

# **City of Mitcham**

## **Animal Management Plan 2007-2012**

adopted by Council 27 Feb 2007

## ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

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## Introduction & Summary

This plan has been prepared to guide Council's management of dogs and cats within the City of Mitcham for the next 5 years (2007-2012).

It follows a recent amendment to the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 (the Act) which now requires all Councils to have a 5 year Animal Management Plan in place no later than July 2007. It should be noted that the Plan is confined to a consideration of owned dogs and cats.

To assist with the development of the Plan, Council appointed Virginia Jackson of Harlock Jackson Pty Ltd to prepare the Plan. Virginia works with Councils nationally in this area and has recognised expertise in the developing area of domestic animal management.

Council also appointed an Animal Management Consultative Committee to oversee the development of the Plan. It comprises Council representatives, veterinarians and interested members of the community.

The members of the Committee include:

Councillor Dianna Gibbs-Ludbrook	Councillor and Committee Chair
Councillor Ian Perry	Councillor
Bob Marshall	Community representative ex Councillor and Committee Chair
John Hain	Community representative ex Councillor
Dr John Caruthers	Hills Veterinary Centre
Dr David Robertson	Veterinarian
Dr Chris Minchenberg	Goodwood Road Veterinary Clinic
Mr Humphry McGrath	RSPCA

Mr D. Mark Allen	Dog Club/Trainer
Ms Beth Robertson	Community representative
Ms Jenny Haub	Community representative
Mr Terry Nicholas	Council officer
Ms Jo Agar	Council officer

### 1.1 Methodology

Council commissioned the Plan in late 2005. Early consultation with the community was proposed given the range of issues to be considered. Consultation occurred in early 2006. It included:

- 3 questions in Council's Annual Community Survey undertaken in November 2005.
- A Discussion Paper and press coverage to publicise the study and assist people in thinking about animal management.
- A survey which was sent out to every household in the municipality (around 3000 completed surveys were received).
- Written submissions received from interested members of the community.
- 2 meetings with the community, held in March 2006, to discuss issues with interested members of the community.

The results of the consultation together with the investigations undertaken by the consultant, Council staff, and the Animal Management Consultative Committee were the basis for the development of the Plan.

### 1.2 Structure of the Plan

Section 2 provides a brief description of Mitcham and its main strategic planning document: Mitcham 2030.

Section 3 provides an overview of animal management in Mitcham.

Section 4 provides a summary of the feedback received through community consultation. A copy of the McGregor Tan report is reproduced in Appendix 1.

Section 5 provides the strategic framework to the Plan. It includes a vision for animal management in Mitcham in 2030, an overall goal for animal management, aims and guiding principles. There are 11 Key Issue Areas and these are addressed in Sections 6-16. Each Key Issue Area contains objectives, identification of target groups, a discussion and action plans.

Recommendations for implementing the Plan are provided in Section 17.

### 1.3 Summary of key recommendations

#### Identification of target groups

The Plan identifies target groups because in some cases, non-pet owners or the wider community are the appropriate target group for action (to reduce dog attacks for example we should consider educating children in bite avoidance).

To target Council's efforts more effectively, the Plan also classifies pet owners into 3 groups:

- Existing pet owners;
- New owners; and
- Prospective pet owners.

*Existing pet owners* are the core group of pet owners. However their habits are potentially more difficult to change. They are relatively easy to contact because of the data base of registered pet owners.

*New pet owners* (pet under 1 year of age) are likely to be more open to new information about responsible pet ownership as new

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habits are being formed. This group will also have several encounters in the first year with a range of external stakeholders as they obtain, immunise, identify, register and train their pets and will often be on the lookout for information on pet ownership. It highlights the importance of developing partnerships with external stakeholders.

*Prospective pet owners* are important because they need to think about appropriate breed selection and the responsibilities of pet ownership before they obtain a pet. However this is the hardest group to target.

### Access to public open space by dogs and their owners

The existing mix of on and off leash and no dog areas works well and is not proposed to change significantly. A code of conduct will be developed for the effective operation of Dog Parks and other off leash areas.

It is also proposed to develop up to 5 Dog Parks during the life of this plan. These would be fenced areas for dog and their owners. It is considered that this will benefit all users of all public space as dog owners will be more likely to use these parks and Council can expect higher standards of behaviour by dogs and their owners in other areas.

### Dog faeces management

The Plan recommends Council should not be responsible for providing people with dog poo bags. Council will continue to provide dog poo bags in designated and high use areas but it will be made clear in all communications with dog owners that these are provided as a backup and that owners should provide their own bags.

Council will amend By-law no 6 to require dog owners to carry a bag with them to pick up their dog's faeces. The distribution of pooch pouches will be reintroduced to dovetail with this requirement.

In Year 1-2 Council will focus on educating people to take bags and use them when they walk their dog. In Year 3-5 Council will focus more on enforcement of legislation to get the remaining people to pick up dog faeces.

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### Cat management

There was strong community support for cat controls equivalent to dog controls in this Animal Management Plan, and Council will review its position on cat management during the life of the Plan.

However, at this time Council believes it is premature to introduce controls over cats in isolation from other Councils. Council believes this is something that is best addressed on a statewide basis, given that a bill is before Parliament (Hon. R B Such's Dog and Cat Management (Management of Cats) Amendment Bill, read for the first time 28<sup>th</sup> June 2006 ), and that the Dog and Cat Management Board is also reviewing the current Dog and Cat Management Act. Council will urge the State Government to pursue statewide cat control measures via these mechanisms.

In addition, Council will consider convening a summit on cat management where interested Councils, welfare and community groups and identified experts can discuss the issues and options available.

A strong education focus of the Plan will be to encourage people to desex, identify and confine their cats. The education program will provide a foundation for the possible future introduction of cat controls.

If no statewide cat control measures are in effect by the end of Year 2 of this plan (i.e. June 2009) Council will initiate the process of introducing a by-law for the identification and registration of cats and a range of other cat controls in The City of Mitcham.

### Education in responsible pet ownership

Education is now integral to animal management. However to be successful, education programs need to be carefully designed and targeted. Council does not have unlimited resources to spend on education.

During the life of this Plan, Council will focus on:

- The importance and benefits of desexing, identifying and confining cats.
- Removing dog faeces from public places.

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- Effective operation of Dog Parks and other areas where dogs can be exercised off leash, compliance with leash and no dog requirements in other areas.
- Holding an Annual Dog Day Out Festival as a positive way to get the responsible pet ownership message across.

### Partnerships with key external stakeholders

Council will develop and strengthen partnerships with key external stakeholders. Council believes this will maximise the reach of the responsible pet ownership message, particularly during the first year of a pet's life when a new pet owner is likely to have numerous encounters with external stakeholders as they obtain, identify, vaccinate, register and train their pet.

A register of external stakeholders will be developed and a program will be developed for communicating with them and encouraging them to help extend the reach of the responsible pet ownership message.

The Animal Management Consultative Committee will be retained as a useful sounding board for implementing the Plan.

### Implementing the Plan

The Plan's recommendations have been prioritised and scheduled through 2 phases of implementation over the 5 year horizon.

Phase 1: Short term 1-2 years.

Phase 2: Medium term 3-5 years.

## 2 Mitcham: A Snapshot

The City of Mitcham is a residential and semi-rural municipality located in Adelaide's southern suburbs. While initial development dates from the 1840s and 1850s, the most significant growth occurred during the inter and post war periods. The construction of the railway provided the impetus for the residential development of areas in the City's south, with new residents attracted by the semi-rural surrounds of the foothills. The City continues to experience new residential development in areas such as Craighburn Farm.

