

The City of Newcastle

Management Plan

Companion Animal Management Plan 2004

PO Box 489 (282 King Street)
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300
Ph 02 4974 2000
Fax 02 4974 2222
Email mail@ncc.nsw.gov.au
www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au



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Introduction

Newcastle City Council was instrumental in developing the first Companion Animal Management Plan in NSW. Council was awarded the inaugural National Urban Animal Management Plan of the Year Award in August 2001 and NSW Plan of the Year in 2002. Eighty percent of actions within the Plan had been completed by 2002.

The NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 defines companion animals as dogs and cats. Newcastle City Council's Community Survey 2003 found that 34% of households own a dog, and 21% of households own a cat. Given that there are approximately 56,600 households in Newcastle, a significant proportion of the community have a direct involvement in companion animal issues. Companion animals play an integral role in society, but can cause conflict when irresponsible pet ownership occurs.

Council uses a range of education and enforcement tools to achieve compliance with the Act. Council's Companion Animal Management Plan identifies key issues in companion animal management and develops and prioritises actions to address these issues.

A review of the Plan has been conducted to assess the key issues in companion animal management to guide companion animals services and actions.

Education and promotion of responsible pet ownership is the guiding principle behind the Plan. Many of the issues identified in companion animal management can be related to irresponsible pet ownership, and by encouraging more responsible behaviour by animal owners, many of the Plan objectives can be met.

Council's Plan identifies three primary themes in companion animal management – animals, community and environment. Specific actions that provide measurable indicators have been chosen to assess plan outcomes.

The Plan aims to:

- balance the needs of the community, the environment and companion animals;
- identify gaps in current planning;
- provide a framework for prioritising actions; and
- provide measurable indicators for the assessment of plan outcomes.

The Plan has been developed following consultation with Council staff across a range of functional areas, Council's Companion Animal Advisory Panel, comprising Councillors, staff and community representatives, and consultation with the general community.

Policy Statement for Companion Animal Management

Recognising the importance of companion animal management to the community, environment and the companion animals of Newcastle;

Using our range of skills and tools in education and enforcement;

Council and the community of Newcastle will encourage all pet owners in the Newcastle Local Government Area to be responsible for their pet's actions.

We will be guided in our work by the following **principles of responsible pet ownership**:

1. Appropriate pet selection;
2. Basic health and welfare principles;
3. Identification;
4. Registration;
5. Desexing;
6. Secure confinement;
7. Environmental enrichment;
8. Socialisation;
9. Training; and
10. Lifetime commitment.

Our **objectives** in companion animal management are ...

- To encourage the permanent microchip identification and lifetime registration of all companion animals in Newcastle to facilitate the prompt return of companion animals to their owners.
- To provide a fast and efficient service for customers updating or registering details on the NSW Companion Animal Register.
- To facilitate the prompt return to owner of seized animals and therefore reduce the number of animals that need to be impounded.
- To provide a best practice animal care facility and transport for impounded animals.
- To minimise the numbers of unwanted animals that are euthanased.
- To ensure Council staff regard animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals.
- To encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their companion animal that improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community.
- To improve community awareness of the importance of safety around companion animals.
- To improve owner's awareness of their responsibility to maintain their animal under effective control in public places.
- To ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks.
- To provide free running exercise areas for dogs across the Newcastle Local Government Area that are as safe as possible for dogs and people.
- To provide opportunities for dogs and their owners to engage in 'dog agility' activities.
- To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters.
- To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity.
- To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on water catchments.
- To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on biodiversity.

Responsible Pet Ownership

Education and promotion of responsible pet ownership is the guiding principle behind the Plan. Many of the issues identified in companion animal management can be related to irresponsible pet ownership, and by encouraging more responsible behaviour by dog owners, many of the Plan objectives can be met.

Council aims to encourage all pet owners in the Newcastle Local Government Area to be responsible for their pet's actions through education and enforcement.

Responsible pet ownership includes appropriate pet selection, basic health and welfare principles, identification, registration, desexing, secure confinement, environmental enrichment, socialisation, training and lifetime commitment.

Appropriate pet selection is the first stage to responsible pet ownership. Pets received as gifts and cheap pets are more often surrendered to welfare organisations (Stabler 1999).

By choosing an animal most suited to the owners lifestyle and property constraints, nuisance behaviour can be minimised. Choosing the right animal ensures a lifetime commitment to the animal. The average lifespan of an Australian companion animal is only 3.5 years of age (PIAS 2001). This is due in part to the high euthanasia rate of young companion animals for behaviour problems (Seksell 1997), and lack of

ownership commitment for the lifetime of the animal.

The privilege of owning and enjoying the companionship of a pet carries with it the dual responsibilities of care for the animal, and respect for the community. Responsible pet owners:

- When at home, confine their animal in their yard to prevent impacts on public safety and the environment;
- When in public places, ensure that their dog is under effective control by means of a leash (except in leash free areas);
- Keep their animals out of prohibited areas;
- Make sure their animal is identified with a microchip, collar and tag to assist in returning the animal if it becomes lost;
- Register their animal on the State register;
- Desex their animal to minimise nuisance behaviour, minimise numbers of unwanted animals and have a cleaner, healthier, happier animal; and
- Clean up after their animal.

