signage), a Council which complies with a statutory requirement to provide a facility is less likely to be exposed to liability risk than a Council which provides such facilities of its own initiative;
- The Act places liability for such claims with the offending dog owner; and
- Section 731 of the Local Government Act gives protection to Councils and their officers for acts done in good faith for the purpose of executing that or any other Act.

2.3. Public places where dogs would be excluded

(Section 14 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Under the Act dogs are also prohibited in the following public places:

- In or within 10m of any children's play areas;
- Food preparation or consumption areas (unless it is a public thoroughfare such as a road, footpath or pathway);
- Recreation areas where dogs are declared prohibited;
- Public bathing areas where dogs are declared prohibited;
- School grounds (unless with the permission of the person controlling the grounds);
- Child care centres (unless with the permission of the person controlling the centre);
- Shopping areas where dogs are prohibited (unless secured in a vehicle, with the permission of the person controlling the place or going to or from a vet or pet shop); and
- Wildlife protection areas.

A wildlife protection area is a public place that has been declared by Council for the protection of wildlife.

Assistance animals are exempt from these provisions.

Thus Council can elect to prohibit dogs from particular recreation areas, public bathing areas, shopping centres and wildlife protection areas.

2.4. Dog faeces

(Section 20 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Unretrieved dog faeces are a problem for health, environmental and amenity reasons. Under the Act, owners are required to remove their dogs' faeces and properly dispose of them. In practice, this is extremely difficult to enforce and may need to be an priority for any public education activities.

Local authorities must provide sufficient rubbish receptacles for owners to dispose of their dogs' faeces in areas that are commonly used for exercising dogs. At a minimum, leash free areas would need to be provided with suitable rubbish receptacles.

2.5. Nuisance dogs

Under Section 21 of the Companion Animals Act 1998 a dog is a nuisance if it:

- is habitually at large;
- makes a noise by barking or otherwise, that persistently occurs or continues to such a degree or extent that it unreasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in any other premises;
- repeatedly defecates on another person's property;
- repeatedly chases any person, animal or vehicle;
- endangers the health of any person or animal; or
- repeatedly causes substantial damage to anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

Inadequate fencing in rural and semi-rural areas makes it difficult for owners to responsibly confine their dogs. In urban areas, no or low front fence requirements also make it difficult for owners to confine their dogs to their property. Dog owners need to be reminded that it is their responsibility to confine their dogs adequately on their property. This is also for the safety of the dog.

The rise in barking complaints over recent years appears to be consistent with the experience in other areas. However such complaints are often not easy to resolve and consume large amounts of officers' time.

On the face of it they seem straightforward, however in practice they could be difficult to enforce given nuisance problems are often difficult to define and measure. The words 'repeatedly' and 'habitually' will be important in determining if a nuisance exists.

2.6. Dangerous dogs

(Section 34 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Council can declare a dog kept in its area as dangerous.

- (1) A council may, if satisfied that a dog is dangerous, declare it to be a dangerous dog. It does not matter if the dog is ordinarily kept in another council's area.
- (2) A declaration can be made on the council's own initiative or on the written application of a police officer or any other person.
- (3) A declaration has effect throughout the State. It is not limited in its operation to the area of the council.

Note. This Part also gives a Local Court the power to declare a dog to be dangerous in certain circumstances.

2.7. Restricted dogs

(Section 55 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) The following are restricted dogs:

- Pit bull terriers;
- American Pit Bull Terriers;
- Japanese Tosas;
- Argentinian fighting dogs (dogo Argentino);
- Brazilian fighting dogs (fila Brasileiro); and
- any other dog of a breed, kind or description whose importation into Australia is prohibited by or under the Customs Act 1901 of the Commonwealth,
- any dog declared by a council under Division 6, of the Companion Animals Act 1998 to be a restricted dog,
- any other dog of a breed, kind or description prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this section.

The owner of a restricted dog must also comply with specified conditions including keeping the dog in a childproof enclosure.