The City of Mitcham is bounded by the Cities of Unley and Burnside to the north, the Adelaide Hills Council to the east, the City of Onkaparinga to the south and the City of Marion to the west. The City includes the suburbs and localities of Bedford Park, Belair, Bellevue Heights, Blackwood, Brown Hill Creek, Clapham, Clarence Gardens, Colonel Light Gardens, Coromandel Valley, Craighburn Farm, Cumberland Park, Daw Park, Eden Hills, Glenalta, Hawthorn, Hawthorndene, Kingswood, Lower Mitcham, Lynton, Melrose Park, Mitcham, Netherby, Panorama, Pasadena, Springfield, St Marys, Torrens Park, Upper Sturt, Urrbrae, Westbourne Park and part of the suburbs of Crafers West and Leawood Gardens.

The City's boundaries are Cross Road and the Adelaide-Crafers Highway in the north, various property boundaries and the eastern edge of the Belair National Park in the east, the Sturt River in the south and South Road in the west.

A major feature of Mitcham is its high proportion of open spaces, including Brownhill Creek, the Waite Agricultural Research Institute, Belair National Park, Shepherds Hill Recreation Park, Flinders University, Watiparinga National Trust Reserve and a network of Council reserves.

At the 2001 census, Mitcham had a total population of 59,766 living in 23,815 households. The average household size was 2.43 person which is slightly below the state average.

### Mitcham 2030: Building Tomorrow's Mitcham Today

This Plan sets a framework for Council and the community to work together Building Tomorrow's Mitcham Today. It consists of a Vision for Mitcham in 2030, a 9 year City Plan and a 3 year Strategic Plan. Mitcham 2030 provides the foundation or framework for the development of this Plan.

Council's vision as outlined in Mitcham 2030 is:

*A safe, healthy, tolerant and prosperous community, living and working in harmony with the environment.*

Council's mission as outlined in Mitcham 2030 is:

*Recognising that it is the custodian of the community's social, environmental, economic, heritage and cultural assets, Council will meet its obligations to future generations to improve the quality of life and respond equitably, efficiently and effectively to the changing needs of the community.*

Council is guided by a number of important values as outlined in Mitcham 2030:

*Accountability: We will provide opportunities for community members to participate in and influence the decision making processes which affect their lives.*

*Honesty and integrity: We will act with honesty and integrity and with respect to the individual.*

*Equity: We will ensure services are provided fairly to all people and groups, taking into account special needs.*

*Partnerships: We value and will strengthen our collaboration with Governments, other Councils, volunteers and the wider community in achieving the best outcomes for our community.*

*Ecological sustainability: We will weave the principles of ecological sustainability into our policies, programs and services.*

*Quality: We will regularly review our performance to continually improve to continually improve our service.*

*Health and safety: We will create a safe workplace culture for our employees and the community.*

## 3 Animal Management in Mitcham

### What is animal management?

Today, Councils manage a broad range of issues associated with domestic animals including safety from attack, the environment and freedom from the nuisance of other people's animals. The issues include ensuring people register their dogs, safety from attack, excessive barking, wandering at large, dogs' access to public places and retrieval of dog faeces. There is also community debate about a range of other issues including requirements for animals to be desexed and controls over cats.

Today, most Councils are focussed on educating their communities in responsible pet ownership with a range of programs being trialled and implemented around Australia.

Finally, many Councils recognise that pets are integral to many people's lives and are looking for ways to support pet owners and harness the recognised health and social benefits of pet ownership.

### Dog and Cat Management Act 1995

The Dog and Cat Management Act 1995<sup>1</sup> was introduced in response to this changing environment. The objects of the Act are:

- to encourage responsible dog and cat ownership.
- to reduce public and environmental nuisance caused by dogs and cats.
- to promote the effective management of dogs and cats (including through encouragement of desexing of dogs and cats).

The Act prescribes responsibilities and procedures to be undertaken in relation to the management of dogs.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer [www.legislation.sa.gov.au/index.aspx](http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/index.aspx)

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Whilst the Act also refers to cats, their management (eg requirements for cats to be registered, identified, confined and desexed) is left to the discretion of individual councils. At this time, the only restrictions on cats in Mitcham are contained in By-law No 7 discussed below.

### Local Government Act 1999

In addition to requirements under the DCM Act, Councils can also introduce Council by-laws under the Local Government Act relating to dogs and cats.

At this time, Mitcham has the following by-laws:

**By-law No 6** limits the number of dogs kept in premises, sets specifications for kennel establishments and provides for control of dogs on local government land.

It limits the number of dogs kept in small dwellings to one dog and in other premises to two dogs.

It provides Council with the power to declare Dog Free Areas (where dogs are not permitted), areas where dogs are required to be on leash and Dog Exercise Areas (areas where dogs can be exercised off leash providing they are kept under effective control of their owner). The areas declared are as follows:

### Dog-Free Areas (no dogs allowed at any time)

- A.A Bailey Recreation Ground (Bailey Reserve), Clarence Gardens (no dogs in the children's playground).
- Barrons Reserve, Lower Mitcham.
- Crozier Reserve, Crozier Avenue, Daw Park.
- Denman Reserve, Lower Mitcham.
- Kingswood Oval, Kingswood.
- Portland Place Reserve, Colonel Light Gardens.

### Dog on Leash Areas

- Avenue Road Reserve, Cumberland Park.
- Bailey Reserve (except children's playground where dogs are prohibited), Clarence Gardens.
- CC Hood Reserve, Panorama; (it is Leash Free April to October – 7am to 9am and 5pm to 8pm and November to March 7am to 9am and 6.30pm to 9.30pm).
- Haddington Reserve, Clapham.
- Hawthorn Oval, Hawthorn (from 10am to 6pm daily and whilst sporting activities are being undertaken).
- Hillview (Penang), Colonel Light Gardens.
- Keith W Pearson Reserve, Hawthorn.
- Naomi Reserve, Pasadena.
- Strathcona Reserve, Panorama.

All other reserves are off leash.

**Section 254** of the Local Government Act provides Council with the power to make an order that requires a person to do or refrain from doing the thing specified in the order in order to abate a nuisance or a hazard to health or safety associated with a live or dead animal or animals, or otherwise to deal with an animal or animals. This might include keeping an excessive number of animals, keeping animals so as to generate excessive noise, dust or odours to attract pests of vermin, keeping an aggressive animal or keeping an animal in a situation where it cannot be adequately contained or may cause danger to the public.

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### Funding of Animal Management

Funds received from dog registrations must be spent on dog management. It cannot be spent on cat management or directed to general revenue. Council has the ability to set registrations at levels it believes are appropriate including the setting of registration variations for the needy or responsible dog owners (eg those that have desexed, identified, trained their animals etc).

A proportion of all registrations are forwarded to the Dog and Cat Management Board which administers *the Dog and Cat Management Fund*. This is used to fund the administration of the Board and statewide education programs.

Without registration of cats, alternative funding would be required for any of the cat management recommendations contained in this Plan.

### Council's policy and practices

In addition to meeting Council's enforcement responsibilities under the Act, Council has a wealth of information available to the public on animal management responsibilities and obligations and helpful tips for dealing with animal behaviour problems. This information is available on Council's website and in hard copy.

Council provides the Delta Dog Safe program to local schools.

Council holds annual microchipping days.

Council's website includes suggestions on how neighbourhood cat nuisance can be managed. As a last resort, Council has traps available for hire for the trapping of cats.

Council has in the past held an annual Dog Day Out type festival.

Council has established policies and procedures for dealing with its animal management responsibilities.