Council staff emphasise the importance of responsible pet ownership when dealing with animal owners, and many of the Plan actions involve education on aspects of responsible pet ownership to deliver on the Plan objectives.

Newcastle City Council Vision

Great Place, Great Lifestyle, Great Future.

Mission

Enhanced quality of life for all Newcastle residents through appropriate community education and promotion of responsible pet ownership to improve community amenity, welfare of animals, and the natural environment.



Animal Issues

An integral part of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 is the permanent microchip identification, statewide lifetime registration and web-based NSW Companion Animal Register.

Animal welfare issues such as environmental enrichment for confined animals, and the safe transport and impounding of companion animals are also important.

Identification and Registration

Objective

- To encourage the permanent microchip identification of all companion animals in Newcastle to facilitate the prompt return of lost or stray companion animals to their owners.
- To encourage the statewide lifetime registration of all companion animals in Newcastle in accordance with the Act.
- To provide a fast and efficient service for customers updating or registering details on the NSW Companion Animal Register.

Background

The Companion Animals Act requires that companion animals be microchipped by 12 weeks of age, and be registered by 6 months of age. The microchip and registration process allows lost or straying companion animals to be identified and returned to their owners as quickly as possible, generally avoiding the need for the animals to be impounded. 80% of the revenue received from companion animal registrations is provided to Council, which supports

Councils programs in companion animal management.

In the five years since the introduction of the Act, microchipping has become a standard part of preventative health care for companion animals. Competition and general market forces reduced the price of microchipping after the introduction of the Act. Microchipping must be carried out by authorised identifiers such as veterinarians, breeders and animal welfare staff. A number of Council officers are authorised identifiers, enabling Council to assist members of the community to microchip their animals, particularly in cases of financial hardship.

Council has held three free microchipping days (2000-2001) in which 2079 dogs and 720 cats were microchipped. A 'Regional Rego Roundup' microchip and register day was held in August 2002 (172 dogs and cats microchipped and registered) with a reduced price of \$10 charged for microchipping. This day was a combined effort of local councils and was marketed through numerous media outlets.

There are now approximately 25,000 animals microchipped in the Newcastle Local Government Area. 15,000 (60%) of those animals are lifetime registered. An unknown number of cats and dogs are likely to be neither microchipped or registered, and Council uses education and enforcement strategies to address this issue when these animals are located.

Council also assists in cases of financial hardship by providing free microchipping to pensioners and health care cardholders if they desex and register their pet.

Issues

- Not all authorised identifiers send in identification forms within the statutory time limit.
- There is still community confusion over the two step process in the legislation i.e. identification then registration.
- There are still a large number of companion animals that are identified but not registered.
- Some previously annually registered dogs (amnesty ended September 2002) have not been microchipped or lifetime registered.
- Not all companion animal owners update their change of address details on the register.



Actions

1. Provide educational materials to local companion animal service industries to promote identification and registration of companion animals.
2. Liaise with Hunter Councils to hold regular 'Regional Rego Roundups' and other events to facilitate identification, registration and responsible pet ownership.
3. Send information packs containing registration, desexing and educational material to owners of companion animals when their animal is microchipped.
4. Continue to provide a microchipping service to members of the community facing financial hardship.
5. In conjunction with local veterinarians and the Department of Local Government, investigate measures to streamline the two step chip and register process and encourage simultaneous microchipping and registration.

Impounding Animals

Objective

- To facilitate the prompt return to owner of seized animals and therefore reduce the number of animals that need to be impounded.
- To provide a best practice animal care facility and transport for impounded animals.
- To minimise the numbers of unwanted animals that are euthanased.

Background

Council responds to complaints and proactively patrols for animals straying in public places. When the animal is seized by a Council officer, the following procedures apply:

1. The animal is scanned for a microchip;
2. The officer telephones Council to retrieve contact details for the owner from the Register;
3. Telephone contact with the owner is attempted; and
4. The officer returns the companion animal to the registered address if the owner is home; or
5. The officer transports the animal to the impound facility in accordance with the legislation.

Council aims to return as many animals to their owner as possible, however animals must be impounded when an owner cannot be identified or contacted. When animals are impounded, they are held for up to 14 days and are then either offered for sale or euthanased. Only animals that are unsuitable for resale due to illness or behavioural problems are euthanased.

Issues

- There are difficulties in returning companion animals to their owners as they are often not contactable, not home or have changed address.
- Whenever animals are impounded, disease transmission and other animal welfare factors such as stress are of concern.
- Owners are liable to significant costs in impound and sustenance fees where animals have remained in the pound for extended periods.
- Animals are euthanased when they are unclaimed and determined to be unsuitable for resale.

