

# CITY OF DARWIN

## Dog and Cat Management Strategy

2017-2021

### PART 1 BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 Introduction

Council's vision for Darwin is *'A tropical liveable city that creates opportunity and choice for our community'*. In line with this vision, Council has a responsibility to ensure the maintenance of a reasonable level of residential amenity and public health. In that light, Darwin's by-laws are designed to ensure a safe community for all members.

The development of this strategy is a result of Council's decision 21/3878 on 27 October 2015 to review its Animal Management Plan and establish an Animal Management Advisory Committee to provide recommendations to Council. Objectives and associated actions contained within this strategy have been informed by the recommendations of the Animal Management Advisory Committee and analysis of cat and dog statistics and trends from 2013 to 2016 in the areas of registration, microchipping, de-sexing and types of community complaints.

In January 2016 Council established a limited tenure Animal Management Advisory Committee (AMAC) comprising Elected Members, community representatives and representatives from animal breeder and management organisations. The objective of AMAC was to review the Animal Management Plan and provide recommendations to Council for inclusion in this Strategy.

The existing Animal Management Plan was also promoted through an interactive feedback opportunity at the Dog's Day Out microchipping and registration day on 2 July 2016. Forty-six people participated in the activity, with the following key areas identified as priorities by participants:

- Education strategies to increase microchipped and registered animals.
- Holding of discounted microchipping days.
- Wandering cats including domestic and feral cats.
- Promoting the benefits of socialisation and training of dogs to reduce dog attacks.
- Education about over-population and benefits of obtaining animals from shelters.
- Investigation of domestic animal businesses to ensure current legislation practices are being complied with.

The recommendations provided by the Animal Management Advisory Committee (AMAC) and participants at the Dog's Day Out event have been incorporated into the draft strategy for further community consultation.

## 1.2 Aims of the Strategy

This Dog and Cat Management Strategy will guide Council and the community towards the goal of responsible animal ownership and management. To succeed, it requires active cooperation from the community, particularly pet owners and their representative groups.

Council acknowledges the benefits of pet ownership. Council wants to ensure that animal welfare is paramount, that Council's powers are understood and that conflicts are minimised.

Key aims are;

- To support and facilitate the benefits of animal ownership and companionship.
- Ensure standards of animal welfare are maintained.
- Minimise local nuisance and maximise residential amenity.
- Ensure the keeping of animals does not compromise acceptable standards of public health.

## 1.3 Scope of the Strategy

The Strategy applies to any land within the City of Darwin where cats and dogs are proposed to be kept. This also includes the keeping of animals for business or commercial purposes.

The Animal Management Strategy is made up of five main parts:

- Part 1- Background
- Part 2- Responsible Dog and Cat Ownership
- Part 3- Pets in Public Spaces
- Part 4- Pound Operations
- Part 5 – Improvement in Animal Management Operations

Any domestic animals other than dogs and cats, including horses, pigs, poultry are not covered by this strategy or by Council By-Laws. Regulations on keeping other domestic animals fall under the Public and Environmental Health Act (2011).

In Darwin, there is a desire for people to keep a range of animals other than cats and dogs as pets. Most native animals are protected and require a permit from the Parks and Wildlife Commission to be kept as pets. Without appropriate approval, these animals are not to be kept in Darwin.

There are also a few issues in relation to keeping fish. Any outdoor fish ponds need to comply with relevant pool safety requirements. A person must not release fish into any public waterways or water bodies as they are introduced species and can have a detrimental effect on native species.

## PART 2 RESPONSIBLE DOG AND CAT OWNERSHIP

There are social, health and companionship benefits to owning pets, but not all residents are pet owners. Those who are, have responsibilities to look after them, control them in public, and make sure they do not adversely impact on others.

For the purpose of this strategy, the Responsible Dog and Cat Ownership section will include five key sections:

- Number of animals kept
- Pet registration, identification, vaccination and de-sexing
- Barking dogs
- Wandering animals
- Aggressive dogs and dog attacks

### 2.1 Number of Dogs and Cats Kept

Residents of the City of Darwin can own up to two cats and/or two dogs. Keeping more than this number requires a licence from Council. While there is not necessarily any problem with people keeping more than two cats and/or two dogs, each application needs to be considered on its merits to ensure the health and welfare of the animals concerned is considered, and to ensure there is no detrimental effect on the amenity of adjoining and nearby properties. In particular, the applicant should be able to demonstrate that such animals can be effectively confined to the owner's property.

Other matters that will be taken into consideration include:

- the size and dimensions of the property
- the dwelling type where the animal/s will be kept
- the proximity of the area in which the animal/s would be kept to adjoining properties
- the likely effects on and views of adjoining and nearby neighbours
- the adequacy of shelter provided for the animal/s
- the adequacy of fencing to prevent the escape of the animal
- the amenity of the area (i.e. noise, smell, drainage, vermin, etc.)
- the type and number of additional animals to be kept
- the owner's competency of keeping the animal/s (e.g. membership of a relevant recognised association would be an advantage)
- any relevant legislation, regulations or code of practice, and
- any other matter relevant to the circumstances associated with the application.

Details on how to apply for a licence, guidelines for assessment, fees and licence conditions is provided in the Responsible Pet Ownership Guide.

## 2.2 Pet Registration, Identification, Vaccination and De-sexing

Darwin City Council By-Laws place a mandatory requirement for all cats and dogs over twelve weeks (3 months) of age to be registered with the Council and microchipped with a national pet register.

Registration provides Council with statistics to inform planning, so that animals (and their owners) can benefit from having outdoor space to exercise and enjoy activities. It also allows lost or found animals to be reunited with their owners and minimises the rates of euthanasia.

If an animal is unregistered and has no microchip, or is not wearing its identification tag when off its owner's premises, a fine may be issued. The cost of registration is not high for de-sexed cats or dogs. Registration fees are higher for entire dogs and cats and the revenue helps Council to provide the services and infrastructure needed for animal management, community education and public safety.

Services and benefits paid for by registration fees and fines include:

- Provision of Community Education programs.
- Proactive patrolling by Animal Management Officers to reduce the number of wandering animals.
- Complaint handling, investigation and resolution services.
- Management of the pound facility and the speedy return of registered and microchipped animals to their owners.

Microchips allow Rangers, vets and animal shelters to quickly identify a dog or cat by scanning them with a microchip reader. The microchip gives the animal a unique number, which can be matched on databases that store information about the animal and the owners contact details. This helps with the speedy return of dogs or cats that are lost, at large or injured. An important point for owners is to ensure they notify the relevant national microchip database of any change of address or ownership details.

### 2.2.1 Vaccination and De-sexing

De-sexing and vaccinating cats and dogs is important for their wellbeing, and as such Council supports and encourages de-sexing and vaccination of domestic cats and dogs. Cats can be vaccinated (primarily against Feline Enteritis) from six to eight weeks of age and require booster vaccinations by a veterinary surgeon. Dogs can be vaccinated against Canine Distemper, Kennel Cough, Viral Hepatitis and Parvo Virus. Puppies can receive their first vaccination between six to eight weeks of age, their second at 12 to 16 weeks old and then a booster vaccination every 12 months. A recommended safe early age of de-sexing dogs or cats is from 8 weeks of age. Cats and dogs can be de-sexed at any age over 8 weeks however there may be benefits for de-sexing the animal at the earlier age.