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### Other stakeholders

External stakeholders play a vital role in animal management. Those relevant to Mitcham are listed below:

The **Department of Environment and Heritage** manages the state conservation reserve system including Belair National Park, Shepherds Hill Recreation Park and the Sturt Gorge Recreation Park.

The **National Trust of South Australia** manages the Watiparinga Reserve that is bisected by the railway line in Belair and Eden Hills.

Both **Flinders University of South Australia** and **The University of Adelaide** (Waite Institute) manage large areas of open space.

The **Dog and Cat Management Board** undertakes a range of responsibilities associated with the administration and enforcement of provisions of the Act. It also undertakes or facilitates research and educational programs relating to dog and cat management.

If a dog that is wandering at large is not wearing a collar and council identification or the owners are not contactable, Council will take the dog to the **RSPCA** at Lonsdale. Impounding fees will apply to all dogs impounded.

The **Animal Welfare League** at Wingfield also takes lost and unowned animals however there is no formal arrangement with Council.

**The Delta Society** runs the Delta Dog Safe Program which is a school based program that provides training for primary school children in bite avoidance.

**Veterinarians** are an important point of contact especially in a pet's early years. They have an important role to play in maintaining the health of pets and educating pet owners.

**SACA** and **dog clubs** have an important role to play in training dogs, socialising pups and educating pet owners.

The **local media** can assist Council with educating pet owners.

**Pet owners** themselves have a role to play in choosing an appropriate pet to suit their lifestyle, training and socialising their dog and adhering to Council requirements.

## 4 Results of Community Consultation

In November 2005, McGregor Tan, Strategies, Marketing and Social Research undertook Council's **Annual Residents' Survey**. This year's survey contained 4 questions on animal management in Mitcham including whether respondents were pet owners or not, their satisfaction with the way Council manages domestic animals within the City of Mitcham, ways council could improve responsible pet ownership in Mitcham and what respondents thought this Plan should focus on.

A **questionnaire** was sent out to every Mitcham household and over 3000 completed surveys were returned. The results were analysed by McGregor Tan, Strategies, Marketing and Social Research. Their report is summarised below. A full copy of their report is contained in Appendix 1. Some written submissions were also received which amplified and are consistent with the findings of the surveys.

The majority of respondents (87%) believe Council should undertake education programs. The top issue for Council's education focus was picking up dog faeces in public places (84%). Other issues included registering and identifying pets, training of dogs and keeping dogs under effective control in public places. The majority of respondents (87%) also believe council should implement measures for cats.

There was support for Council's current approach of having a mix of on and off leash areas and areas from which dogs should be prohibited. There was a high degree of support for prohibiting dogs from areas where children and/or the elderly congregate.

There was a high degree of support for the idea of having designated parks for dogs and their owners i.e. Dog Parks (70% of respondents).

Two **public meetings** were held in March 2006 to discuss the Plan. They were held in Melrose Park and Blackwood. The meeting at Melrose Park was mostly concerned about dogs – both effective control in public places (particularly safety) and concerns with Council's procedures for dealing with nuisance dog complaints (barking). The meeting at Blackwood was mostly concerned with cat control. There was a high degree of consensus at the meeting for Council to consider introducing a range of cat controls.

## 5 Strategic Framework

### Our Vision

Mitcham's vision for animal management in 2030 is described below.

*Mitcham is recognised as a success story in animal management.*

*People choose a pet carefully. They do their homework and they avoid rash decisions. In Mitcham, it is common for people to choose a pet from an RSPCA and AWL.*

*All dogs and cats are identified, registered and most are desexed. As a result, very few dogs and cats in Mitcham end up in a shelter.*

*Virtually all dogs in Mitcham attend puppy pre school and receive professional training. This has helped to reduce many animal management problems that used to occur.*

*Mitcham's pet owners understand their responsibilities to their pet, to the community and to the environment. They keep their pets confined. They exercise their dogs in accordance with the community's expectations for dogs to be leashed or kept out of some public places and retained under effective control in off leash areas. They know how to prevent problems like entrenched barking from occurring in the first place.*

*All dog owners pick up their dog's faeces in public places and dispose of them appropriately. In Mitcham, it is extremely rare to see dog faeces on footpaths, roads or in public parks.*

*There are no dog attacks in Mitcham. This is because people choose a pet that is appropriate to their lifestyle, they have them socialised and trained at an early age, they ensure they are confined and they exercise their dog in accordance with Council requirements. In addition, all primary school children in Mitcham receive training in bite avoidance.*

*Cat owners in Mitcham confine their cats 24/7. They recognise that this is beneficial to the environment and to their cat's own welfare.*

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*Pets are valued in Mitcham. Council and the community understand their importance - for companionship, social capital and healthy lifestyles.*

### Our Goal

Our GOAL for animal management at Mitcham is to:

*Promote and achieve responsible pet ownership of dogs and cats, RSPCA and AWL and the benefits of animal companionship.*

### Our Aims

The AIMS of the Plan are to:

- *Ensure Council meets its obligations under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.*
- *Investigate the best mix of regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to securing responsible pet ownership in the City of Mitcham.*
- *Consider ways Council could harness the benefits of owning pets.*
- *Establish priorities for animal management in Mitcham for the next 5 years.*

### Our Guiding Principles

In delivering animal management services to the community, Council is committed to the following GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- *Achieving responsible pet ownership in the City of Mitcham.*
- *Focusing on preventative approaches to animal management.*
- *Protecting the community and the environment from the negative impacts of dogs and cats.*

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- *Balancing the need of pet owners and non pet owners.*
- *Recognising that pets contribute to quality of life.*
- *Reducing the number of healthy animals that are euthanased.*
- *Using the most up to date techniques, processes and technologies available.*
- *Achieving an efficient and effective use of Council resources.*
- *Adopting a whole of community approach to animal management. In particular, Council will strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders to deliver improved outcomes.*

### Key Issue Areas

There are 11 KEY ISSUE AREAS. These are:

*Prospective and new pet owners.*

*Registration and identification.*

*Excessive barking.*

*Dog attacks and bite avoidance.*

*Confinement and wandering at large.*

*Access to public open space.*

*Dog faeces.*

*Cat management.*

*Animal welfare.*

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*Public Education.*

*Harnessing the benefits of pet ownership.*

Each KEY ISSUE AREA has objective/s, identified target groups, a discussion and action plans. The identification of target groups is important as in some cases non-pet owners or the wider community is the appropriate target group.

The key issue areas are presented in Sections 6-16.

Implementation of the Plan is then considered in Section 17.

## 6 Prospective and New Pet Owners

### Objectives

- 6.1 *Encourage prospective pet owners to consider the responsibilities of pet ownership before obtaining a pet.*
- 6.2 *Encourage prospective pet owners to select a breed that is appropriate to their lifestyle and home environment.*
- 6.3 *Encourage prospective pet owners to consider obtaining a pet from RSPCA and AWL.*
- 6.4 *Ensure new pet owners identify and register their pets.*
- 6.5 *Ensure new pet owners vaccinate their pet.*
- 6.6 *Encourage new pet owners to desex their pet.*
- 6.7 *Encourage new pet owners to socialise their pet around other humans and animals.*
- 6.8 *Encourage new pet owners to provide appropriate obedience training.*
- 6.9 *Encourage new owners to provide their pet with an enriching home environment.*
- 6.10 *Ensure new pet owners are able to confine their pet to the home.*
- 6.11 *Ensure new pet owners exercise their dog in accordance with Council requirements.*

### Target groups

- Prospective pet owners.
- New pet owners.

### Discussion

Council believes that many animal management problems could be eliminated or minimised if prospective and new pet owners attend to the requirements outlined in the above objectives. Council believes this is a crucial period in pet ownership.