Actions

1. Review companion animal transport and impound protocols to ensure best practice guidelines provided by NSW Agriculture are followed.
2. Utilise technological advances such as wireless communications to improve efficiency of database checking and facilitate prompt animal return to owner.
3. Investigate the placement of digital photos of unidentified stray animals on Council's website to facilitate the release of animals from the pound and reduce rates of euthanasia.
4. Encourage authorised identifiers to record as much owner contact information as possible to facilitate their prompt return to owner.
5. In partnership with local Councils, conduct a program to educate companion animal owners of the importance of accurate register contact details.

Animal Welfare

Objective

- To ensure Council staff regard animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals.
- To encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their companion animal that improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community.

Background

Animal welfare is defined as providing appropriate nutrition, shelter, exercise, and interaction to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of an animal. Animal welfare is intricately linked to the welfare of their owners.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is the lead agency in managing animal welfare in NSW. Given that Council is actively involved in other aspects of companion animal management, it is appropriate that Council cooperate with the RSPCA to ensure that animal welfare issues are appropriately addressed. In many cases, animal welfare issues give rise to nuisance behaviours such as barking or straying and therefore Council has a supplementary role in the issue.

Many urban pet problems arise from animals experiencing frustration or boredom causing reactions such as barking, chasing, and jumping up. By providing environmental enrichment such as the addition of cognitive, dietary, physical, sensory and social stimuli, the animal's physiological and psychological well being can be improved.

Desexing companion animals has been encouraged through the registration fee structure incorporated into the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998. Council has formed partnerships with community organisations to promote discount desexing of animals for those in the community experiencing financial difficulty, and Council provides educational material on the benefits of desexing. Early desexing reduces potential pet behaviour problems such as roaming, mounting, and urine spraying in companion animals (Hopkins 1976).

Issues

- Large numbers of animals kept in confined spaces can cause animal welfare concerns, in addition to causing nuisance behaviour. Currently there is no restriction on numbers of companion animals permitted on premises.
- Undesexed animals are at greater risk of contracting diseases, are more likely to be overweight and are not as clean, quiet and healthy as desexed animals.

Actions

1. Continue to promote the benefits of desexing of companion animals.
2. Continue to provide reduced rate desexing of companion animals.
3. Provide information to the community on appropriate animal housing and care as recommended by the RSPCA.
4. Develop a Local Orders Policy in conjunction with other Hunter Councils which includes guidelines on numbers of dogs and cats recommended to be kept per premises.
5. Research the linkage between nuisance behaviour such as barking and animal welfare issues.



COMMUNITY ISSUES

Companion animals play an important role in Australian society and culture. Many in the Newcastle community assimilate companion animals into their every day life while others prefer not to associate with animals. Balance and harmony between these groups is difficult to achieve but is based on respect and responsibility.

Public Safety

Objective

- To improve community awareness of the importance of safety around companion animals.
- To improve owner's awareness of their responsibility to maintain their animal under effective control in public places.
- To ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks.

Background

Dog attacks compromise public safety and affect the right of the community to safely walk the streets and undertake recreational activities.

Victorian Council research indicates 58% of dog attacks in public places occurred on the footpath or road bordering the property. Only 9% of dog aggression incidents in public places occurred in parks or reserves (Van der Kuyt 2001).

Children are a high-risk group in terms of dog attacks. Research has shown that the majority of dog bites to children are:

- from a dog they know;
- in their own or a friend's backyard;
- to children aged 0-5years; and

- cause injuries to their face (Van der Kuyt, 2001).

Council has developed a protocol for the investigation of dog attacks, which details the procedures to be followed in both the investigation and enforcement phases of the process. The protocol creates a framework for determining the appropriate course of action, from warnings and education to prosecution, dangerous dog declarations and destruction orders, and conducting regular audits of premises housing declared dangerous dogs.

In 1999, Council incorporated the Delta Society Australia's 'Prevent a Bite' Program into Council's Companion Animal Schools Education Program. The program educated children about the appropriate way to approach and handle companion animals to minimise the risk of dog bites, and measures to reduce injury in the event of an attack.

Council also presents information on responsible pet ownership to new dog owners through the 'Puppy Preschool' program, which is delivered by local veterinarians.

Issues

- Owners of dangerous dogs do not always comply with the requirements of Council's dangerous dog declaration. Ongoing compliance with the terms of the declaration need to be monitored.
- Investigating dog attacks and monitoring ongoing compliance with dangerous dog control requirements is resource intensive for Council.
- The legislative requirement for childproof enclosures for declared dangerous dogs is difficult to interpret.

- Schools education and 'Puppy Preschools' place a considerable resource load on Council in their current form.

Actions

1. Research previous dog attack incidents in Newcastle to ascertain specific recurrent local issues or seasonal trends, and adapt education and enforcement accordingly.
2. Review Council's dangerous dog protocol on a regular basis.
3. Conduct six monthly audits of premises where declared dangerous dogs are kept and assess issues including adequacy of child proof enclosures.
4. Revise Council's Schools Education Program and utilise the education staff and resources of the RSPCA to assist in program delivery.
5. Consider adopting a support role for puppy preschool providers to more efficiently manage Council's involvement.
6. Investigate options for community involvement to assist Council officers in identifying irresponsible pet ownership and remind owners of their responsibilities.