2.8. Cats

The issues of cat management relate predominantly to the impact of cats on wildlife. Cats can also be a nuisance to surrounding neighbours. A distinction needs to be made between feral cats, domestic cats and stray cats.

Council can prohibit cats from entering public places (see discussion below). Other options for protection of wildlife include:

- Education to encourage people to keep their cat indoors;
- Cat curfews;
- Cat proof fences and enclosures;
- Use of housing design to help owners to responsibly confine their cat; and
- Cat bans in new housing estates, where there are specific environmental concerns.

2.9. Areas where cats would be prohibited

(Section 30 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) Under the Act, domestic cats are prohibited in the following public places:

- Food preparation or consumption areas (unless it is a public thoroughfare such as a road, footpath or pathway); or
- Wildlife protection areas.

A wildlife protection area is a public place that has been declared by Council for the protection of wildlife.

2.10. Nuisance cats

(Section 31 of the Companion Animals Act 1998) A cat is a nuisance if it:

- Makes a persistent noise; or
- Repeatedly damages anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

This will be similar to handling nuisance dog complaints, although cats are more difficult to confine to a property than dogs. It is envisaged that each complaint will need to be examined on a case by case basis.

2.11. Enforcement or education?

The benefits of an extensive education program supported by an appropriate level of law enforcement aimed at responsible community animal management are well recognised. The best outcome for the general community, companion animals and their owners will be achieved through a well informed community supporting Council Rangers' efforts to provide the community with sound animal management.

Voluntary compliance is achievable through education, awareness programs and incentives and supported by law enforcement. The aim is to provide meaningful and lasting changes in the community's behaviour and attitude thereby providing the aims of sensible companion animal management in Coonamble shire. The whole community, whether companion animal owners or not, should be included in the process to achieve success and benefits for all the community.

A combination of education and law enforcement will be applied to achieve the required outcomes for responsible companion animal management. An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both are essential to maintain a well balanced approach to management that achieves the desired aims.

2.12. Recognising the benefits of pet ownership

The health and social benefits of owning pets are now well understood and have been documented in numerous scientific studies. At one level this means a balanced approach to managing domestic pets. At another more implicit level, there is an emerging understanding that pets contribute to quality of life, a positive that could perhaps be fostered by local government.

At this stage, fostering the positives in an explicit way would still be something of a quantum leap, focused as local government is on handling complaints. However over time the Plan could be adjusted to integrate an explicit consideration of the benefits of owning pets.

Part of the challenge involves removing barriers to owning pets. The Petcare Information and Advisory Service publish brochures promoting socially responsible pet ownership. As one initiative, Council could make these brochures available for the local community.

3. GOAL AND AIMS

3.1. The Goal

The Local Companion Animal Management Plan's primary goal is:

To promote and facilitate responsible pet ownership of dogs and cats, protect animal welfare and foster the benefits of animal companionship.

3.2. The Aims

The aims of the Plan are:

- To ensure Council meets its obligations under the Companion Animals Act 1998
- To investigate and adopt the best mix of regulatory and non regulatory approaches to achieving responsible pet ownership in Coonamble;
- To consider ways Council could harness the benefits of owning pets; and
- To establish priorities for companion animal management for the next three to five years.

The ACTION PLANS are the concrete action that Council can undertake to ensure these aims materialise. These are set out in Part 2. The action plans have been grouped into fourteen KEY ISSUE AREAS.

ACTION PLANS

4. KEY ISSUE AREAS

The key issue areas include:

- Animal Welfare And Safety
- Education And Dissemination
- Recognising The Benefits Of Pet Ownership
- Identification And Registration
- Desexing
- Excessive Barking
- Dangerous Dogs And Restricted Breeds
- Dogs In Public Places
- Wandering Dogs
- Faeces Management
- Cat Management
- Enforcement
- Funding And Review
- Coordination With Other Agencies

4.1. Animal Welfare And Safety

Of particular importance is to promote desexing of non-breeding pets in order to reduce the number killed because they are unwanted. Liaise with RSPCA, local veterinarians and Police in respect of POCTA provisions.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Promote desexing of companion animals.	HIGH	Input into education campaign.
Promote and enforce identification and registration of dogs and cats to enable safe return of companion animals.	HIGH	Input into education campaign.
Review existing holding facility arrangements for compatibility with new responsibilities	HIGH	Pound review completed by end of 2007.