Prospective and new pet owners are generally open to receiving new information and developing good habits when a new animal comes into their family. They are also likely to have more encounters with key stakeholders than at later stages of pet ownership (ie breeders, trainers, veterinarians) as they obtain, identify, register, train, desex and immunise their pet. Key external stakeholders can help to pass on the responsible pet ownership message.

*Prospective pet owners* need to consider the responsibilities of pet ownership and appropriate breed choice to avoid later problems and to reduce the likelihood that they will later relinquish their pet. Council should also encourage people to obtain a pet from an animal shelter or at least tap into information on appropriate breed choice eg *Selectapet*. Whilst this group is hard to target, general messages in local media should not be ignored.

*New pet owners* (pet under 1 year of age) can reduce much of the animal management task later on if they meet the following responsibilities:

- Identify their pet.
- Register their pet.
- Immunise their pet.
- Socialise their dog around other animals.
- Undergo basic obedience training with their dog.
- Provide an enriching home environment for their pet.
- Confine their pet to the property.
- Provide their dog with regular exercise in accordance with Council requirements (comply with leash requirements, maintain effective control and abide by code of conduct in off leash areas, carry bag to pick up dog faeces and pick up when dog has defecated).
- Encourage prospective pet owners to consider pet insurance.

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There is a wealth of information available for prospective and new pet owners – from Council, the DCMB, Delta and training and welfare groups. Council will give consideration to sponsoring or developing a single package of information with specific relevance to prospective and new owners. The package can be available on Council's website and distributed to key stakeholders for distribution. Since this is a relatively ambitious task, its development and implementation is a medium term priority. Key stakeholders including the Animal Management Consultative Committee would assist with the development and implementation of the package.

Council will facilitate the development of a puppy preschool program. It is envisaged that this would be operated by a committee of volunteers with in kind administrative support from Council. The Old Croquet Club at Angas Road, Hawthorn is vacant and could be adapted for this use at little cost.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Develop a package of information designed specifically for prospective and new pet owners. It should include things to think about before obtaining a pet, how to select a breed appropriate to one's lifestyle, obligations and responsibilities of pet owners, the importance of training and early socialisation, tips for developing good habits from an early age and ways to overcome common behaviour problems. The package should be developed in conjunction with key stakeholders.	Medium term
Develop a dissemination strategy for the New Pet Owners Package.	Medium term.
Implement the dissemination strategy for the New Pet Owners Package.	Medium term
Undertake a feasibility study for establishing a Puppy Pre-School program at the Old Croquet Club at Angas Road, Hawthorn.	Short term.
Depending on the outcome of the Puppy Pre-School feasibility study, establish the Location.	Medium term.

Refer also Action Plans for:

- All other Key Issue Areas.

## 7 Registration & Identification

### Objectives

*7.1 To ensure all dogs are registered as required.*

*7.2 To encourage dog and cat owners to identify their cat by way of a microchip.*

*7.3 To formalise criteria for setting registration fees for dogs.*

### Target groups

New pet owners.

Dog owners.

Cat owners.

### Discussion

Dogs are required to be registered but at this time cats are not.

A high proportion of dogs in the City of Mitcham are believed to be registered although the actual number of unregistered dogs is not known. Council should constantly seek ways to boost the proportion of dogs that are registered.

There was strong community support for the registration of cats, but at this time Council believes it is premature to introduce a registration requirement for cats in isolation from other Councils. Council believes this is something that is best addressed on a statewide basis and will urge the State Government to pursue statewide cat registration through changes to the current Dog and Cat Management Act (refer Section 13: Cat Management).

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However, if no statewide cat control measures are in effect by the end of Year 2 of this plan (i.e. June 2009) Council will initiate the process of introducing a by-law for the identification and registration of cats and a range of other cat controls in The City of Mitcham.

Identification by microchip is also highly desirable however a by-law requiring dogs to be microchipped is not proposed to be introduced at this time. Council will continue to hold and/or sponsor annual pet microchipping days.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Encourage new registrations at the Dog Day Out Festival.	Short term.
Prepare a press release for rotational release on the importance of registering your dog.	Short term.
Hold an annual pet microchipping day.	Short term.
Review criteria for establishing dog registration fees.	Medium term.
Evaluate the value of pet microchipping days.	Medium term.
Write to the State Government to urge them to pursue statewide cat registration through changes to the current Dog and Cat Management Act.	Short term.
Consider holding a summit on cat management (including registration).	Short term.
Council will initiate the process of introducing a by-law for the registration of cats if If no statewide cat control measures are in effect by the end of Year 2 of this plan (i.e. June 2009)	Medium term

Refer also Action Plans for:

- New and prospective pet owners.
- Cat management.

## 8 Excessive Barking

### Objectives

*8.1 Reduce the number of barking dog complaints.*

*8.2 Maximise the number of successfully resolved barking complaints.*

### Target groups

- Prospective dog owners.
- New dog owners.
- Owners of dogs that bark excessively.
- Complainants.
- New home builders.

### Discussion

Barking dog complaints have increased over the last 20 years with the rising incidence of pets being left alone during the day, increases in housing density and declining levels of tolerance generally.

Excessive barking has several causes:

- Separation anxiety.
- Boredom.
- External stimuli (eg passers by, other dogs barking, possums, cats).
- Territorialism (visitors to the property).
- Communication.

Often the owner is not at home to hear or stop excessive barking.

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**Prevention** of barking dog problems should be the starting point for managing excessive barking because once excessive barking is entrenched it is often hard to resolve.

Some breeds are genetically pre-disposed towards excessive barking. However excessive barking is often an acquired behaviour that can occur in any breed or sex of dog. Nevertheless Council could encourage prospective pet owners to avoid breeds that have a genetic predisposition to bark.

Habitual barking often develops at an early age. New dog owners should be encouraged to teach their puppies that excessive barking is not allowed. Obedience training can also help owners to control their dog's behaviour.

Council should encourage owners to exercise their dogs regularly. Council should also provide accessible opportunities for off leash exercise (no change is proposed to existing provisions at this time).

Providing dogs with an enriching home environment helps to minimise problem barking (toys, view of the outside world, shade, shelter and comfort).

Design guidelines exist for pet friendly housing that address ways housing design can minimise problem barking. Council could make these guidelines available through the building and planning departments.

Council always suggests that complainants speak to their neighbours before contacting Council. Council should encourage people to do this as early as possible - before the excessive barking becomes an entrenched habit and before complainants are literally at their wits end when they make the complaint to Council. As these people are not able to be targeted, Council should provide this message through the general local media and on Council's website.

**Not all barking dog complaints can be prevented. The objective is to resolve complaints as quickly and smoothly as possible.**

Once a complaint has been made, Council needs to **decide if a problem exists**. This is not easy.

First there is the need for reliable data. Council issues complainants with diaries to complete before a complaint will be acted upon. This practice is used by Councils throughout Australia and should be retained.

In the last 2 years, bark counters have been developed. These are attached to a dog's collar (eg for a week) and provide a printout

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of the time and duration of barking. Council could purchase one or more of these collars and use them in resolving barking dog complaints. This could provide additional data but should not replace the diary system.

Second, there is the question of determining what level of barking is excessive. The City of Onkaparinga is presently working on establishing a standard for excessive barking. Council will monitor the progress made and review its procedures in light of this and other developments.

Once established, **barking dog problems need to be resolved**. Again, this is not easy. There are no perfect solutions eg getting a second dog will help in some cases but aggravate the problem in others.

Council assists dog owners with suggestions to help with problem barking. Council should continue to update staff skills in relation the understanding and diagnosis of excessive barking and solutions available.