Leash Free Areas

Objective

- To provide free running exercise areas for dogs across the Newcastle Local Government Area that are as safe as possible for dogs and people.
- To provide opportunities for dogs and their owners to engage in 'dog agility' activities.

Background

Council has classified three types of public areas for dogs:

- prohibited areas, such as all ocean beaches;
- areas where dogs are permitted to exercise off lead (leash free areas); and
- the balance of public areas, where dogs are only permitted when on a lead.

The purpose of leash free areas is to allow dogs to exercise off lead so they can 'burn off' excess energy in a safe environment without being a nuisance to the general public and to provide socialisation experience with other dogs. By providing these opportunities, dogs are less likely to exhibit nuisance behaviour due to boredom and frustration when confined to their yard.

Under the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998, Council is obliged to provide one leash free area for community use. Council established five areas in 1996 and now has fifteen areas around the city totalling approximately 55 hectares. The areas, which are distributed across the City, are integrated into local parks, with some on a restricted time basis.

The leash free areas were chosen following an extensive process of community consultation. All leash free area signage was reviewed and updated in 2001. Waste bins in each area were upgraded in 2004. A 'Dog Exercise Areas' brochure is part of all pet information packs provided to the community.

The leash free areas are considered to be highly successful, with recorded incidents of dog attacks in leash free areas being minimal.

Incidence of dog faeces is minimised by the use of dung beetles, dog poo bag dispensers and dog poo bins, and the areas are regularly patrolled by Council officers.

Issues

- A dog agility area has been investigated. Such areas provide an obstacle course environment for dogs, and a more challenging form of exercise for dogs and their owners. Community concerns regarding the amenity impacts of a large, centralised facility have been raised, and smaller facilities in a number of reserves are being considered.
- Some owners fail to remove dog faeces from the area, and do not maintain effective control of their dog in the leash free area.
- Complaints are occasionally received regarding unleashed dogs being observed in areas surrounding but outside the designated leash free area.
- Requests have been received for additional leash free areas across the City to cater for residents without a local facility.
- Provision of dog poo bags has assisted the community in achieving greater levels of awareness, but demand for bags is such that

Council cannot sustain the rate of supply.

Actions

1. Investigate the creation of additional leash free areas to provide further options for exercising dogs off lead in the Local Government Area.
2. Trial the installation of a small number of items of dog agility 'playground equipment' in selected leash free areas.
3. Conduct activity days in key leash free areas to promote the use of the facilities by dog owners.
4. Continue proactive patrols of leash free areas to manage inappropriate use.
5. Replace dog poo bins with standard waste bins to provide greater flexibility for waste disposal and reduced servicing and maintenance costs.
6. Phase out the provision of dog poo bags and encourage the community to provide their own bags as part of responsible pet ownership.



Disaster Planning

Objective

- To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters.

Background

Disaster planning is critical in minimising the impact of disasters on persons and property. It is important that this planning gives consideration to companion animals.

The NSW Department of Agriculture is the lead agency for animal evacuation in NSW, and in the event of an emergency, calls upon agencies such as Councils and the RSPCA to provide assistance. It is important that these agencies maintain regular contact and review procedures.

Incidents such as the bushfires that threatened homes in the Toronto area in November 2002 provide an indication of the threats facing residents and their animals. A number of homes were damaged, and large number of residents were evacuated from their homes, with Lake Macquarie City Council Officers assisting with animal evacuations. Similar incidents could arise in the Newcastle area and preparedness for such incidents is critical, both for residents and Council.

Issues

- People have refused to be evacuated from life threatening situation if their pets are not evacuated as well.
- People prefer to remain with their animals after evacuation, which creates challenges for providing evacuation centres, which can house both people and their animals.
- Limited sites are available to operate large-scale animal evacuation centres in the Newcastle LGA.

Actions

1. Contribute to the development of a database of possible evacuation centres for large numbers of companion animals.
2. Assist the Department of Agriculture to review and document assembly procedures at evacuation centres to ensure companion animals are considered.
3. Develop procedures for implementing Council's role in emergency evacuations.
4. Educate the community regarding disaster preparedness for companion animals.

Strategic Links

- Newcastle DISPLAN

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Companion animals can adversely affect the environment in a number of ways – noise pollution, water pollution, faecal pollution and predation on native fauna. Educating companion animal owners to take responsibility for their animals will help the owner to redirect their animal's activity to minimise impact on the surrounding environment.

Noise Pollution

Objective

- To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity.