### 2.2.2 Current Status and Actions

The key objectives for increasing dog and cat registration are to inform planning by Council and to allow lost or found animals to be reunited with their owners, minimising the rates of euthanasia.

While the number of registered cats has remained relatively constant over the last four years the number of registered dogs has fluctuated (Figure 1). Actions to ensure that all pets are registered are provided in Table 1. These actions include improvements in technology, education campaigns, and incentives.

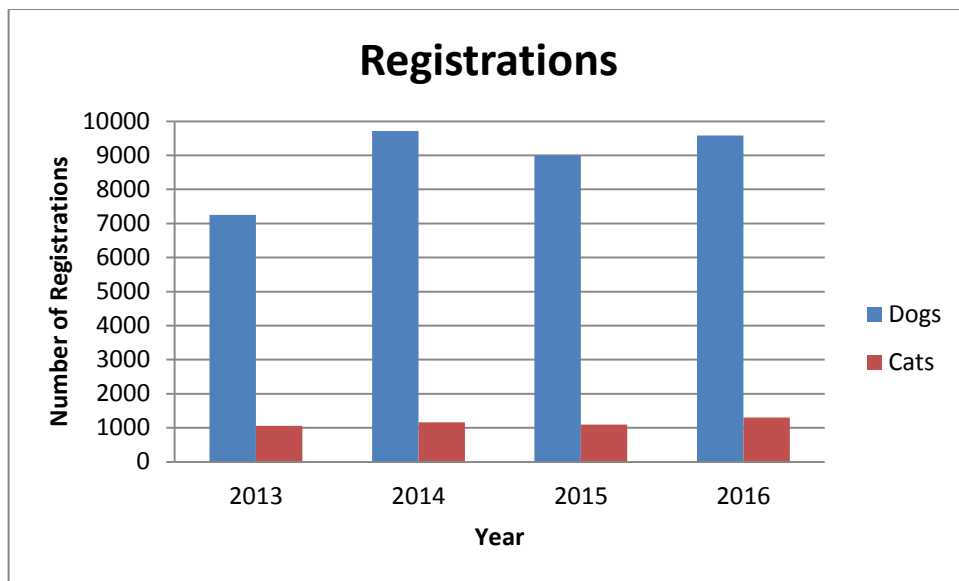


Figure 1: Number of registered dogs and cats within the municipality.

Table 1: Target and actions to increase dog and cat registration within the municipality

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<b>By 2021 there will be an increase in registrations by 20% or 5% each year.</b>	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Continue education of the community in relation to registration of pets within the municipality.	Increased number of registrations from this action.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of animals that can be reunited with their owners.</li> </ul>
	Conduct a communications campaign and doorknock program across the municipality.	Number of animals microchipped and registered.	Bi annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess number of unregistered dogs. To allow a better estimate of cat and dog populations</li> <li>• Increase number of registered pets.</li> </ul>
	Organise microchipping days to be held bi-annually throughout the municipality with stakeholders.	Number of animals microchipped and registered.	Bi annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase number of registered pets.</li> <li>• Increase the number of animals with permanent identification.</li> <li>• Improve the number of animals that can be reunited with their owners.</li> </ul>
	Increase community awareness and understanding of the number of dogs and cats people can keep.	Development of materials	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community awareness.</li> </ul>
	<b>Fees and Charges</b>			
	A review of fees and charges including potential incentives measures, and investigate the options for a tag for life registration system.	Uptake of the incentives by the community.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of registered dogs and cats.</li> <li>• Increase the number of de-sexed animals in the community.</li> <li>• Reduce the number of unwanted and uncared for animals.</li> </ul>
	<b>Partnerships and Collaboration</b>			
	Work in collaboration with rehoming organisations and pet businesses to register animals as part of sale.	Agreement between agencies and a process developed.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of registered animals.</li> </ul>
	Support an indigenous community animal health program with AMRIC.	Number of events & Number of animals involved.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased collaboration with AMRIC.</li> <li>• Improved animal health and care.</li> <li>• Improved community education.</li> </ul>

<b>Innovation and Technology</b>				
	Investigate the use of technology and text messaging to increase awareness, ease, accessibility and convenience in registering pets.	Customer feedback and use of payment options by customers.	June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved customer service and experience.</li><li>• Increased number of registered pets.</li></ul>

## 2.3 Barking Dogs and Animal Nuisance

Many people purchase dogs to deter potential intruders. However, dogs that are habitual barkers are a nuisance to owners and neighbours.

Dogs bark for a reason, and the problems are easier to rectify if approached as soon as they eventuate. Common reasons for dogs barking are:

- lack of exercise
- boredom, loneliness and frustration
- feeling under threat/ fear (of thunder, fireworks)
- poor living conditions (shelter/ no water/ security lights impinging)
- ill-health

Dogs that bark usually benefit from more exercise, socialisation or a more interesting environment. Dogs barking at passers-by may need to have their access to views obstructed (e.g. solid fencing or a hedge). If the problem persists, dogs and their owners will benefit from attending obedience clubs.

Residents concerned about a barking dog should make contact with the owner(s) in the first instance in an effort to resolve the issue. More often than not, a dog owner may not be aware that their dog is barking (it may bark when the owner leaves the premises) or may not be aware that the barking is a nuisance to their neighbours. If not successful, the concerned party can then contact Council who will contact the dog owner to advise that a complaint has been made, and offer advice on how to rectify the problem. The complainant will also be given a diary for them to complete when the dog barks over a seven day period.

The enforcement of nuisance animals is a complex matter. For example, before compliance notices and infringements are issued to an owner for a dog barking excessively, Council undertakes a comprehensive and impartial investigation to gather sufficient evidence to confirm that the barking is excessive. This investigation takes time and during this process Council officers seek to balance the needs of the complainant, the needs of the animal owners, the welfare of the animals involved and the requirements of the law.

If the problem persists the dog owner will be advised that further complaints have been made and of the possible actions that can be taken and of the potential consequences should the behaviour not improve. If the investigation determines that the barking does create a nuisance, Council can take the following actions:

- Conditions can be placed on the registration of the dog such as fencing alterations, bark control devices and mandatory engagement of a certified dog behaviour training provider
- Dogs can be formally declared a nuisance dog, which incur additional registration fees and further conditions of registration
- Repeated offences and breaches of registration conditions may lead to cancellation of registration where the dog is either relocated out of the municipality or seized by Council.

Consulting with neighbours and taking action to curb the dog's likelihood to bark are the best ways to manage barking issues. While court action is available and penalties are



possible, this does not directly improve the situation and stop the dog from barking. The most effective solution is discussion of the issue and management of the animal. Prosecution often takes many months to resolve. Owners who allow a nuisance to remain will however be prosecuted to the extent of the law.