Sometimes the behaviour is so ingrained that professional advice is required. In these cases, advice from a veterinarian or referral to a qualified animal behaviourist should be required. Council should have a panel of behaviourists to whom problem barkers can be referred.

Council has procedures for dealing with barking dog complaints including a checklist and flow chart of procedures to follow and forms officers use to complete the investigations. It is considered that the procedures should be reviewed every 2 years for updated information and practices.

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### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Distribute guidelines for pet-friendly housing to Council's town planning and building departments.	Medium term.
Ensure locally provided puppy pre-school and dog training programs include material on ways to minimise barking dog problems from developing.	Short term.
Prepare a press release on preventing barking problems from occurring for rotational inclusion in the local media.	Short term.
Continue to focus on resolving barking dog complaints informally.	Continue practice. existing
Encourage potential complainants to speak to their neighbour as early as possible to help avoid the barking from becoming entrenched. (including through the general local media)	Short term
Continue to issue complainants with diaries in which to record incidences of excessive barking.	Continue practice. existing
Consider the purchase of one or more barking counters.	Medium term
Review the procedures for dealing with barking dog complaints every 2 years.	Short term/medium term
Ensure new staff receive early training in diagnosis and treatment of barking dog complaints.	Short term
Continue to update and extend officers' skills in diagnosis and treatment of barking dog complaints.	Short term
Develop a panel of behaviourists to whom problem barkers can be referred.	Medium term

Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and New Pet Owners.
- Public education.

## 9 Dog Attacks & Bite Avoidance

### Objectives

*9.1 To reduce the incidence and severity of dog attacks in Mitcham.*

*9.2 To establish formalised procedures for dealing with dog attack/harassment complaints.*

### Target groups

- Prospective dog owners.
- New dog owners.
- Existing dog owners.
- Children.
- All members of the community.

### Discussion

Whilst the number of dog attacks is not high in Mitcham, managing them is a critical animal management role. It is generally thought that dog attacks occur predominantly in and around the family home including the pavement in front of the home.

Council believes all dog owners should be encouraged to take their dog to a recognised puppy preschool. This introduces basic training, helps the owner to understand his or her responsibilities and importantly helps with early socialisation of the dog that will help to minimise aggressive tendencies later on. Council will consider facilitating the development of a puppy pre school program at the Old Croquet Club in Angas Road, Hawthorne.

Council will encourage all dog owners to have their dog desexed as this will reduce aggressive tendencies.

Council believes all dog owners should be encouraged to attend obedience training with their dog. This will provide continuing socialisation and help owners to manage and/or reduce potentially aggressive tendencies in their dog. Council will strengthen

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partnerships and links with approved training organizations to promote the training of dogs in Mitcham.

Council believes regular exercise including exercise in off leash areas is important for reducing the incidence of aggression in dogs. Regular outings also help to socialise dogs around other people and dogs.

All dogs are required to be confined to their property. This is a requirement under the Act. Council will continue to place importance on the need for dogs to be confined.

People should be reminded that every dog has the capacity to bite and understand how to behave around dogs. Children should be supervised around dogs at all times. Dog owners should be made aware of the potential implications for their dog if it bites.

Council believes all school children in the City of Mitcham should receive instruction in bite avoidance. This is particularly important for children who don't have any experience with dogs. Council staff presently visit schools on a regular basis. Council will develop a 3 year rotational plan to visit each school in the City of Mitcham and provide 5-8 year old children with instruction in bite avoidance. Council will seek volunteers to disseminate these programs.

Breed specific restrictions are the cause of much debate. Whilst some people say particular breeds should be banned, others say we should blame the deed not the breed. Whatever the case, Council believes it cannot introduce breed specific restrictions in isolation of other Councils. Council believes that if breed bans are deemed appropriate then it needs to be carried out at a statewide level. Nevertheless Council can encourage people to select a breed of dog that they believe they can manage. It should also be noted that several breeds of dog are already banned under the Act.

Council has procedures for dealing with dog attacks and harassment complaints. Council staff believe the procedures operate effectively now. They should be formalised as approved procedures under this Plan and reviewed during the life of the Plan. .

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### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Ensure Council has one or more officers who are trained presenters for the Delta Dog Safe Program.	Short term
Seek volunteers to be trained and assist in delivering the Delta Dog Safe Program.	
Develop a program to visit each primary school in the City of Mitcham every 3 years to provide 5-8 year old children with instruction in bite avoidance.	Short term
Develop a press release on the implications for your dog if it attacks and bites an animal or person for rotational inclusion in local media.	Short term.
Develop a press release on bite avoidance for rotational inclusion in local media.	Short term
Approve the procedures for dealing with dog attacks/harassment complaints.	Short term
Review the procedures for dealing with dog attacks/harassment complaints.	Medium term

Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and New Pet Owners.
- Confinement and Wandering at Large.
- Access to Public Open Space.
- Public Education.

## 10 Confinement and Wandering at large

### Objective

*10.1 Ensure dog owners confine their dog to their property.*

*10.2 Encourage cat owners to confine their cat to their property.*

*10.3 Review procedures for dealing with detained animals.*

### Target group

- Existing pet owners.
- New pet owners.
- Prospective pet owners.

### Discussion

Dogs that are wandering at large contribute to a significant proportion of dog management problems especially as there is mounting evidence to suggest that the majority of dog attacks are the result of inadequate confinement. Cats that wander are a danger to wildlife and a potential nuisance to others. Animals that wander contribute to the pool of unwanted litters.

Council has procedures for dealing with complaints about dogs wandering at large. Council staff believe the procedures operate effectively now and only need to be formalised as approved procedures under this Plan. If a dog found wandering at large is not claimed within 72 hour notice period, the dog may be destroyed, given away or sold.

Prospective dog owners should be encouraged to choose a breed that may be less likely to wander and can be contained behind a secure fence (some breeds can scale a fence easily). Desexed animals that are less likely to wander so Council should continue to encourage people to have their pet desexed.

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Cats are not as easily confined as dogs. Some people have suggested that a cat confinement requirement should be introduced as part of this Plan. Council does not propose to introduce a requirement at this time in isolation from other Councils. Instead it is proposed to focus heavily on educating the community about the benefits and importance of confining their cats with a view to having a statewide or possibly local cat confinement requirement within 5 years time. A new funding source will need to be established as funds from dog registrations must only be spent on dog management.

Design guidelines for pet-friendly housing are available and should be promoted by Council to promote confinement.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Identify breeds of dog that may be less likely to wander and are more able to be confined by a secure fence. Include this information in all relevant Council publications.	Short term.
Include information on ways to confine cats in all Council information sources (benefits and successfully confining cats, cat runs and enclosures, cat proof fences.	Short term
Distribute the pet-friendly housing guidelines to Council's planning and building departments.	Medium term
Continue to treat incidences of dogs wandering at large as an issue warranting priority attention.	Continue existing practice
Approve the procedures for dealing with dogs wandering at large.	Short term
Review the procedures for dealing with dog wandering at large.	Medium term
Review existing practices for detaining dogs found at large and consider other options.	Medium term.
Educate the community about the benefits and importance of confining cats.	Short term.
Write to the State Government to urge them to pursue statewide cat registration through changes to the current Dog and Cat Management Act.	Short term.
Consider convening a summit on cat management.	Short term.
Establish a cat management program and budget for approval by Council.	Short term.

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Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and new pet owners.
- Cat management.
- Animal welfare.
- Public education.