Background

Barking dogs account for 50% of noise complaints received by Council and 20% of all companion animal complaints. There are three options available for the management of barking dog issues in the community:

1. Newcastle City Council's Ranger Services Team provides information and advice and encourage negotiation between neighbours. Council may serve orders if Council is satisfied that the dog 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.
2. The Community Justice Centre (CJC) is an independent, government funded centre that specialises in settling neighbourhood disputes. Affected neighbours can seek to mediate a solution to the issue in

cooperation with their neighbour, facilitated by the CJC.

3. The Chamber Magistrate at the Local Court may make Noise Abatement Orders. These orders may be issued when it is clear the barking has caused a nuisance and attempts have been made to resolve the issue by other means.

Council hires Citronella Anti Barking Collars (ABC) to the community to reduce barking problems.

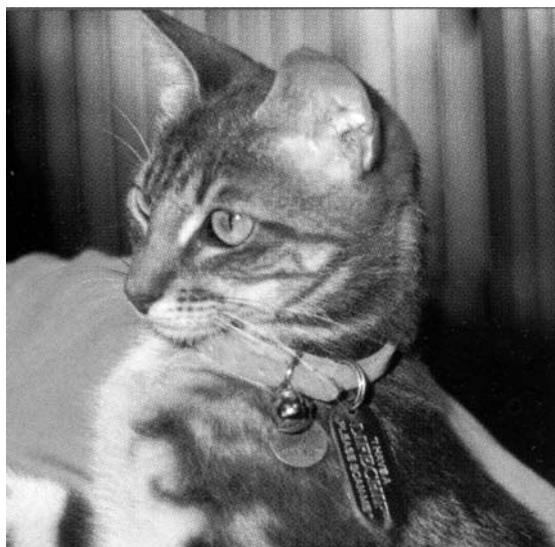
Noise of cats fighting in the middle of the night is a less common complaint but is still a source of general community noise pollution.

Issues

- Barking dogs are a labour intensive issue for Council with 20% of companion animal officer's time spent on barking dog problems throughout the city. This equates to one full time officer.
- Barking can be caused by many different things such as separation anxiety, attention seeking, boredom, or perceived territorial incursion. Barking may occur at any time of the day or night.
- Barking has a different impact on different people in different areas. Urban design, yard landscaping and topography affect the volume, intensity and frequency of barking and thus level of annoyance.
- Neighbourhood disputes can be exacerbated by barking dogs especially in medium to high-density housing areas. Councils have tried many different strategies with no consistently effective solutions.

Actions

1. Review complaint data to ascertain the most common causes and seasonality of barking dog problems in Newcastle, and utilise this information in a review of Council's barking dog information packs.
2. Review complaint data to ascertain outcomes, the most successful control techniques and success rates in reducing barking. Benchmark with other Council's to further research solutions.
3. Develop a local database and referral service of appropriate socialisation and training options.
4. Investigate the feasibility of hiring out 'Dog-Cams' for barking dog complaints, to assist dog owners to understand how their dog behaves when unsupervised.
5. Develop a Local Orders Policy in conjunction with other Hunter Councils which includes guidelines on numbers of dogs and cats recommended to be kept per premises.
6. Research the linkage between nuisance behaviour such as barking and animal welfare issues.
7. Encourage confinement of cats between dawn and dusk to reduce the noise nuisance caused by cats fighting.



Water Pollution

Objective

- To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area.

Background

Companion animal faeces are a significant environmental and public health issue in urban areas. Pollution of domestic yards, footpaths, parks and reserves by animal faeces and the consequent pollution of waterways by stormwater run-off is of great environmental concern. Pet droppings contribute to high levels of phosphorous and other potentially harmful nutrients in our waterways.

Diseases such as parasites, protozoa and bacteria can be transmitted to people and animals via faecal material and contaminated stormwater. There is a potential for infections to be passed to humans from animals, particularly Hookworm and Roundworm. Eggs from these worms can remain dormant in the environment for up to one year. Recreational water quality testing shows that faecal coliform levels can be elevated for several days following rainfall and animal faecal material is a key contributor to these elevated levels. Clean beaches are rated by the community as one of Newcastle's most important assets (State of Environment Report 2001/2002).

To assist in resolving these pollution problems, Council has released dung beetle colonies into key parks and reserves. The beetles bury animal droppings in underground tunnels thus reducing nutrient run-off, aerating the soil, reducing fly populations, and reducing health risks to people and animals.

Council has promoted the 'pick up your dog's poo' message to the Newcastle community in a number of ways:

- Distribution of POOch Pouches to responsible companion animal owners by Council staff. POOch Pouches are brightly coloured bag holders that attach to dog leads.
- Dispensers for photodegradable dog poo bags installed in all Leash Free Areas.
- Dung beetle colonies released into leash free areas.
- Distribution of education material that emphasises the importance of appropriate disposal of dog faeces.

Issues

- Council staff receive intermittent reports of companion animal owners not picking up their dog's poo.
- Provision of dog poo bins and bags have been problematic.
- Provision of dog poo bags in leash free areas has assisted the community in achieving greater levels of awareness.
- As dogs are walked within areas other than leash free areas, the phase out of bags should be supplemented with an increase in education of the responsibility of being prepared prior to leaving home.