4.2. Education And Dissemination

Education is the key to lasting voluntary changes in human behaviour. It involves education of animals, their owners and prospective owners. It also involves showing non-pet owners, especially children how to behave around animals.

To be effective, education needs to be designed and implemented with great care, taking into account identified priorities and programs being implemented by the State Government. Developing a comprehensive education campaign should be an early priority.

The education campaign needs to consider both formal education (brochures, communication in the media etc) and informal education. The latter may require staff training in dealing with the community in their day-to day-patrols.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Plan a comprehensive education campaign involving all stakeholders to identify education priorities and appropriate action.	HIGH	Education campaign developed.

4.3. Recognising The Benefits Of Pet Ownership

Local government could have a new role to play in harnessing the health and social benefits of owning domestic pets.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Consider the health and social benefits of owning pets in the development of any future local or public health plan.	MEDIUM	Health benefits of pet ownership included in the public health plan.
Assist tenants and landlords with queries about owning pets in rental accommodation.	MEDIUM	Hold copies of the Petcare Information & Advisory Service brochures on keeping pets in rental accommodation for distribution to the local community.

4.4. Identification And Registration

Identification and registration are important for reunion of lost pets with their owners and as a source of funding for animal management activities. It also provides a database for Council to communicate with its pet owning population.

Boosting registrations should be an early priority of the Plan.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Educate the community about the importance and need for microchipping and registering.	HIGH	Boost registrations through encouragement, enforcement and other activities.

4.5. Desexing

The promoting and encouraging desexing of companion animals should be a high priority in order to reduce the number of animals killed because they are unwanted and to show the health benefits to the animal.

Reduced registration fees for desexed animals are available under the Companion Animals Act 1998.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Promotion of desexing within the community.	HIGH	assistance into education and desexing campaign.

4.6. Excessive Barking

Barking complaints are problems for a different range of reasons and are not easy to resolve.

Options for improvement include use of a diary system by complainants, staff training in negotiations, the leasing of Citronella Anti-barking collars and other such aids and the introduction of a referral system to a specialist animal behaviourist.

Improved housing design can also be used to reduce the incidence of barking complaints in new developments.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Review procedures for dealing with barking complaints.	MEDIUM	Review completed by the end of 2007.

4.7. Dangerous Dogs And Restricted Breeds

The Companion Animals Act provides special procedures for dealing with dangerous dogs and restricted breeds.

Both types of dog are required to be kept in a child-proof enclosure.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Review procedures for dealing with dangerous dogs.	HIGH	Review completed by the end of 2007.
Review procedures for dealing with dog attacks	HIGH	Review completed by the end of 2007.
Review procedures for dealing with restricted breeds, including Council restricted breeds.	HIGH	Review completed by the end of 2007.

4.8. Dogs In Public Places

Dogs and their owners are significant users of public open space, however some dogs cause problems for other park users and the environment.

Council needs to decide if additional off-leash areas should be provided and if so, how many and where. There may also be a case to prohibit dogs from some public places. These issues need to be decided in consultation with the local community and in the context of the review of this Plan.

The new provisions relating to dogs' access to public open space need to be disseminated widely to the community. Appropriate signage is essential.

Once established, the off-leash areas need to be protected from conflicting uses or development. This is best done by integrating the new provisions into relevant plans of management.

Over time, improved planning and design can be used to reduce conflicts between different public open space users and resources.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Undertake a review of on- and off-leash provisions.	HIGH	Plans of Management for Open Space amended accordingly.
Undertake a review of areas from which dogs (and cats) might be prohibited.	MEDIUM	Appropriate declarations and orders made under S13(6) and S14(1) of the Companion Animals Act 1998.
Seek advice on appropriate risk management strategies in public places.	LOW	Ongoing relevant advice received.
Disseminate, educate and advertise the new leash provisions and commence enforcement of their new management.	HIGH	Strategy for dissemination and enforcement is developed and implemented including an education program.