## 11 Access to Public Places

### Objective

*11.1 Balance the needs of dog owners and other users of public places.*

*11.2 Achieve compliance with on leash requirements on streets, footpaths and designated on-leash areas.*

*11.3 Maximise the success of designated off leash Dog Parks.*

*11.4 Minimise the negative impacts of dogs exercised in other off leash areas.*

### Target groups

- Dog owners.
- All park and reserve users.

### Discussion

Dogs are required to be leashed on all streets and footpaths.

Section 26A (2) of the Act requires the Plan to include provisions for parks where dogs may be exercised off-leash and for parks where dogs must be under effective control by means of physical restraint and may include provisions for parks where dogs are prohibited. By-law no 6 also provides for Council to declare parks to be dog on leash, dog off leash or no dog areas.

There is a strong case for Council to provide for off leash exercise of dogs in parks:

- Dogs need to be socialised around other dogs and humans.
- Dogs need exercise. Regular exercise can also alleviate pent up energy associated with some unwanted behaviours by dogs at home. Whilst dogs can be exercised on leash, most dogs also benefit from “free running” off leash exercise.

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- Dog owners are a significant group of park users. Many enjoy exercising their dog and meeting other dog owners in off leash parks. Council recognises that dogs can be an inducement for dog owners to exercise and recent research has shown strong social dynamics amongst dog owners who meet other dog owners regularly in the park.
- Open spaces are a major feature of the City of Mitcham and there is a strong tradition of dog owners exercising their dogs off leash in reserves.

On the negative side however:

- Unleashed dogs can be a problem in environmentally sensitive areas particularly where native fauna is present or being encouraged.
- Dog attacks may be more likely to occur where dogs are unleashed (however statistics indicate that dogs may be more aggressive in and around the home than they are in the neutral territory of a public park.
- Unruly dogs can annoy other park users and detract from people's recreation experience. Some people are frightened of dogs and/or don't wish to encounter unleashed dogs in the park.
- There are some places where unleashed dogs may be unsuitable eg in the immediate vicinity of children's play equipment, around picnic areas and bbqs, in the vicinity of bicycle paths.

Council believes that the existing mix of on and off leash and no dog areas works well and does not propose to make any changes to the current provisions contained in By-Law No 6.

It is also proposed to establish up to 5 Dog Parks in the municipality. These would be fenced areas dedicated to dogs and their owners. It is considered that the establishment of such parks would assist all users of all public open space as dog owners would have areas dedicated especially for them. In addition, Council would be able to insist on higher levels of compliance with effective control, on-leash and no dog requirements in other parks. In the short term it is proposed that 2 Dog Parks be established with a view to 5 parks being established during the life of this Plan. This number is considered an appropriate distribution so that the Dog Parks are within a relatively short drive of people's home. The first reserve that could be considered for dedication as a Dog Park is part of CC Hood Reserve at Panorama.

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An early focus of the Plan will be in promoting awareness, acceptance and **compliance with the leash requirements**. In Year 1 Council will focus on education and then move into education and enforcement in Years 2 to 5. The education activities would consist of written material (mail outs, brochures, press coverage, signage) and face to face contact (handing out leads in on-leash areas, talking to children in schools).

Section 8 of the Act defines effective control by physical restraint i.e. leash, tether or cage.

Section 7 of the Act provides for circumstances when a dog is considered to be wandering at large. A dog is not considered to be wandering at large where it is in a park and is under effective control by means of physical restraint or by command (the dog being in proximity to the owner and the person being able to see the dog at all times). It is recommended that By-law number 6 be amended to distinguish between effective control in on-leash areas (by physical restraint) and effective control in off leash areas (voice command).

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Amend By-law number 6 to distinguish between effective control in on and off leash areas.	Short term.
Amend By-Law 6 to include banning dogs from fenced children's playgrounds or where not fenced dogs must be on leash within 5 metres of children's play equipment.	Short term.
Develop a Code of Conduct and brief for the selection and operation of Dog Parks in Mitcham.	Short term.
Identify a short list of parks that could be developed as Dog Parks.	Short term.
Develop 2 Dog Parks.	Short term.
Develop 3 Dog Parks.	Medium term.
Seek advice on risk management strategies to reduce risk and liability.	Short term
Amend the brochure identifying the access and leash requirements. The brochure should include a map with the location of No Dog areas, on leash areas and Dog Parks.	Short term
Include the access and leash requirements on Council's website.	Short term
Advise neighbouring Councils of the access and leash requirements in the City of Mitcham.	Short term

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Prepare an education strategy to increase awareness of the access and leash requirements and achieve compliance over the life of the Plan. It should be a 5 year strategy and include written and face to face communication in accordance with the discussion included in Key Issue Area 15. The strategy should be prepared in conjunction with the education strategy for getting people to pick up their dog's faeces. It should identify external stakeholders who can assist with disseminating the message.	Short term
Develop a signage strategy for identifying the access and leash requirements throughout the City of Mitcham. Neighbouring councils should be invited to participate.	Short term
Develop a code of conduct for successful operation of off-leash areas. Include this in the Access and Leash Requirements brochure.	Short term
Ensure the access and leash requirements are considered in all plans and strategies associated with public open space in the City of Mitcham especially where new bicycle paths, play equipment and picnic facilities are proposed.	Short term
Decide if the access and leash requirements should be included in the Adelaide street directory.	Medium term.

Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and new pet owners.
- Dog faeces.
- Public education.

## 12 Dog Faeces

### Objective

12.1 To ensure dog owners pick up their dog's faeces when outside the home.

### Target group

- Dog owners.

### Discussion

The management of dog faeces is an important environmental and health issue. Tonnes of dog faeces pollute our waterways and public places every year and it is an issue on which the community has strong feelings.

The Dog and Cat Management Act requires people to remove their dog's faeces. However compliance with this requirement depends on people:

- Having a bag or other receptacle with them to pick up;
- Seeing the dog defecate (less likely perhaps in off leash areas);
- Overcoming the distaste factor; and
- Having somewhere to dispose of the bag conveniently.

Council will amend By-law No 6 to include a requirement that dog owners carry with them a bag or dispenser suitable for picking up dog faeces when walking their dog. This has been introduced successfully at other Councils in South Australia.

Many Councils provide bags in parks for use by dog owners. This is a useful reminder to dog owners that picking up after their dog is now expected. Council will continue to provide dog poo bags at selected locations. However Council does not believe it should be *responsible* for providing dog owners with bags. This is because:

- If dogs are walked from home they are likely to have defecated before they get to the park.

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- If the dispensers happen to be empty people can't pick up.
- People are more likely to pick up their dogs' faeces if they have a bag on them than if they have to walk over to a receptacle that may be on the other side of the park.
- The bag dispensers are prone to vandalism.
- The cost of providing bags and keeping dispensers replenished is high and diverts scarce resources away from other valuable animal management programs.

Council will continue to provide dog poo bags in designated and high use areas. However all communication with dog owners will make it clear that bags are provided as a backup, that they will only be provided in selected parks and that people should always carry their own bag with them.

Council will reintroduce the pooch pouch program. These are brightly coloured pouches attached to a dog's collar for dog poo bags to be stored in. This is another useful reminder that picking up dog faeces is now expected. Their reintroduction will dovetail well with the new requirement to carry a bag when out with their dog. It is proposed that the pooch pouches be distributed with registrations. Council will also consider making them available to key stakeholders for distribution amongst their members/clients.

A review of dog faeces management will be undertaken towards the end of the life of this Plan to assess the suitability of the by-law and education programs implemented and available.

Council believes removal of dog's faeces is best suited to education rather than enforcement. This is because it is extremely difficult for an officer to catch a dog in the act of defecating. This will be a priority for education during the life of this Plan. The focus in Years 1-2 will be on ensuring people know the requirements and take a bag with them. The focus in Years 3-5 will be more on ensuring people meet the legislative requirements to pick up their dogs faeces.