Actions

1. Review areas where dung beetles have been released and release new dung beetle colonies where faeces in public places are problematic eg near sporting grounds or playgrounds.
2. Distribute Pooch Pouches and stormwater pamphlets at appropriate community events.

3. Research the extent of the dog faeces problem in Newcastle (eg beaches, walkways) and implement a targeted education / enforcement campaign in those areas.
4. Seek NSW Companion Animal Fund Education Grant funding for a community awareness program in cooperation with other Hunter Councils.
5. Replace dog poo bins with standard waste bins to provide greater flexibility for waste disposal and reduced servicing and maintenance costs.
6. Phase out the provision of dog poo bags in leash free areas and encourage the community to provide their own bags as part of responsible pet ownership.



Strategic Links

- Stormwater Management Plan

Biodiversity

Objective

- To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area.

Background

The City of Newcastle has more than 2000 hectares with a high conservation value: Kooragang Nature Reserve, Hexham Nature Reserve, Blackbutt Reserve, Glenrock State Recreation Area and Jesmond Bushland. Within these reserves there are at least six known species of endangered or vulnerable flora and fauna. It is vital that feral animal and companion animal management strategies be implemented to assist with protection of these and other species.

Community education and responsible pet ownership programs should emphasise that dumping of unwanted litters in bushland, industrial estates or nature reserves is irresponsible, environmentally destructive and illegal.

Feral cats and free-ranging domestic cats are responsible for a significant number of wildlife deaths every year. It is therefore important that appropriate emphasis be placed upon the care and control of domestic cats, especially to limit their nocturnal wanderings.

Cats can be confined to the house for their entire life, provided appropriate environmental enrichment is available. One source of this enrichment is a modular, cat fun-park concept which confines them within the owners' property in fully contained, aesthetically pleasing, cage systems.

Currently the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 'Backyard Buddies' Program educates the community about wildlife protection issues at the urban-bush interface. Council's Community Greening Centre operate a 'Good Neighbours Program' in residential areas adjacent to a number of bushland areas. This program aims to educate residents about a range of issues which can impact on urban bushland.

Council's Nature Watch Diary also aims to educate the community regarding urban bushland management issues including responsible pet ownership.

Issues

- Newcastle City Council Feral Animal Survey 2001 documented evidence of straying animals (via the presence of domestic dog food in faeces) as well as feral animals (those not dependent on humans) using nature reserves in the Newcastle Local Government Area.
- There are 6 endangered and 34 vulnerable species occurring or likely to occur in the Newcastle Local Government Area (State of the Environment Report 2001/2002).
- The NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 provides that companion animals may be prohibited from wildlife protection areas at the discretion of Council. National Parks and Nature Reserves are also prohibited areas for companion animals. Owners can be fined if their companion animal is found within these areas.
- Domestic cats provide a reservoir of breeding animals for wild populations and continually increase the wild cat population.

Actions

1. Increase community awareness regarding the impact of companion animals on fauna, including possible collaboration with existing bushland interface education programs.
2. Identify specific local threatened or endangered fauna that would benefit from a focused companion animal community education program.
3. Implement a community awareness campaign highlighting the advantages of keeping cats totally inside, including a voluntary cat curfew and education program.
4. In conjunction with other Hunter Councils, government agencies, RSPCA and local veterinarians, target a community education program during peak cat breeding season to discourage dumping of kittens.
5. Consider the prohibition of companion animals from new residential developments adjacent to areas of high conservation value.
6. Develop a feral animal trapping protocol to target areas of high conservation value.
7. Continue to promote the benefits of desexing of companion animals.
8. Continue to provide reduced rate desexing of companion animals.



Strategic Links

- Bushland Plans of Management
- Vegetation Management Plan
- Biodiversity Strategy