### 2.3.1 Current Status and Actions

Barking and/or nuisance dogs are a common complaint received by the Animal Management Team. Of the animal management complaints received by Council in 2016, barking and nuisance dogs contributed 27% of all complaints (Figure 8). The Animal Management Team spend a large amount of time and resources investigating complaints in this area. All barking/nuisance complaints require investigation and collection of evidence to verify the complaint. On average a barking/nuisance complaint takes 4-6 weeks to resolve with a large amount of time invested by animal management rangers.

The number of barking/nuisance complaints received by Council has fluctuated over the last four years (Figure 2), however complaints appear to be on the rise, jumping by 17% in 2016 from 2015 figures. Over the next four years the Animal Management Team aims to reduce the number of barking/nuisance complaints by 20% (Table 2). Actions to decrease barking/nuisance complaints include improvements in technology, education events and materials, workshops and incentives.

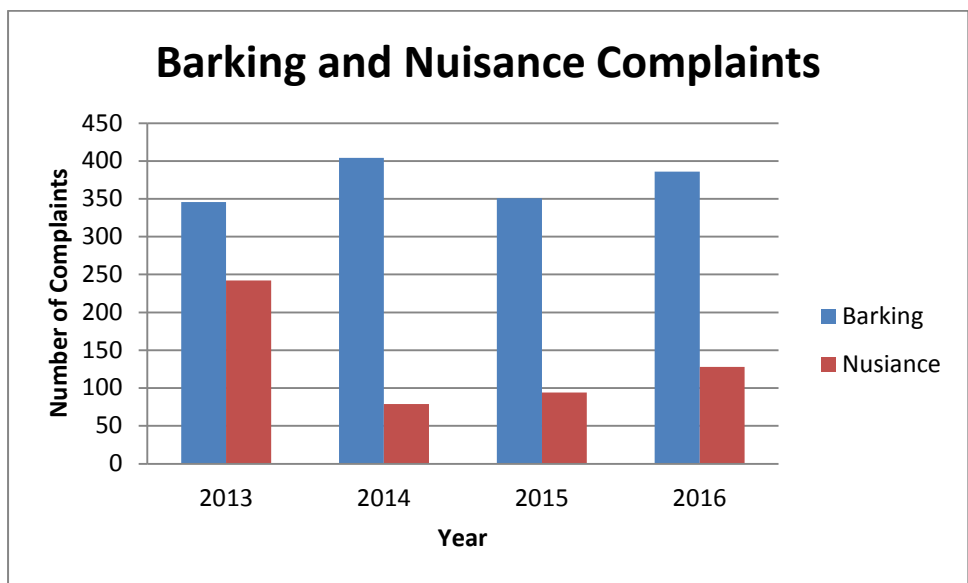


Figure 2: Number of dog barking and nuisance complaints received by Council.

Table 2: Target and actions to reduce dog barking and nuisance within the municipality.

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<b>Reduce Dog Barking Complaints by 20%</b>	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Promote the provision and benefits of ongoing training.	Number of education and engagement events.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimise issues and complaints relating to dogs barking.</li> <li>Increased level of education in the community.</li> </ul>
	Development of an information pack for owners of alleged barking or nuisance dogs.	Pack developed.	December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased level of education in the community.</li> </ul>
	Conduct a series of bark stopping workshops. Make a condition of registration for offending animals.	Number of seminars delivered and number of participants.	January 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in the number of barking nuisances reported – particularly in prior re-offenders.</li> <li>Reduce behavioural issues that lead to other offences including dog attacks and at large.</li> </ul>
	<b>Fees and Charges</b>			
	Explore various incentives to encourage pet owners to undertake obedience training.	Report produced with recommendations.	December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced anti-social behaviour.</li> </ul>
	<b>Innovation and Technology</b>			
	Explore the use of online and mobile technologies for investigating excessive barking complaints.	Report produced with recommendations.	July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved response times to resolve nuisance complaints.</li> </ul>
	Investigate the use of anti-barking collars and bark counting collars.	Reports produced with recommendations.	July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prompt resolution of barking complaints.</li> <li>Improved client satisfaction on barking incidences.</li> </ul>
Investigate digital options and alternatives to the barking diary.	Report with recommendations.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved data collection and statistics.</li> </ul>	

		Implementations dependent on budget.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Potential additional tool for combating barking issues in the community.</li><li>• Provide alternative ways of collecting evidence in barking investigations.</li></ul>
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## 2.4 Aggressive Dogs and Dog Attacks

### 2.4.1 Declared Dogs

Council may issue conditions which result in dogs being declared, **dangerous** or **nuisance**.

A dog is Declared if it is the subject, following any offence of:

- Dog attack Level 1 (Declared Category 1)
- Dog attack Level 2 (Declared Category 2); or
- Any offence against By-Laws 65 – 71 (Declared Category 3)

Dogs involved in fatalities and serious mauling attacks are often found to have a history of unaddressed menacing or aggressive behaviour. The **Declared** dog classification 55 (B), (C) and (D) within the Darwin City Council By-Laws were amended in 2002 and again in 2007 to ensure the containment of the dog is such to prevent an escalation to harmful behaviour.

An Authorised Officer may declare a dog as a dangerous dog. There are 2 categories of dog attacks **Level 1** and **Level 2**:

- A dog commits a **Level 1** attack if the dog bites or holds a person or animal in its mouth whether or not:
  - (a) the holding is accompanied by biting, shaking, pulling or pushing; or
  - (b) the person or animal suffers any injury (physical or otherwise).
- A dog commits a **Level 2** attack if the dog approaches, chases, menaces, harasses or rushes at a person or animal in a manner endangering or causing fear, alarm or distress to the person or animal. Clause (2) applies whether or not there is any contact or injury to the person or animal.
- Declared Dog – Level 3 is a dog causing **nuisance**, breaching any offences under By-laws 65-71

Under the City of Darwin by-Laws all declared dogs must be microchipped, wear an identification tag, be kept in a prescribed enclosure with a Council prescribed sign displayed and be kept under effective control in accordance with additional conditions of Declared Dog Registration.

Owners of a declared dog must:

- Notify Council if it has gone missing, been relocated or has a new owner.
- Muzzle the dog and have it on-lead whenever it is off private premises.
- Must ensure the dog is not under the control of or sold to any person under the age of 17.
- Securely contain the dog within the confines of the property.
- Display a dangerous dog sign at all entrances to the premises (issued by Council).
- Comply with any other conditions imposed by the council.

A full list of these requirements is provided in Subdivision 1A Part 55(B, C and D) of the Darwin City Council By-Laws 2009.

### **2.4.2 Dog attacks**

The likelihood of dog attacks will decrease if the principles of responsible pet ownership are followed, i.e. ensuring a dog is on-lead when it leaves its owners premises. The majority of dog attacks in public places occur on a footpath or road joining the premises of the dog owner. Furthermore, the majority of dog attacks on children occur in their own home or another person's home.

Most injuries are to the face or head, usually caused by children putting their face close to a dog's mouth or hugging the dog tightly around its neck. Parents should closely supervise their children around dogs.

Council places a high priority on investigating reported dog attacks which are of great concern to both Council and the community.