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### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Amend By-law No 6 to include a requirement that people carry a bag or container for picking up their dog's faeces.	Short term.
Introduce the pooch pouch program distributing them with registrations and to key stakeholders.	Short term
Consider providing external stakeholders eg vets with pooch pouches to distribute to clients.	Short term
Review all information material to ensure it is clear that people are responsible for providing their own bags and that bag dispensers will only be provided at selected locations.	Short term
Ensure dog poo bags are provided at designated and high use locations.	Short term
Ensure the dog poo bag dispensers are replenished as required.	Short term
Train staff in approaching people in the public realm to discuss picking up dog faeces (role play/develop scripts/hand out pooch pouches).	Medium term
Evaluate the faeces management program at Mitcham (including a review of existing programs and identification of new approaches and products).	Medium term.

Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and new pet owners.
- Access to public open space.
- Public education.

## 13 Cat Management

### Objective

*13.1 Reduce the environmental and nuisance impacts of cats.*

### Target group

- Cat owners.
- Prospective cat owners.
- Prospective home builders.
- Designers and builders.

### Discussion

Cats that are wandering at large may attack wildlife, annoy neighbours and be harmed by cars and other cats. If they are not desexed, cats can also contribute to the population of stray and feral cats.

The community has strong feeling about cat management with calls for cats to be registered, desexed and partially or totally confined. Some people have called for a ban of cats in environmentally sensitive areas.

**Section 254** of the Local Government Act provides Council with the power to make an order that requires a person to do or refrain from doing the thing specified in the order in order to abate a nuisance or a hazard to health or safety associated with a live or dead animal or animals, or otherwise to deal with an animal or animals. This might include keeping an excessive number of animals, keeping animals so as to generate excessive noise, dust or odours to attract pests of vermin, keeping an aggressive animal or keeping an animal in a situation where it cannot be adequately contained or may cause danger to the public.

If Council were to introduce a cat confinement curfew by-law, it would have to apply across the whole of Mitcham. It could not apply to a particular suburb or area of the municipality. In addition, Council's legal advice suggests Council does not have the power to

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include a provision in their by-laws to prohibit the owning of cats.

There was strong community support for cat controls equivalent to dog controls in this Animal Management Plan, and Council will review its position on cat management during the life of the Plan.

However, at this time Council believes it is premature to introduce controls over cats in isolation from other Councils. Council believes this is something that is best addressed on a statewide basis, given that a bill is before Parliament (Hon. R B Such's Dog and Cat Management (Management of Cats) Amendment Bill, read for the first time 28<sup>th</sup> June 2006 ), and that the Dog and Cat Management Board is also reviewing the current Dog and Cat Management Act. Council will urge the State Government to pursue statewide cat control measures via these mechanisms.

In addition, Council will consider convening a summit on cat management where interested Councils, welfare and community groups and identified experts can discuss the issues and options available.

A strong education focus of the Plan will be to encourage people to desex, identify and confine their cats. The education program will provide a foundation for the possible future introduction of cat controls.

If no statewide cat control measures are in effect by the end of Year 2 of this plan (i.e. June 2009) Council will initiate the process of introducing a by-law for the identification and registration of cats and a range of other cat controls in The City of Mitcham.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Write to the State Government to urge them to pursue statewide cat registration through changes to the current Dog and Cat Management Act.	Short term.
Consider holding a summit on cat management.	Short term.
Establish a cat management program and budget for approval by Council.	Short term.
Include tips on confinement of cats in the New Pet Owners Kit.	Short term
Develop and implement an education strategy to encourage people to desex, identify and	Short term.

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confine their cats.	
Distribute the Pet Friendly Housing Design Guidelines to Council's planning and building departments.	Medium term.
Council will initiate the process of introducing a by-law for the registration of cats if no statewide cat control measures are in effect by the end of Year 2 of this plan (i.e. June 2009)	Medium term
Continue to make available DCMB's Information Sheet 13: I have a Cat Problem: What Can I do to complainants.	Continue existing practice.

Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and new pet owners.
- Confinement and wandering at large.
- Public education.

## 14 Animal Welfare

### Objectives

*14.1 Reduce the number of unwanted litters.*

*14.2 Reduce the number of lost and relinquished animals.*

*14.3 Increase the number of returned or re-homed animals.*

*14.4 Encourage pet owners to attend to their pet's basic needs and provide a quality environment in which to live.*

### Target groups

- Pet owners.
- Prospective pet owners.

### Discussion

The number of animals impounded every year remains high. Many are returned or re-homed but many also need to be put down.

The number of animals impounded is a function of:

- Unwanted litters.
- Lost animals (unidentified and/or unregistered animals cannot be returned to their owners).
- Relinquished and/or unclaimed animals. The likelihood of a pet being relinquished or unclaimed is reduced if people 1) do not make rash decisions about getting a pet, 2) choose a breed that is appropriate to their lifestyle 3) undertake basic obedience training with their animal to reduce unwanted behaviours 4) are able to confine their pet to their property.

The number of animals put down each is a function of:

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- The number returned to their owners; and
- The number able to be re-homed with new owners (this in turn is a function of the number of people willing to adopt an animal from a shelter and the temperament and ability of the animal to be re-homed).

Council believes responsible pet ownership is fundamental to animal welfare. Key strategies to reduce the number of animals in animal shelters are therefore to increase the rates of:

- Desexing;
- Identification and registration;
- Confinement;
- Obedience training; and
- Re-homing of lost and unwanted animals i.e. encouraging people to obtain a pet from RSPCA or AWL.

Most of these strategies are considered elsewhere in the Plan.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Encourage prospective pet owners to consider obtaining a pet from an animal shelter.	Short term
Include information on Council's website on the reasons animals end up in RSPCA or AWL, what happens to them and what pet owners and the community can do to minimise the problem.	Medium term
Develop a series of press releases for rotational release on the reasons animals end up in RSPCA or AWL, what happens to them and what pet owners and the community can do to minimise the problem.	Medium term

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Refer also Action Plans for:

- Prospective and new dog owners.
- Excessive barking.
- Confinement and wandering at large.
- Cat management.
- Public education.

## 15 Community Education

### Objectives

*15.1 Plan and implement appropriate community education programs in accordance with priorities identified in this Plan.*

### Target groups

- Pet owners.
- Prospective pet owners.
- All members of the community.

### Discussion

An ongoing debate is the relative merits of education versus enforcement. Laws will probably always be the backbone of animal control. However enforcement of laws is inherently inefficient because of its focus on means rather than ends and because it can consume vast resources in maintaining an enforcement presence.

By contrast, voluntary compliance through education can provide more meaningful, lasting, voluntary changes in behaviour. It is sometimes a matter of simply overcoming ignorance and incompetence. However education changes behaviour slowly. It can be expensive and hard to evaluate. Council does not have unlimited resources to spend on education.

The Dog and Cat Management Board operates education programs and activities on a statewide basis. However it is recommended that Council build on these programs and develop its own education programs to reflect local priorities.

The main education options available to local government are listed below. This list is not necessarily complete but can be used as a basis to generate more options. The options are divided into antecedence strategies (those that occur *prior* to the behaviour) and consequence strategies (those that occur *after* the behaviour). The strategies can be further classified into written or documentary programs and face to face contact.

