



# Dog and Cat Management Strategy

2018–2022



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## KEY MESSAGE

### *Socially Responsible Pet Ownership and Compliance with the By-Laws for Animal Management*

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



## INTRODUCTION

### Lord Mayor's Message

On behalf of the City of Darwin, I am pleased to present the Dog and Cat Management Strategy 2018 – 2022. The Strategy has been developed from a comprehensive deliberative process that included consideration by the Animal Management Advisory Committee, research and review, a program of community and stakeholder consultation and Elected Member workshops.

Pets are an important part of people's lives and contribute to enhanced wellbeing and the provision of companionship in many homes and families. There are social, health and companionship benefits to owning pets, but pet owners have important responsibilities to look after them and make sure they do not adversely impact on others.

Council supports pet ownership, whilst aiming to ensure that the keeping of pets does not impact negatively on others in the community.

The Dog and Cat Management Strategy will guide Council and the community toward the goal of responsible pet ownership and management. The Strategy focuses on key areas of service delivery that through investment of resources and effort, will reap positive results for the community and Council.

The Dog and Cat Management Strategy will enable Council to provide a proactive service to the community, with emphasis on education and awareness, the introduction of innovative technologies to assist with enforcement and compliance and improvements to the regulation of animal ownership within the Darwin municipality.

I would like to thank everyone that contributed to the development of the Dog and Cat Management Strategy, particularly the community volunteers on the Animal Management Advisory Committee, and I

look forward to working with the community to achieve the goal of responsible pet ownership and management.

**- Lord Mayor Kon Vatskalis**



## PRINCIPLES

### Service

Council aims to provide a proactive service that provides education, mediation and outcomes for pet owners and non-pet owners alike. When intervention is required Council will ensure that all issues brought to our attention are dealt with fairly and effectively and that duty of care obligations and safety standards are adhered to. In providing a high level of customer service to the community we are guided by the **Five C's** and strive to:

- show **Courtesy** and **Compassion** at all times and to all members of the community, working collaboratively to mediate disputes
- use **Common Sense** and **Compliance** with the City of Darwin By-laws to ensure natural justice for all involved
- provide/deliver **Consistency** through investigations and service.

### Responsiveness

Council is always working to ensure we are responsive to the changing needs of the community by:

- being relevant, contemporary and keeping in-step with community needs and sentiment
- completing investigations in a timely and efficient manner
- implementing current technology and thinking
- have a holistic approach to issues, through collaboration and coordination with various partners and agencies.

### Evolving

We are constantly seeking to improve the service and support we provide to the community in managing dogs and cats across the municipality. We will achieve this by:

- ensuring our staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out their roles and responsibilities
- providing ongoing training and education of staff in accordance with industry standards
- having a program and process in place that educates and incentivise responsible pet ownership
- regularly reviewing and improving our procedures and processes.





## GOALS

### Amenity

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. The amenity of an area can include our physical surrounds and infrastructure, noise, smells and the general atmosphere or feeling of an area. Council supports pet ownership, whilst aiming to ensure that the keeping of pets does not unreasonably impact negatively on others in the community.

### Safety

Community safety is a priority for Council. Darwin City Council by-laws are designed to ensure a safe community for all members. Council provides consistent regulation and management of compliance for dogs and cats to maintain and promote public safety. When a dog or cat has encroached on or impacted the safety of others in the community the Council has the authority to enforce by-laws to remedy or mediate any additional threats the animal may cause.

### Responsible Pet Ownership

There are social, health and companionship benefits to owning pets. Pet owners have responsibilities to care appropriately for them, control them in public, and ensure they do not adversely impact on others. Council acknowledges the community and individual benefits of pet ownership, and in doing so aims to ensure that the health and wellbeing of animals and members of our community is maintained.

### Compliance with By-Laws

The By-laws provide Council with the powers to provide warnings, infringements and de-register companion animals. When pet owners are irresponsible, their pets can negatively impact the community. Council uses its ability through the enforcement, regulation and compliance with the by-laws to resolve conflicts when needed.