#### *Penalties for Dog Attacks*

Dog owners are responsible for any damage caused by:

- **Level 1** Dog Attack - makes any physical contact or injury to a person or animal
- **Level 2** Dog Attack - their dog rushing and/ or approaching in a threatening manner, causing fear or harm to a person or animal.

A breach of conditions of a Declared Dog registration may result in Council cancelling registration, removal of the dog from the municipality or the animal being destroyed.

### **2.4.3 Current status and Actions moving forward**

The Animal Management team places a high priority on investigating reported dog attacks which are of great concern to both Council and the community. Over the last four years the number of dog attacks has averaged around 214 attacks per year, with a spike in attacks (234) recorded in 2014 (Figure 3). From 2013 to 2016 the Council investigated 877 dog attacks in the Darwin municipality. This equates to an average of 4.2 reports of dog attacks each week during this period.

Over the life of this strategy the Council aims to reduce dog attacks by 15% each year. Actions to decrease dog attacks include reviews of current policies and processes, and education events and materials (Table 3).

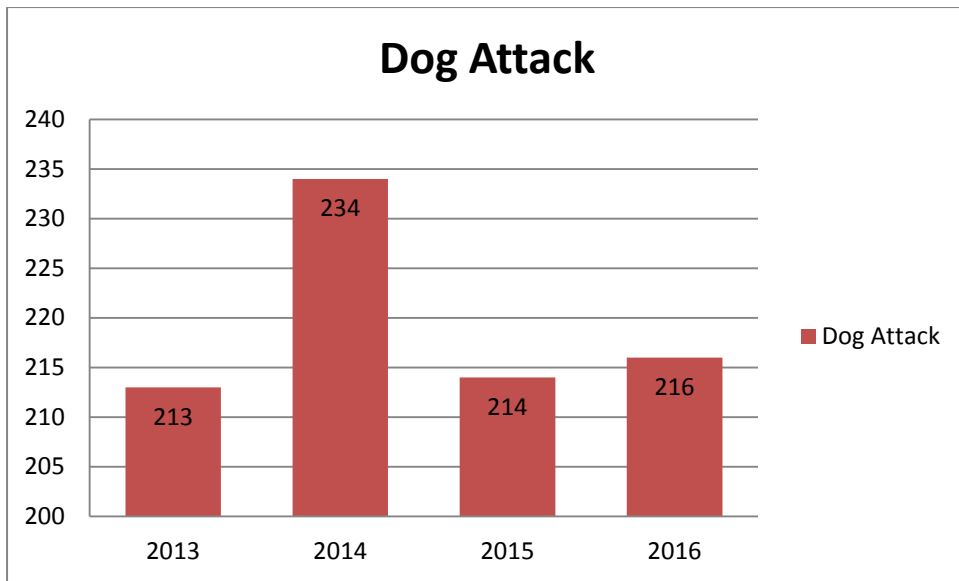


Figure 3: Number of dog attack complaints received by Council for the past four years.

Table 3: Target and actions to reduce dog attacks within the municipality.

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<b>Council aims to reduce dog attacks by 15% per year.</b>	<b><i>Education and Communication</i></b>			
	Review existing education material and include content on ways to reduce dog attacks.	Materials updated and produced	January 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved awareness in the community of effective methods to minimising dog attacks.</li> <li>Increased public awareness of the links between animal health and nuisance behaviour.</li> <li>Reduce dog behavioural issues that lead to attacks.</li> </ul>
	Promote the provision and benefits of ongoing training.	Number of events attended.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved awareness in the community of effective methods to minimising dog attacks.</li> <li>Increased public awareness of the links between animal health and nuisance behaviour.</li> <li>Reduce dog behavioural issues that lead to attacks.</li> </ul>
	<b><i>Procedures, Processes and Policies</i></b>			
	Review procedures for dealing with animal attacks.	Review completed.	June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve response times for attack investigations.</li> <li>Improve customer service.</li> </ul>
	Review on/off lead policies across the municipality for impacts on the number of dog attacks. Identify hotspots.	Review completed.	June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential reduction in un-controlled dogs.</li> </ul>
Inspect all declared dogs.	Demonstrate annual audit of owner's property.	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring compliance with dangerous dog regulations.</li> <li>Minimise any further incidents.</li> </ul>	

## PART 3 PETS IN PUBLIC PLACES

An additional key principle that underpins this strategy is that all cats and dogs should be under effective control at all times in public spaces. A cat or dog is said to be under effective control if it is on-lead or for dogs if it is in close proximity/ in line of sight of the pet owner and under voice command.

Responsible owners know that walking a dog is important, providing opportunities for exercise and social interaction. Lack of exercise is considered to be detrimental to the health and behaviour of a dog. While dog owners need to exercise their dogs, this activity must be balanced against environmental considerations, and the rights and safety of others.

The answer is to provide choice for the community and ensure that off-lead areas are clearly signed. Designating areas as having different levels of dog access is a reality of the current open space planning environment. The challenge is to provide good free running and socialising opportunities for owners and their dogs.

### 3.1 Wandering Animals

#### **3.1.1 Wandering dogs**

A dog wandering at large, usually within the vicinity of the owner's home is one of Council's main dog management challenges. Wandering dogs are a public health and safety issue. In terms of animal welfare, an uncared-for dog is likely to be a disease risk, and scavenging dogs are likely to result in a litter nuisance.

Uncontrolled dogs are also a safety risk to the public. Pedestrians, cyclists, mail delivery services, motorists and other animals are all at potential risk of a dog at large causing accidents, dog attacks and even death due to being struck by vehicles. It is particularly distressing when a wandering dog is involved in any of these events.

#### **3.1.2 Wandering cats**

As with dogs, cats must be under effective control of their owners at all times. A growing stray cat population creates a serious public nuisance, particularly in terms of the spread of disease by cats if they are not cared for, de-sexed or vaccinated.

Feeding and harbouring stray and feral cats can cause over population, with diseased or aggressive animals becoming a nuisance for neighbouring properties. In a seven-year period, an unsprayed cat and her offspring can produce 430,700 cats<sup>1</sup>. Stray cats and dogs should be reported to the Animal Management Section. This will allow Council to collect information on the magnitude of the feral/stray cat problem across the municipality and assist to identify feral cat hotspots.



### 3.1.3 Current status and Actions

The number of complaints for animals at large has been steadily rising over the past four years, increasing by 25% between 2013 and 2016 (Figure 5). Animals at large make up 62% of complaints received by Council (Figure 6). Actions in relation to pets in public places within the municipality are presented in Table 4.