Education Options

Antecedence Strategies		Consequence Strategies	
Written or documentary	Face to face contact	Written or documentary	Face to face contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brochures.</li> <li>• Mail outs.</li> <li>• Press coverage.</li> <li>• Signs.</li> <li>• Videos on responsible pet ownership.</li> <li>• Information on the Internet (Council's website and links to other websites).</li> <li>• Code of conduct.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking to pet owners about responsible pet ownership.</li> <li>• Talking to children about responsible pet ownership &amp; appropriate behaviour around dogs.</li> <li>• Dog Day Out Festivals.</li> <li>• Microchipping days.</li> <li>• Demonstration (ie how to pick up dog faeces without it touching your hand).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awards - eg dog owner of the year or month accompanied by letters of congratulation and press coverage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewards for responsible behaviour.</li> <li>• Sanctions (fines, warnings).</li> </ul>

Face to face contact is generally regarded as superior to written or documentary approaches. However face to face contact is time consuming and depends on the skills of the educator. Written or documentary approaches reach more people and the message lasts longer (a sign for example is seen every time someone visits a park). There is evidence to suggest that written messages work best when used in conjunction with face to face contact eg officers/veterinarians handing out brochures to pet owners.

Lessons from successful community education programs in other areas of public interest indicate that to be successful community education programs need to:

- Be targeted ie people need to feel the message applies to them (people won't hear the message about the need to train their dog if they have an old dog);
- Convey clear and specific messages (the message should not just be *pick up your dog's faeces* – it should be *take a bag with you, pick up as soon as your dog defecates and dispose of it in any garbage bin*); and

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- Convey positive messages (provide a list of places where you *can* take your dog off the leash as opposed to a list of places where you *can't* take your dog off the leash).

Each Key Issue Area includes target groups to assist in designing successful education programs. The Plan also classifies pet owners into prospective pet owners, new pet owners and existing pet owners for better targeting of the responsible pet ownership message.

Partnerships with key stakeholders (vets, clubs, and welfare organisation) are important to maximise the success of education programs and Council will seek to develop and strengthen these partnerships.

Council's community education priorities for the life of this Plan will be:

- The importance and benefits of desexing, identifying and confining cats.
- Removing dog faeces from public places.
- Effective operation of Dog Parks and areas where dogs can be exercised off leash, compliance with leash and no dog requirements in other areas.
- Holding an Annual Dog Day Out Festival as a positive way to get the responsible pet ownership message across.

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### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Develop an education strategy to encourage people to desex, identify and confine their cats.	Short term.
Develop faeces management education strategy to ensure all dog owners are aware of the requirement to pick up dog faeces.	Short term
Develop an education strategy for publicising Council's leashing and no dog requirements and for effective management of off leash areas.	Short term.
Develop a Code of Conduct for Dog Parks, and the presence of dogs in other off leash and on leash areas.	Short term.
Plan and hold an annual Dog Day Out Festival for dog owners. Involve key external stakeholders.	Short term
Conduct an annual evaluation and review of the Annual Dog Day Festival	Short term

Refer also all other Action Plans.

## 16 Harnessing the benefits of owning pets

### Objective

*16.1 Support pet owners and harness the benefits of owning pets.*

### Target groups

Pet owners.

### Discussion

There is a wealth of scientific evidence to support the health and social benefits of owning pets, although pet ownership is a very complex, individual relationship and as such not all human animal interactions are positive.

Most of the studies suggest pet ownership is associated with a reduction in cardiovascular disease (heart attacks and stroke) associated with increased exercise. However a growing body of research indicates that there is an association between pet ownership/attachment and psychosocial wellbeing. The psychosocial benefits of pet ownership include facilitating normal child development, ameliorating loneliness and depression and facilitating social support and interaction with other humans. It has been demonstrated that dogs are a social lubricant - having a dog with you stimulates conversations and in some cases friendships with other dog owners. This is generally seen as making a positive contribution to social capital.

Local government has a potential new role to play in harnessing the benefits of owning companion animals.

There are programs in other parts of Australia (eg Pet Links in Victoria) that match frail elderly pet owners with volunteers that might walk, bath or take a pet to the vet.

Pets are often taken in nursing homes and hospitals to visit patients/residents.

Council could be involved in facilitating program like these.

## ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Council will consider provision of an agility course for dogs. This could become a focus for many social activities for dog owners.

The Dog Day Out Festival recommended for educating the community in responsible pet ownership could also be used as a way to generate social capital in The City of Mitcham.

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Investigate the merits of sponsoring a pet links type program.	Medium term.
Determine if there is scope to sponsor a dog visitation program in local hospitals and nursing homes.	Medium term.

Refer also Action Plans for

- Public education.

## 17 Implementation and Evaluation

### Approval of the Plan

The Plan will need to be submitted to Council for its approval.

It will then need to be submitted to the DCMB for approval.

### Prioritising actions

The Plan's recommendations have been prioritised and scheduled through 2 phases for implementation over a 5 year horizon.

Phase 1: Short term 1-2 years.

Phase 2: Medium term 3-5 years.

### Animal Management Consultative Committee

The Animal Management Consultative Committee will be retained to review the implementation of this Plan. Council believes it is an invaluable link with the community and will be a useful sounding board for discussing the Plan. New terms of reference for the committee will be developed and considered for adoption by Council.

### Developing a sound basis for recording data

Council's procedures for recording animal control data should be screened and upgraded to provide an accurate and comprehensive basis to assess Council's performance in animal management.

## ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

### Annual Plan

Although this Plan contains detailed recommendations, a more detailed annual work plan will be needed to guide those who will implement the Plan and allow the actions to be matched with appropriate budget allocations.

### Annual Progress Report

Evaluating the annual progress of the Plan is the cornerstone of the implementation and evaluation strategy. It is proposed that an Annual Progress Report be prepared that outlines the progress made towards achieving the objectives of the Plan, difficulties encountered and any changes to the Plan that are considered necessary due to new circumstances or information.

### Partnerships with external stakeholders

Council will develop and strengthen partnerships with key external stakeholders to extend the reach of the responsible pet ownership message. This includes but is not limited to the Board, the RSPCA and Animal Welfare League, The Delta Society, veterinarians, pet shops, breeders, SACA, dog clubs, animal behaviourists, volunteers, local media and pet owners. Council will develop a register of key external stakeholders and communicate with them on a regular basis.

### Staff training

It is likely that there will soon be accredited animal management courses available for those working in animal control. Council should encourage all of its animal management officers to have completed an accredited course within 5 years. In considering applications for new animal control officers, preference should be given to applicants who have completed an accredited course.

### Funding

Funds from dog registrations must be used on dog management. Alternative funding sources need to be found for cats.

In addition to a commitment of Council funds, the City will take advantage of other funding sources as they become available, including state government grants and public private sector partnerships.

That Council should explore alternative funding sources and opportunities federal, state and private sectors to assist in the implementation of the Plan.

## ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

### Action Plans

Action	Priority
Obtain Council approval of the Plan.	Short term.
Submit the Animal Management Plan to the DCMB for approval.	Short term.
Identify funding requirements for the cat management recommendations contained in this Plan.	Short term.
Develop terms of reference for the Animal Management Consultative Committee.	Short term.
Screen Council's procedures for recording animal control data.	Short term.
Encourage all staff to have completed an accredited animal management course over the life of the Plan.	Short term.
In considering applications for new animal control officers, preference should be given to applicants who have completed an accredited animal management course.	Short term.
Generate a list of key external stakeholders.	Short term.
Develop a strategy for communicating with key external stakeholders.	Short term.
Hold an information seminar with key external stakeholders to brief them on key elements of the Plan and their role in helping to implement the Plan.	Short term.
Prepare an annual work plan to implement the Plan.	Short term.
Prepare an Annual Progress Report.	Short term.
Consider alternative funding sources to help with the implementation of the Plan.	Medium term.