## AREAS OF FOCUS

The areas of focus we use to categorise our work are essential and interlocking pieces of our overall strategy. Work in each area informs and advances work in other areas.

### Registration, Licencing 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 future 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.

Residents of the City of Darwin may own up to two cats and/or two dogs. Residents wishing to exceed this number of dogs or cats, require a licence issued by Council. Each license application is considered

on its own merits to ensure the health and welfare of the animals concerned, and to ensure there is no detrimental effect on the amenity of nearby properties.

De-sexing and vaccinating cats and dogs is important for their wellbeing, so Council supports and encourages de-sexing and vaccination of domestic cats and dogs. De-sexing is also a key tool in tackling pet over-population and unwanted pets.

### Nuisance Barking

Dogs that are habitual barkers are a nuisance to owners and neighbours. 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.

### Dog Attacks

An attack by a dog on another animal or person is of the highest priority for investigation by Council and the community. The likelihood of a dog attack is decreased if the principles of responsible pet ownership are followed. The majority of dog attacks in public places occur on a footpath or road joining the premises of the dog owner.

Council's By-laws recognise levels of dog attack and this can include whether or not there is any contact or injury to a person or animal.

Council has the ability to declare a dog **dangerous** or **nuisance**. Under the Darwin City Council 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.



## Pets in Public Places

Cats and dogs are required to be under effective control at all times in public spaces. Responsible owners know that walking a dog is important, providing opportunities for exercise and social interaction. While dog owners need to exercise their dogs, this activity must be balanced against environmental considerations, and the rights and safety of others. Cats are not permitted to leave the property at any time. A dog or cat wandering at large, usually within the vicinity of the owner's home is one of Council's animal management challenges. Wandering dogs and cats are a public health and safety issue. Pedestrians, cyclists, mail delivery services, motorists and other animals are all at potential risk of a dog or cat at large causing accidents, attacks and even death. Dog poo in public recreation areas is a health and environment concern.

## Pound Operations

The City of Darwin impounds hundreds of lost, wandering or nuisance cats and dogs every year. The ideal outcome is for the owner to be identified through registration or microchip details and reunited with their cat or dog, and Council is committed to removing unnecessary impediments to owners reclaiming their pets. When Council is unable to identify an animal's owner, or the owner does not claim the animal, Council is obligated to make the best decision for the community and the animal. Animals 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. 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.

## STRATEGIES

Over the next five years we will be measuring our progress toward targets in our areas of focus to achieve the goals of sustaining public amenity, safety, responsible pet ownership and compliance with the by-laws. Implementation of our strategies can be categorised into five key themes:

- **Education and Communication,**
- **Incentives,**
- **Regulation and Enforcement,**
- **Innovation and Technology, and;**
- **Partnerships and Collaboration.**



## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### Registration, licencing and de-sexing

TARGET	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
By 2022 there will be an increase in registrations by 20 per cent or 5 per cent each year	<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	Increase the number of animals that can be reunited with their owners
	Conduct a communications campaign and doorknock program across the municipality	Number of animals microchipped and registered	Bi annually	Assess number of unregistered dogs. To allow a better indication of cat and dog populations Increase number of registered pets
	Organise microchipping days to be held bi-annually throughout the municipality with stakeholders	Number of animals microchipped and registered	Bi annually	Increase the number of animals with permanent identification Improve the number of animals that can be reunited with their owners
	Hold subsidised de-sexing/registration days targeted at marginalised pet owners and recognised organisations who promote responsible pet ownership	Number of animals de-sexed and registered	On-going	Increase number of registered pets Reduce impediments for marginalised pet owners Improve the number of animals that can be reunited with their owners
	Increase community awareness and understanding of the number of dogs and cats people can keep	Development of materials	On-going	Increased community awareness
	Animal registration process includes an educative check list	Check list added to registration forms	June 2018	Ensuring owners are aware of their obligations as pet owners
	Work with other areas of Council and external partners to develop a 'Welcome to Darwin' information pack that provides key information about living in Darwin  This can be distributed to new residents through Council and Real Estate Agents	Development of pack	September 2018	Link new residents with resources Ensuring pet owners are aware of their obligations and resources available to them
	Continue education of the community in relation to registration of pets within the municipality	Awareness in the community Customer satisfaction survey	On-going	Increased community awareness Increased pet registrations