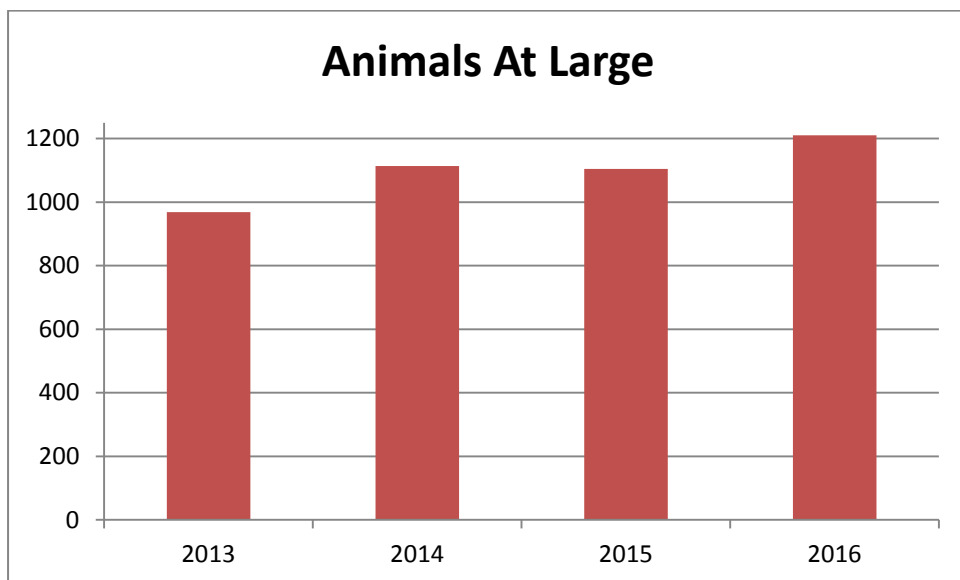


Figure 4: The number of Animal at Large complaints received for the last four years

## 3.3 Managing Cats

All cats in the Darwin municipality must be registered and fitted with a microchip. By-law 67 provides that if a cat at large is not under effective control, the owner of the cat commits an offence. Organisations such as the RSPCA and the Cat Association of the NT actively encourage people to keep their cats confined to their property and inside at night.

The City of Darwin will continue to encourage pet owners to confine their cats through the responsible pet ownership information provided on its website, the Responsible Pet Ownership Guide and community education events.

### 3.3.1 Keeping cats in at night

Cat owners have legal responsibilities under Council's Animal Management By-Laws. These specifically address cat registration and cats being at large. A cat out at night can roam a long way; it is also more likely to be hit by a car and is more likely to be injured in a fight with other cats. A recent three week study conducted by the Cat Protection Society found that 94% of car accidents or fights involving cats occurred at night. Diseases such as toxoplasmosis (which can affect humans), feline enteritis and feline AIDS (which does not affect humans) can be contracted during cat fights.

Confining a cat at night is an animal welfare issue; there are no ill effects when a cat is home-based.

Protection of wildlife is a priority in Darwin. Cats tend to do most of their hunting at night with each feral cat killing between 5-30 animals per day, equating to a minimum estimate of 75 million native animals killed daily by feral cats<sup>2</sup>. For their own safety, and the safety of native animals and biodiversity, cats should be kept inside during the night.

### **3.3.2 Cat traps**

Cat trapping is an effective (and safe for the animal) way to monitor cat behaviour at night. It is also an effective way to monitor the feral cat population. If a registered cat is trapped wandering, it can be identified through its registration/ identification tag, and returned to its owner.

Council has a number of cat traps that are available for residents to borrow for use on their property to catch roaming or feral cats. The traps are available from the Darwin Animal Pound and are available at no charge; however should the trap be returned in a damaged condition or not returned at all, there is a charge to cover costs. A Cat Trap Loan Form needs to be completed. Trapped cats should be delivered to the City of Darwin Animal Pound, located at Boulter Road Berrimah. Assistance is provided to those residents who are unable to deliver the cat personally.

### **3.3.3 Neighbourhood cats**

Cats are usually well loved members of a family. However, even a pet cat that is well fed and looked after may still roam and hunt. This means that often the cats out at night will be pets from the neighbourhood. If people have problems with a neighbour's cat wandering into their yard, Council encourages neighbours to discuss the matter in the first instance. Where someone cannot get in contact with or are unable to discuss this with their neighbours, they should contact the Council for advice.

### **3.3.4 Feral/Stray cats**

It is important not to feed stray or feral cats. This potentially leads to dependence and develop issues such as overbreeding, cross contamination of disease and health and safety to the community and risk to animal welfare. If a person is found to have a population of cats on their premises they are considered the person under effective care and control of the cats and are required to register and microchip any unknown cats on the property. It is a by-law offence to keep an unregistered or un-microchipped cat in the municipality.

### **3.3.5 Current Status and Actions**

Like dogs, cats must be kept under effective control of their owners at all times. A growing stray cat population creates a serious public nuisance as they are not cared for, de-sexed or vaccinated. Stray cats should be reported to Council's Animal Management Team.

While the large majority of complaints received by Council are in relation to dogs, Council wishes to increase awareness and understanding in the community of cat management issues. Over the last four years the number of complaints received by Council has increased, primarily with reports of cats at large (Figure 4). Cat at large complaints have increased by 297% since 2013 (Figure 4). Actions to increase awareness of cat management issues are presented in Table 4.

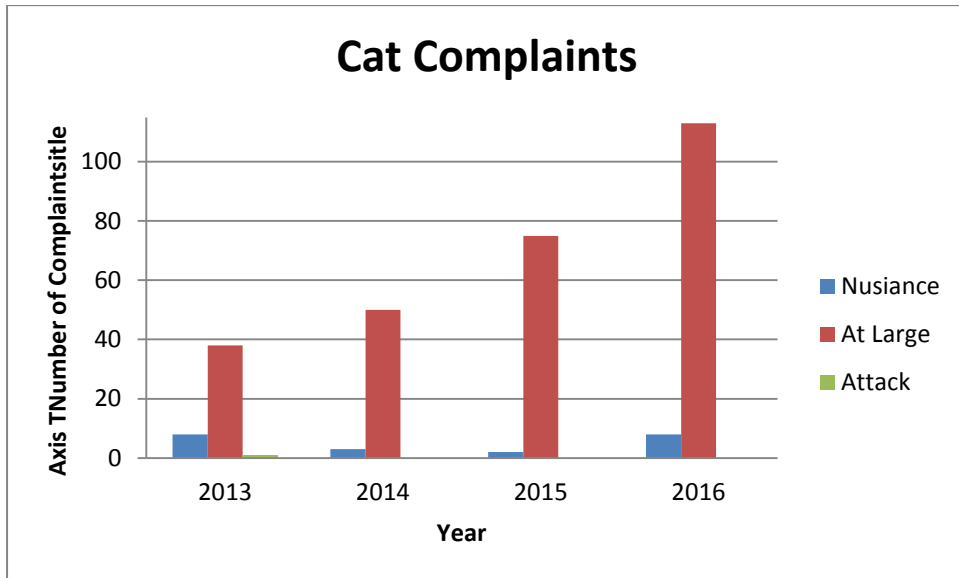


Figure 5: Number and type of cat complaints received for the last four years.

<sup>1</sup> Animals Australia - National Federation of Animal Welfare and Rights Groups

<sup>2</sup> Australian Wildlife Conservancy – Wildlife Matters 2012/13

### 3.4 On-lead Policy

In broad terms, any dog that leaves its owner’s private property must be on-lead. Thus, dogs must be on-lead:

- in all streets, roads and public car parks
- in public open space, except where designated otherwise.