Performance Indicators

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide state educational materials to local companion animal service industries to promote identification and registration of companion animals. 	<p>Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage the permanent microchip identification of all companion animals in Newcastle to facilitate the prompt return of lost or stray companion animals to their owners. To encourage the statewide lifetime registration of all companion animals in Newcastle in accordance with the Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the number of animals microchipped. Increase in the number of animals registered.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<p>Liaise with Hunter Councils to hold an annual 'Regional Rego Roundup' to facilitate identification, registration and responsible pet ownership.</p>	<p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the permanent microchip identification of all companion animals in Newcastle to facilitate the prompt return of lost or stray companion animals to their owners. • To encourage the statewide lifetime registration of all companion animals in Newcastle in accordance with the Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of animals microchipped. • Increase in the number of animals registered.
<p>Continue to send information packs containing registration, desexing and educational material to owners of companion animals when their animal is microchipped.</p>	<p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the statewide lifetime registration of all companion animals in Newcastle in accordance with the Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of animals registered.
<p>Continue to provide a microchipping service to members of the community facing financial hardship.</p>	<p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the permanent microchip identification of all companion animals in Newcastle to facilitate the prompt return of lost or stray companion animals to their owners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of animals microchipped.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In conjunction with local veterinarians, investigate measures to streamline the two step chip and register process and encourage simultaneous microchipping and registration. 	<p>Medium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide fast and efficient service for customers updating or registering details on the NSW Companion Animal Register. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of animals registered.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review companion animal transport and impound protocols to ensure best practice guidelines provided by NSW Agriculture are followed. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a best practice animal care facility and transport for impounded animals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review to be completed by March 2005.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise technological advances such as wireless communications to improve efficiency of database checking and facilitate prompt animal return to owner. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate the prompt return to owner of seized animals and therefore reduce the number of animals that need to be impounded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the number of animals returned to owner. Reduction in the number of animals impounded.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the placement of digital photos of unidentified stray animals on Council's website to facilitate the release of animals from the pound and reduce rates of euthanasia. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the numbers of unwanted animals that are euthanased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in the percentage of impounded animals euthanased.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage authorised identifiers to record as much owner contact information as possible to facilitate their prompt return to owner. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate the prompt return to owner of seized animals and therefore reduce the number of animals that need to be impounded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the number of animals returned to owner. Reduction in the number of animals impounded.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with local Councils, conduct a program to educate companion animal owners of the importance of accurate register contact details. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate the prompt return to owner of seized animals and therefore reduce the number of animals that need to be impounded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the number of animals returned to owner. Reduction in the number of animals impounded.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to promote the benefits of desexing of companion animals. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure Council staff regard animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals. To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the percentage of animals desexed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide reduced rate desexing of companion animals. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure Council staff regard animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals. To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the percentage of animals desexed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information to the community on appropriate animal housing and care as recommended by the RSPCA. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their companion animal that improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Local Orders Policy in conjunction with other Hunter Councils which includes guidelines on numbers of dogs and cats recommended to be kept per premises. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure Council staff regard animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals. To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve the community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy to be completed by August 2005.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research the linkage between nuisance behaviour such as barking and animal welfare issues. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their companion animal that improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research previous dog attack incidents in Newcastle to ascertain specific recurrent local issues or seasonal trends, and adapt education and enforcement accordingly. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve community awareness of the importance of safety around companion animals. To improve owner's awareness of their responsibility to maintain their animal under effective control in public places. To ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in numbers of dog attacks. Increase in compliance with dangerous dog control requirements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Council's dangerous dog protocol on a six monthly basis. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in numbers of dog attacks. Increase in compliance with dangerous dog control requirements.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct six monthly audits of premises where declared dangerous dogs are kept and assess issues including adequacy of child proof enclosures. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in compliance with dangerous dog control requirements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise Council's Schools Education Program and utilise the education staff and resources of the RSPCA to assist in program delivery. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve community awareness of the importance of safety around companion animals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in numbers of community education sessions delivered. Reduction in numbers of dog attacks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate adopting a support role for puppy preschool providers to more efficiently manage Council's involvement. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve owner's awareness of their responsibility to maintain their animal under effective control in public places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in numbers of community education sessions delivered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate options for community involvement to assist Council officers in identifying irresponsible pet ownership and remind owners of their responsibilities. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve owner's awareness of their responsibility to maintain their animal under effective control in public places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the creation of additional leash free areas to provide further options for exercising dogs off lead in the LGA. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide free running exercise areas for dogs across the Newcastle Local Government area that are as safe as possible for dogs and people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in number of leash free areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trial the installation of a small number of items of dog agility 'playground equipment' in two selected leash free areas. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide opportunities for dogs and their owners to engage in 'dog agility' activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in items of dog agility equipment in leash free areas.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue proactive patrols of leash free areas to manage inappropriate use. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide free running exercise areas for dogs across the Newcastle Local Government area that are as safe as possible for dogs and people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding leash free areas.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to the development of a database of possible evacuation centres for large numbers of companion animals. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Database developed and maintained.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist the Dept of Agriculture to review and document assembly procedures at evacuation centres to ensure companion animals are considered. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assembly procedures developed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop procedures to document Council's role in emergency evacuations. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures developed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate the community regarding disaster preparedness for companion animals. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist companion animal service industries and owners to plan ahead for safe evacuation of companion animals and their owners in the event of natural disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education program delivered.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review complaint data to ascertain the most common causes and seasonality of barking dog problems in Newcastle, and utilise this information in a review of Council's Barking Dog Information Packs. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review complaint data to ascertain outcomes, the most successful control techniques and success rates in reducing barking. Benchmark with other Council's to further research solutions. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop local database and referral service of appropriate socialisation and training options. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the feasibility of hiring out 'Dog-Cams' for barking dog complaints, to assist dog owners to understand how their dog behaves when unsupervised. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage confinement of cats between dawn and dusk to reduce the noise nuisance caused by cats fighting. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the noise pollution caused by companion animals and improve community amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review areas where dung beetles have been released and release new dung beetle colonies where faeces in public places are problematic eg near sporting grounds or playgrounds. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute Pooch Pouches and stormwater pamphlets at appropriate community events. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research the extent of the dog faeces problem in Newcastle (eg beaches, walkways) and implement a targeted education / enforcement campaign in those areas. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek NSW Companion Animal Fund Education Grant Funding for a community awareness program in cooperation with other Hunter Councils. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replace dog poo bins with standard waste bins to provide greater flexibility for waste disposal and reduced servicing and maintenance costs. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase out the provision of dog poo bags and encourage the community to provide their own bags as part of responsible pet ownership. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise the impact of companion animals and their faeces on the water catchments of the Newcastle Local Government Area (LGA). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase community awareness regarding the impact of companion animals on fauna, including possible collaboration with existing bushland interface education programs. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify specific local threatened or endangered fauna that would benefit from a focused companion animal community education program. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a community awareness campaign highlighting the advantages of keeping cats confined, including a voluntary cat curfew and education program. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conjunction with other Hunter Councils, government agencies, RSPCA and local veterinarians, target a community education program during peak cat breeding season to discourage dumping of kittens. 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.