4.9. Wandering Dogs

Dogs wandering at large are at risk from traffic and other danger contribute significantly to the dog management task.

Identification and registration are central to management of wandering dogs.

Housing design may also have a role to play in helping owners to properly confine their dog.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Educate the community about the importance of properly confining their dogs.	HIGH	Input into the education campaign as an early priority.
		Promote and enforce identification and registration of dogs (and cats) to enable safe return of companion animals.
Educate the community about the necessity of properly exercising their dogs.	HIGH	Input into the education campaign.

4.10. Faeces Management

Removal and disposal of dog faeces by dog owners is required under Section 20 of the Companion Animals Act. It is important for environmental reasons, for example, faeces washing into the river causing contamination; health reasons, for example, the high risk of contracting Roundworm and Hydatid Tapeworm infection; and amenity reasons. However it is recognised that this requirement is difficult to enforce. Encouraging owners to pick up and remove their dogs' faeces could be an early priority for public education.

It is Council's duty to provide sufficient rubbish receptacles for the disposal of dog faeces pursuant to Section 20.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Install sufficient rubbish receptacles for the disposal of dog faeces.	HIGH	Appropriate locations for decided in collaboration with all Council departments
Develop and review procedures for enforcement	MEDIUM	Enforcement procedures decided on.
Educate the community about the importance of removing and disposing of dog faeces and options available.	HIGH	Input into the public education campaign as an early priority.

4.11. Cat Management

New cats are now required to be identified and registered under the Companion Animals Act 1998.

Council can prohibit cats from entering specified public places. There will be procedures for dealing with nuisance cats.

Some of the options proposed in other areas (eg cat bans, cat curfews etc) are extremely difficult and expensive to enforce. Public education is required to increase awareness of the need to identify and register cats and about responsible cat ownership.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Incorporate consideration of cat prohibitions in the review of on- and off-leash areas and areas from which dogs would be prohibited.	MEDIUM	Review completed following consultation with the community.
		Appropriate orders made under S30 of the Companion Animals Act 1998.
Education of cat owners as to the benefits of keeping the cats in at night which includes the protection of the cat and wildlife.	MEDIUM	Input into education campaign.
Establish procedures for dealing with nuisance cats.	LOW	Procedures established by the end of 2007.

4.12. Enforcement

While Council already has enforcement procedures in place, these should be subject to ongoing review as circumstances change and better approaches become evident.

All enforcement should be empathic, flexible and reasonable.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Review all enforcement procedures and protocols for operational improvements and gaps.	MEDIUM	Annual review in consultation with ranger contract review.

4.13. Funding And Review

Once adopted, the Plan needs to be subject to on-going review as new issues and priorities emerge.

A detailed record system is important to ensure Council can accurately track trends in registrations, complaints, infringements and orders and pound activity.

Animal management activities will not be funded from registrations and fines alone.

The Plan should be completely reviewed within three to five years.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Ensure CAMP is implemented	HIGH	Continuous Monitoring
Ensure CAMP is reviewed.	HIGH	CAMP completely reviewed by end of 2007.
Review records system.	HIGH	Audit record system to ensure detailed records are kept on all animal management activities.
Consider an animal management levy.	LOW	Decision made on whether to impose an animal management levy.

4.14. Coordination With Other Agencies

Co-ordination with other agencies will facilitate information sharing and co-operation between areas.

Agencies include but are not restricted to: RSPCA, Royal NSW Canine Council, Local veterinarians, WIRES Cat Fanciers Association, National Parks & Wildlife, Police, other Councils, NSW Fire Brigade and Department of Housing.

STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIORITY	TARGET/PERFORMANCE
Maintain contact with the Department of Local Government and other agencies on the implementation of the Act.	HIGH	Continuous liaison with relevant agencies.