#### 3.4.1 Shared pathways

Cats and dogs are a potential hazard in shared pathway environments, given their relative unpredictability and the greater potential for injury to other path users (e.g. cyclists, runners, etc.) Across the municipality, shared pathways and a ten metre zone either side of the path are designated dog on-lead areas at all times. Even when the pathway runs through an off-lead area.

#### 3.4.2 Off-lead areas

All public parks and beaches controlled by City of Darwin are dog off-lead areas. If a dog is off-lead in these areas, the owner is required to maintain effective control over their pet and be carrying a lead for when it is required. A dog is considered to be under effective control if it is;

- Immediately responsive to the owner’s commands and is within a 1.5m distance from the owner;
- The owner must be in a position to continuously see their dog;
- The dog is on a lead when exiting and entering the off-lead area;
- The dog responds immediately to corrections by voice commands and
- The dog immediately recalls by voice command to the owner.

Throughout the City of Darwin all dogs should be on-lead except in off-lead areas. Many key paths and facilities e.g. The Mall, are sign posted no dog areas. In designated off-lead areas, a cat or dog must still be under the effective control of its owner, i.e. it will immediately return to its owner on command and/ or remains in the clear and unobstructed view of its owner at all times. See Appendix 1 for a map of Council off-lead areas and Appendix 2 for the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife for regulations in their local parks.

#### 3.4.3 No cat/dog areas

Cats and dogs can damage environmentally sensitive areas by traumatising, injuring or killing small birds and animals, trampling flora, and disturbing or causing erosion on the banks or edges of water bodies. Cats and dogs are not permitted, whether restrained or otherwise:

- At East Point Reserve – from the area bounded by the entry gateway and Lake Alexander perimeter fence.
- The Mall
- Market areas – Mindil Beach, Parap, Rapid Creek, Nightcliff and Malak during market times. Or any other area where markets are being conducted.
- Within ten metres of any children’s playground, public BBQ’s or skate park/BMX facility.
- On sporting ovals during times of organised play.

Sporting ovals are a valuable resource for dog owners to exercise their pets. However to ensure there can be a harmonious relationship between sporting clubs and dog owners, additional management in and around sporting oval areas will be provided by patrols from Animal Management Officers to notify animal owners of their responsibilities.

See Appendix 1 and 2 for no cat/ dog areas in the Darwin municipality.

### 3.5 Dog Faeces

Dog faeces are a problem on streets and in open space. Droppings may contain harmful bacteria and nutrients. Whether washed into creeks and drains or left to contaminate soil where adults and children play, dog faeces are a public health issue.

To overcome the issue of faeces management, all dog owners are required to carry a plastic bag whenever they leave home. Bags should be used to clean up faeces left by their dog in a public space. Dog owners should carry more than one bag as fines may be issued for not having a bag on them. Not removing dog faeces from a public place may attract an infringement notice.

### 3.6 Dog Parks and Programs

Some pet owners seek confined spaces to exercise their pets. There is an increased interest in providing fenced dog parks, agility areas and specialised animal play equipment. This is a reflection of the interest pet owners take in the welfare of their animals. Similarly, where children and animals play together, there is concern to protect both from the dangers of escaping or absconding, particularly in terms of conflict with traffic.

It is desirable therefore that Council provide some enclosed spaces – using fences, barriers or planting – for dog off-lead activities, allowing a choice for owners. Fenced dog parks can be a good use for areas not suitable for other public facilities.

Across the municipality there are dog off-leash exercise areas at many parks, reserves and beaches. Development of a specific dog park is near completion in Muirhead, with locations being investigated for an additional dog park elsewhere in the municipality.

The regular patrols of off leash exercise areas are undertaken by Animal Management Officers to reduce the incidents of un-social behaviour.

#### **3.6.1 Dog programs/ sports**

A range of dog activity programs (eg puppy school, dog obedience, dog sports) are conducted by clubs and other dog interest groups in the municipality. Dog clubs and interest groups provide valuable role models and distribution channels for information about responsible pet ownership.

While Council acknowledges the social benefits of exercise and play for animals and their owners, their role (as with other sports) is to allocate parkland for use, and to promote clubs, their activities, and the benefits they provide.

Table 4: Target and actions in relation to pets in public places within the municipality.

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<b>Education and Communication</b>				
	Continue education of the community in relation to registration of pets within the municipality.	Awareness in the community. Customer satisfaction survey.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased community awareness.</li> <li>Increased pet registrations.</li> </ul>
	Promote the benefits of cats being kept in at night.	Education material developed.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase community awareness of the benefits of cats remaining inside at night.</li> </ul>
	Develop cat ownership educational materials.	Education material developed.	June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase community awareness.</li> </ul>
	Promote the location of no cat/ dog areas and the reasons for their designation.		On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing community awareness of on and off-lead areas within the municipality.</li> </ul>
	Ensure a map of the municipality is easy to read, easy to duplicate (therefore cheap and effective to distribute) and are available in service centres, clubs and online.	Map produced and distributed.	Dec 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing community awareness of on and off-lead areas within the municipality.</li> </ul>
	Undertake education and awareness campaigns about “picking up”, via community groups, schools, or through phone on-hold messages and displays in Council libraries and other community centres.	Education materials produced. Messages conveyed to the public at events.	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing community awareness of their responsibilities.</li> </ul>
	Address ‘hot spots’ quickly by educating and warning offenders once and issuing a fine if the problem reoccurs.	Feedback from patrols.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing community awareness of their responsibilities.</li> </ul>
	Continue to monitor community sentiment and need for additional dog park facilities.	Customer satisfaction survey.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keeping Council informed of community need.</li> </ul>

<b>Procedures, Processes and Policies</b>			
Review on/off lead policies across the municipality. Identify hotspots.	Report with recommendations.	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential reduction in un-controlled dogs.</li> <li>• Potential to reduce attacks in public places reduced.</li> </ul>
Develop a strategy investigating options to address the stray cat population within the Darwin municipality.	Strategy developed recommendations accepted.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the number of stray or homeless cats.</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships and Collaboration</b>			
Work in partnership with CDU and NTG on feral/stray cat projects.	Collaboration on projects.	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine the magnitude of the stray cat problem and identify hot spots for stray cats.</li> </ul>
Support dog clubs/groups in finding suitable sites for dog agility programs, sports or equipment where there is demand.	Communication and relationships with Dog clubs and groups	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build partnerships with dog clubs and groups.</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for pet orientated events and activities.</li> </ul>
Maintain ongoing dialogue with dog activity groups about issues facing pet owners and in terms of dog parks and programs.		On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing community awareness.</li> </ul>



## PART 4 POUND OPERATIONS

The City of Darwin impounds hundreds of lost, wandering or nuisance cats and dogs every year. The Pound has 28 kennels, 5 isolation kennels and 3 exercise yards to hold impounded dogs and can house up to 28 cats. There are an additional 8 isolation cages for impounded cats.

As a result of these numbers, it naturally follows that for the Pound facility to service the needs of Darwin, Council needs to ensure that animals remain at the pound for the shortest time possible. It is essential that there are kennels available every day for dogs that are found wandering or are impounded because of the risk they pose to community safety.