TARGET	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
By 2022 there will be an increase in registrations by 20 per cent or 5 per cent each year	<b>Incentives</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	Increased number of registered dogs and cats Increase the number of de-sexed animals in the community Reduce the number of unwanted and uncared for animals
	<b>Regulation and Enforcement</b>			
	Council approach the Northern Territory Government with a request that an overarching legislative instrument for the purpose of animal management including regulating the sale of dogs and cats within the Northern Territory	Documentation of Council's advocacy efforts in this area	2022	Improved Animal Management across the Northern Territory control the sale of dogs and cats
	Refine and improve the dog and cat licence process and management, e.g. selection criteria on application	Changes made to the licence process	June 2018	Provide greater scrutiny of licences to own more than 2 dogs and/or 2 cats
	<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	December 2018	Increase the number of registered animals
	Support an indigenous community animal health program with AMRRIC	Number of events & number of animals involved	On-going	Increased collaboration with AMRRIC Improved animal health and care Improved community education
	<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	Improved customer service and experience Increased number of registered pets

## Nuisance barking

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
Reduce Dog Barking Complaints by 20 per cent	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Promote the provision and benefits of ongoing training	Number of education and engagement events	On-going	Minimise issues and complaints relating to dogs barking Increased level of education in the community
	Development of an information pack for owners of alleged barking or nuisance dogs, including practical measures they can take	Pack developed	December 2018	Increased level of education in the community
	Conduct a series of bark stopping workshops. Make a condition of registration for offending animals	Number of seminars delivered and number of participants	On-going	Reduction in the number of barking nuisances reported – particularly in prior re-offenders Reduce behavioural issues that lead to other offences including dog attacks and at large
	<b>Incentives</b>			
	Explore various incentives to encourage pet owners to undertake obedience training	Report produced with recommendations	February 2019	Reduced anti-social behaviour between pets
	<b>Regulation and Enforcement</b>			
	Amendments be made to the following by-laws Section 71 to clarify the nuisance definitions by-laws: it needs to be quantified rather than based on individuals tolerance levels	A change to the By-laws	2019	Improved quantitative definition of nuisance barking
	<b>Innovation and Technology</b>			
	Explore the use of online and mobile technologies for investigating nuisance barking complaints	Report produced with recommendations	December 2018	Improved response times to resolve nuisance complaints
	Investigate the use of anti-barking and bark counting collars, as well as any other technology opportunities	Report produced with recommendations	December 2018	Prompt resolution of barking complaints Improved client satisfaction on barking incidences
	Investigate digital options and alternatives to the barking diary	Report with recommendations. Implementations dependent on budget	December 2018	Improved data collection and statistics Potential additional tool for combating barking issues in the community Provide alternative ways of collecting evidence in barking investigations



## Dog attacks

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
Council aims to reduce dog attacks by 15 per cent per year	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Review existing education material and include content on practical ways to reduce dog attacks	Materials updated and produced	September 2018	Improved awareness in the community of effective methods to minimising dog attacks Increased public awareness of the links between animal health and nuisance behaviour Reduce dog behavioural issues that lead to attacks
	Promote the provision and benefits of ongoing training	Number of events attended	On-going	Improved awareness in the community of effective methods to minimising dog attacks Increased public awareness of the links between animal health and nuisance behaviour Reduce dog behavioural issues that lead to attacks
	<b>Regulation and Enforcement</b>			
	Review procedures for dealing with animal attacks	Review completed	June 2018	Improve response times for attack investigations Improve customer service
	Review on/off lead policies across the municipality for impacts on the number of dog attacks. Identify hotspots	Review completed	December 2018	Potential reduction in un-controlled dogs
	Inspect all declared dogs	Demonstrate annual audit of owner's property	Annually	Ensuring compliance with dangerous dog regulations Minimise any further incidents
Review of by-laws for inclusion of cat attack and review of current categories of dog attack	By-laws modified to improve attack categories	2019	Ability to manage cat and dog attacks	