Action	Priority (High/ Medium/Low)	Related Objective	Performance Indicator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the prohibition of companion animals from new residential developments adjacent to areas of high conservation value. 	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a feral animal trapping protocol to target areas of high conservation value. 	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness and minimise the potential impact of companion animals on the biodiversity of the Newcastle Local Government Area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.

Statistical Performance Indicators and Targets

Performance Indicator	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	Target 2004/05	Target 2005/06
• Increase in the number of animals microchipped.	16701	23221	26358	30000	34000
• Increase in the number of animals registered.	9554	13857	15341	17000	19000
• Increase in the percentage of animals returned to owner.	10%	8%	6%	8%	10%
• Reduction in the number of animals impounded.	1287	1237	1291	1200	1100
• Reduction in the percentage of impounded animals euthanased.	25%	28%	18%	15%	12%
• Increase in the percentage of animals desexed.	No data	No data	70%	75%	80%
• Reduction in complaints regarding nuisance behaviour.	389	366	477	360	350
• Increase in compliance with dangerous dog control requirements.	No data	No data	No data	90%	95%
• Reduction in numbers of dog attacks.	495	518	430	400	380
• Increase in the number of community education sessions delivered.	56	30	15	30	50
• Increase in number of leash free areas.	15	15	15	16	17
• Increase in items of dog agility equipment in leash free areas.	No data	No data	No data	6	10
• Reduction in complaints regarding leash free areas	36	22	46	30	20
• Reduction in complaints regarding dog faeces in public places.	61	70	77	60	50
• Reduction in complaints regarding feral animals.	31	57	139	120	100

* Targets beyond 2005/2006 will be set by Council's Companion Animal Advisory Panel at a later date.

Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

Council aims to monitor, review and continually improve the implementation of the Companion Animal Management Plan to provide for efficient and sustainable management of urban companion animals.

Monitoring is integrated into the Plan so that if a strategy is ineffective it can be modified appropriately. Regular review of available statistical information helps to compare implementation actions with plan priorities. Continuous improvement will ensure sustainability of actions.

Council's Companion Animal Advisory Panel was formed in January 1998 to assist with development of the first Plan.

Quarterly reports are provided to the Panel to facilitate strategy implementation and review of the Plan. Annual companion animal reports are presented to Council to assist them in keeping up to date with companion animal issues.



Companion Animal Advisory Panel

The Companion Animal Advisory Panel's (CAAP) key responsibility is to advise Newcastle City Council on the development and implementation of the Companion Animal Management Plan.

In particular the CAAP will:

- Assist in the development of companion animal strategies;
- Guide the implementation of companion animal strategies;
- Monitor and review the progress of companion animal strategies; and
- Communicate and report to Council on the operations and achievement of strategic objectives.

The membership of the Companion Animal Advisory Panel shall comprise of:

- 2 Councillors;
- 4 Community members; and
- 2 Council Officers.

Expressions of interest are called for the Community members of the Panel. Community members should demonstrate that they have relevant skills and capabilities, which would assist the CAAP in achieving its key responsibilities and primary functions.

The appointment of Community members to the CAAP is for a two year term.

The following criteria are used as a guide in assessing the appointment to the CAAP:

- Animal welfare;
- Veterinary;
- Feline background and understanding;
- Canine background and understanding;
- Parks and playground;
- Social welfare;
- Environmental protection including:
 - Wildlife; and
 - Stormwater.

Council officers are responsible for the day to day operations of Companion Animal services. The role of Council officers on the CAAP is to provide administrative support to the Panel as well as provide:

- Status reports to the panel on the progress of the Plan on a quarterly basis;
- Regular updates on any operational achievements or community issues;
- Sound research advice and recommendations to the panel on emerging and continual issues; and
- Feedback to CAAP on community expectations and concerns regarding companion animal management in the Local Government Area.

Panel membership is reviewed annually, and members actively seek feedback from the groups they represent to assist with companion animal management.

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