### 4.1 Management of Unclaimed Animals

The ideal outcome is for the owner to be identified through registration or microchip details and reunited with their cat or dog. If the owner cannot be identified, Council will post a picture of the animal on its website with the hope that the owner comes forward.

It is Council's policy to allow four (4) working days for owners to contact Council and reclaim their animal, however in some cases, animals are held for longer than this while the owner is sought. From the time an owner is identified and contacted, Council provide an additional four working (4) days to allow for collection of the animal. Daily maintenance fees for safe keeping of impounded animals apply.

To make the best decision for the community and the animal, dogs are assessed to determine whether they are suitable for inclusion in the rehoming program. This process involves a behavioural assessment and health check for dogs and cats. Assessments are conducted by Pound staff and the RSPCA. Council will not include animals in its rehoming program that have behavioural issues which may pose a risk to the community, or health issues that will have a long term impact on both the animal and the prospective owner.

If the owner does not come forward within the specified time, a decision is made to re-home or euthanise the animal. The only circumstance under which an animal will be euthanised is if the animal fails a health check or a behavioural assessment.

A pound release fee applies if an unregistered or non-microchipped dog or cat has been claimed by its owner. This fee is waived if the dog is registered, microchipped and it is the first impoundment. Dog at large fines still apply to all dogs impounded for being at large regardless.

As with all welfare agencies, if Council is unable to find an alternative home for an unclaimed, unregistered animal and where the impounding facilities are at full capacity, the animals will be euthanised.

While the animals are in the care of Council, staff and volunteers ensure that an animals physical and mental wellbeing is maintained.

#### **4.1.1 Current Status and Actions**

On average, 810 animals are impounded each year at the Council pound facility. The majority of animals arrive at the pound as they are at large roaming in public places (Figure 6). Actions to reduce the number of impounded animals and to increase the number of animals reunited with their owners or rehomed are presented in Table 5.

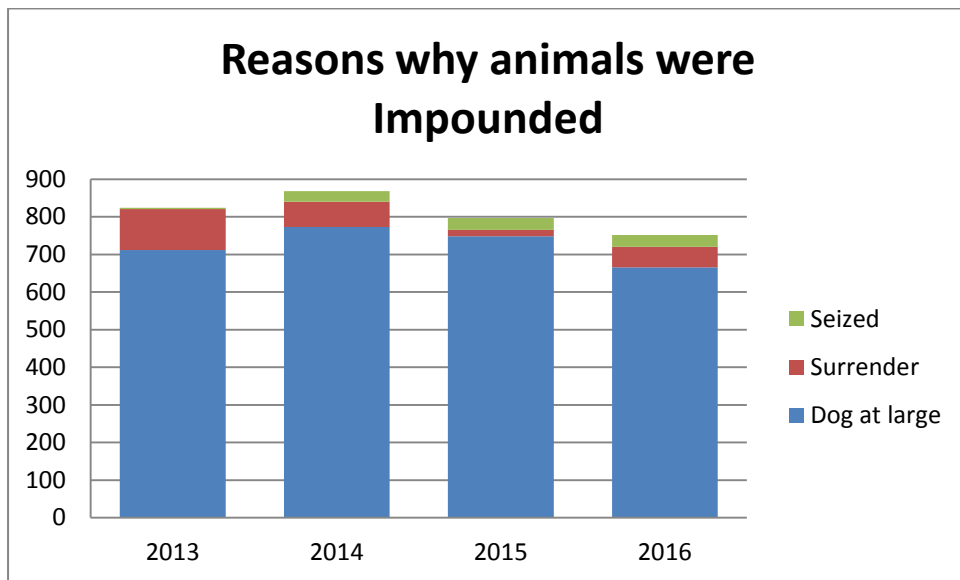


Figure 6: Reasons why animals have been impounded at the Council pound facility.

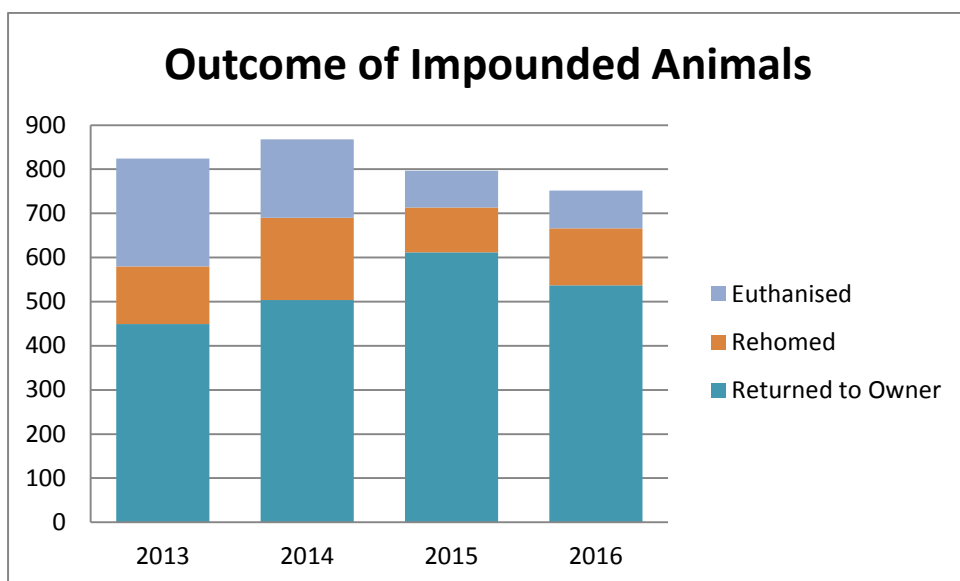


Figure 7: Known outcome of impounded cats and dogs.

Table 5: Targets and actions to reduce the number of impounded animals and the number of animals reunited with their owners or rehomed.

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<p><b>Reduce the number of impounded animals by 20% by 2021</b></p> <p><b>AND</b></p> <p><b>By 2021, increase the number of animals reunited with their owners or rehomed by 20% on 2016 figures</b></p>	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Review education materials to highlight the importance of securely confining dogs and the ramifications for owners should pets are found wandering at large.	Materials developed.	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in the number of complaints received relating to dogs wandering at large.</li> </ul>
	<b>Procedures, Processes and Policies</b>			
	Review and if required update the City of Darwin’s procedures for dealing with dogs wandering at large.	Review completed.	December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in the number of complaints received relating to dogs wandering at large.</li> </ul>
	Review the reasons for euthanasia and consider programs to address these.	Report	December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the number of animals euthanized.</li> </ul>
	<b>Partnerships and Collaboration</b>			
	Investigate opportunities to partner with local animal shelters and veterinary services to implement and promote reduced fee de-sexing initiatives.	Opportunities assessed.	June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the number of cats and dogs de-sexed.</li> <li>Reduction in the number of unwanted animals.</li> </ul>
	In conjunction with key partners, implement a proactive campaign about the effective management and containment of cats and dogs.	Campaign completed.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in number of cats and dogs impounded.</li> <li>Reduction in roaming, nuisances and attacks reported.</li> </ul>
	<b>Fees and Charges</b>			
Develop incentives for people who purchase animals from rehoming organisations e.g. waive registration for 1 yr.	Report with recommendations.	July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in number of animals rehomed.</li> </ul>	

## PART 5 IMPROVEMENTS IN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

### 5.1 Staff Training

City of Darwin staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out required roles and responsibilities. The City of Darwin has a commitment to ongoing training and education of staff in accordance with industry standards. The Animal Management Rangers undergo a range of training including Certificate IV in Government Investigations, Animal Handling Care and Control and Other Enforcement Communication Skills Training. The Animal Education Officer has specific experience and qualifications relevant to animal behaviour and training skills to enable in house training with the community and also the Rangers.