## Pets in public places

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>			
	Promote the requirement of cats to be contained to their property of residence and being kept in at night	Education material developed	On-going	Increase community awareness of the benefits of cats remaining within the property and inside at night
	Develop cat ownership educational materials	Education material developed	September 2018	Increase community awareness
	Promote the location of no cat/ dog areas and the reasons for their designation	Map produced and distributed	On-going	Increasing community awareness of no cat/ dog areas
	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	September 2018	Increasing community awareness of on and off-lead areas within the municipality
	Undertake education and awareness campaigns about "picking up dog poo", via community groups, schools, or through phone on-hold messages and displays in Council libraries and other community centres	Messages conveyed to the public at events Education materials produced	2019	Increasing community awareness of their responsibilities
	Address 'hot spots' quickly by educating and warning offenders through signage and issuing a fine if infringements reoccur	Feedback from patrols	On-going	Increasing community awareness of their responsibilities
	Continue to monitor community sentiment and need for additional dog park facilities	Customer satisfaction survey	On-going	Keeping Council informed of community need
	Work with other areas in Council and external partners to identify locations and progress new dog park facilities	Progress on new dog parks	On-going	Increasing dedicated off-lead facilities for dogs



Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
	<b>Regulation and Enforcement</b>			
	Review on/off lead policies across the municipality. Identify hotspots	Report with recommendations	December 2018	Potential reduction in un-controlled dogs Potential to reduce attacks in public places reduced
	<b>Partnerships and Collaboration</b>			
	Work in partnership with CDU and NTG on feral/stray cat projects	Collaboration on projects	On-going	Determine the magnitude of the stray cat problem and identify hot spots for stray cats
	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	Build partnerships with dog clubs and groups Increase opportunities for pet orientated events and activities
	Maintain ongoing dialogue with dog activity groups about issues facing pet owners and in terms of dog parks and programs		On-going	Increasing community awareness
In consultation with expert bodies, develop a strategy investigating options to address the stray cat population within the Darwin municipality	Strategy developed recommendations accepted.	December 2018	Sustained Reduction in the number of stray or homeless cats	

## Pound operations

Target	To achieve this Council will	This will be measured by	To be completed by	This action will contribute to
<p>Reduce the number of impounded animals by 20 per cent by 2022</p> <p>AND</p> <p>By 2022, increase the number of animals reunited with their owners or rehomed by 20 per cent on 2016 figures</p>	<b>Education and Communication</b>			
	Review education materials to highlight the importance of securely confining dogs and the ramifications for owners should pets be found wandering at large	Materials developed	2020	Reduction in the number of complaints received relating to dogs wandering at large
	<b>Regulation and Enforcement</b>			
	Review and if required update the City of Darwin's procedures for dealing with dogs wandering at large	Review completed	December 2018	Reduction in the number of complaints received relating to dogs wandering at large
	Review the reasons for euthanasia and consider programs to address these	Report	December 2018	Reduce the number of animals euthanised
	<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	February 2019	Increase the number of cats and dogs de-sexed Reduction in the number of unwanted animals
	In conjunction with key partners (including the Department of Housing and real estate agents), implement a proactive campaign about the effective management and containment of cats and dogs	Campaign	On-going	Reduction in number of cats and dogs impounded Reduction in roaming, nuisances and attacks reported
	<b>Incentives</b>			
	Develop incentives for people who purchase animals from rehoming organisations e.g. waive registration for 1 year	Report with recommendations	February 2019	Increase in number of animals rehomed
Identify the barriers and investigate incentives that support people suffering from economic hardship to be responsible pet owners	Length of stay' and 'reclaim' stats	February 2019	Increased reclaim rates, reduced numbers of animals euthanised	





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