Staff will continue to receive training in customer service, operational procedures, animal handling and the delivery of community education information, and will be encouraged to attend industry information sessions.

### 5.2 Processes and Procedures

#### 5.2.1 Handling Complaints

In order for Council to ensure that all animal management complaints are dealt with fairly, efficiently and effectively and that duty of care obligations and safety standards are adhered to, the City of Darwin will manage complaints under the following principles:

- A complaint will be acknowledged promptly;
- The complaint will be assessed and assigned priority;
- If investigation is required, it will be planned;
- The investigation will resolve factual issues and consider options for complaint resolution;
- The response to the complainant will be clear and informative;
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, internal review of the decision will be offered and information about external review options provided; and
- Any systemic issues that arise as a result of the complaint will be considered and acted on.

To guarantee that animal management complaints are dealt with following the principles listed above, the City of Darwin must ensure that:

- An appropriate and effective complaint handling system is in place for receiving, assessing, handling, recording and reviewing complaints;
- Make firm decisions about how complaints will be managed;
- All complaints are dealt with professionally, fairly and impartially;
- Staff treat all parties to a complaint with courtesy and respect;
- Assessment and investigation of a complaint is based on sound reasoning and logically proactive information and evidence;
- Finalise complaints on the basis of outcomes that Council considers to be satisfactory in the circumstances;

- Reasonable and appropriate policies and procedures are implemented to ensure that complainants are not subjected to any detrimental action in reprisal for making a complaint, including maintaining separate complaint files and other operational files relating to the issues raised by individuals who make complaints; and
- Consideration to any confidentiality, secrecy and/or privacy obligations or responsibilities that may arise in the handling of complaints and the conduct of investigations.

The general complaints management procedure is documented in the Responsible Pet Ownership Guide.

### 5.2.2 Current Status and Actions

Over the past four years the total number of animal management complaints has averaged at 1832 complaints per year, peaking at 1948 complaints in 2016 (Figure 6). The largest proportion of complaints are for animals at large, roaming in public areas. While the majority of actions targeting specific complaint types e.g. barking/nuisance and dog attack will contribute to reducing the number of Animal Management complaints to Council, additional actions are listed in Table 6.

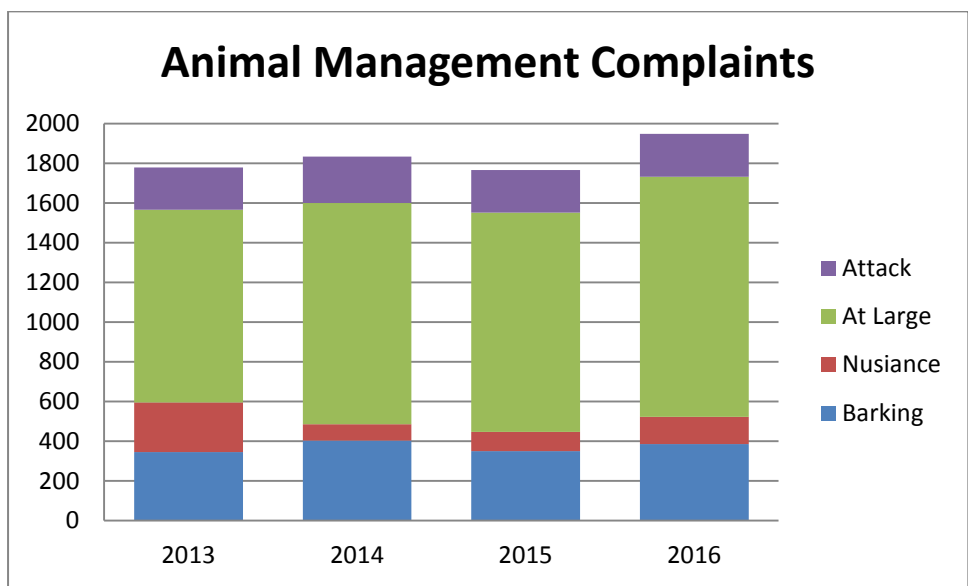


Figure 8: The number of animal management complaints per year, showing the contribution by type of complaint.

### **5.2.3 Information technology**

A key area of focus for the Animal Management Team is increasing the diversity of access and options for linking with the community around animal management. This may include;

- the introduction of an app for pet owners on responsible pet ownership tips and information on Council Animal Management By-Laws.
- Lodgement of registration and complaints on-line.
- Increased use of social media.
- Update council website.
- Use of blanket e-mail and text message service for registration renewals.

## **5.3 Customer Service**

The Animal Management staff provide a vital service to the community, often having to engage directly with the community in times of distress or frustration.

Best community outcomes include one or more of the following solutions:

- All parties agree and commit to a positive outcome.
- Social networks are enhanced.
- Community, health and safety are not compromised.
- The built, social and environmental amenity is enhanced.
- Harm or nuisance is reduced or abated.

In addition, while Council currently liaises with external stakeholders, we recognise that there are opportunities for stronger collaboration, enhanced relationships and to minimise duplication and avoid inconsistencies. Council will liaise with external agencies to ensure that any proceedings instituted are for the most appropriate offence. External agencies include, but are not limited to the Northern Territory Police Service, Environmental Protection Agency and Northern Territory Health.

Table 6: Target and actions to improve the operation of the Animal Management Section.

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<b><i>Procedures, Processes and Policies</i></b>				
	Review of fees and charges in relation to registration and infringements.	Report with recommendations.	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that fees and charges remain relevant.</li> </ul>
	Review and document policies and procedures.	Documents reviewed.	On-going till 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies and procedures that are clear and up to date.</li> </ul>
	Review the number of full-time staff and benchmark against similar local government areas.	Assessment completed.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficient resourcing of the Animal Management section.</li> </ul>
	Review record keeping and investigation procedures to increase efficiency.	Implement changes – if required.	2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase efficiency and improve the quality of data recorded.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Training</i></b>				
	Identify the minimum level of training required for staff.	Assessment completed.	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly trained and capable staff.</li> </ul>
	Develop and induction program suitable for animal management officers.	Incorporation of documentation into the induction process.	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved induction processes.</li> </ul>
	Identify additional training opportunities in consultation with management and staff.	Completion of an annual performance development review.	2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building the capacity and capability of staff.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Partnerships and Collaboration</i></b>				
	Form and coordinate a Dog and Cat Management working group with key stakeholder representation.	Formation of the group and minutes of the meetings.	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen partnerships and reduce duplication.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1 MAP

Insert Map



Appendix 2: Map Domestic Animal Regulations (on and off-lead areas) in the Darwin municipality. Provided by Parks and Wildlife

