

CITY OF DARWIN
Responsible Pet Ownership Guide – You, your pet and us

Supplementary Document to the Dog and Cat Management Strategy

Pet Ownership Guide

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INTRODUCTION

In Darwin 8923 dogs and 1224 cats are currently registered with The City of Darwin Council. With a high rate of pet ownership, we need to treat our pets with respect and take responsibility for them.

Household pets are wonderful companions and loved members of the family. The health and social benefits of having pets is widely recognised. Most pet owners are usually healthier, happier, more independent, and more active, feel more secure, are less likely to feel lonely and suffer less from depression and stress.

Children who grow up with pets have higher self-esteem and improved social skills with a good understanding of discipline and responsibility. Children learn how to share their time with a pet, and are more likely to be responsible pet owners of the future.

You are responsible for a pet for its entire life span. You need time every day to devote to their care and wellbeing. Pets cost money for a variety of reasons such as their food, health care, supplies, registration, and training.

The City of Darwin wants cat and dog owners to be responsible and considerate of others in our community who do not have pets.

Managing pets is a complex issue. City of Darwin devotes staff and training to encourage and teach responsible pet ownership. We want to balance your right to own a pet with the community's need for safety, amenity and peace.

Council's Role:

Council administers the Animal Management By-Laws and works to encourage responsible pet ownership via education, services and facilities.

This Pet Ownership Guide has been produced to help explain Council's aims and objectives and help pet owners understand the By-Laws and their legal and social obligations.

For a copy of the By-Laws go to: <https://www.darwin.nt.gov.au/council/about-council/laws-and-by-laws/overview>

Council is not responsible for the administration of the Animal Welfare Act. The Northern Territory Government and the RSPCA carry out this function. For further information visit:

<https://nt.gov.au/environment/animals/animal-welfare>

Council has a well-trained team that is dedicated to pets, owners and education. Rangers are trained in animal management, animal handling, complaint investigation, evidence gathering, conflict management and Council procedures and policies

Please read the following information which is our comprehensive Pet Ownership Guide, a guide to the Council By-Laws. If you require more information about the plan or the Council By-Laws, please contact us or go to www.darwin.nt.gov.au

Council Contact numbers:

- Pet Care Help Line 8930 0606
- Animal Management Supervisor 8930 0605
- Animal Education Officer 8930 0606
- Council Pound 8947 2099
- RSPCA 8984 3795
- After hours assistance* 1800 8930 0600
- General enquiries 8930 0600

* Council will respond to after hour calls, 7 days a week from 7pm to 8 am for emergency calls only when a dog has attacked/menaced someone or is being aggressive.

Pet Care Help Line

The Pet Care Help Line is a phone service direct to the Animal Education Officer who provides advise on:

- Nuisance pet behaviour
- Owner education and assistance
- Registration enquiries
- Animal By-Law enquiries and
- Any other pet-related matters.

Phone 8930 0606, between 8:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday

Website Information

You can access information about animal management through Council's website including:

- Registration fees and conditions
- Free Fact Sheets: Keeping Your Dog and Cat at Home, Your Dog and The Law, Your Cat and The Law, Nuisance Barking, Kids and Dogs, Caring For Your Dog or Cat, Dogs, Cats and Cane Toads, Exercise Areas and Declared Dogs.
- Current By-Laws
- Council's strategies, including this Responsible Pet Ownership Guide
- Fees and charges associated with infringements
- How to lodge a complaint incident
- Upcoming events and activities
- Information about the Pound facility and its operations
- Impounded cats and dogs
- Contact details for Animal Welfare branch and rescue organisations

Education

Support through education and advice is an important element to effectively manage animals in Darwin. Council has a full-time Animal Education Officer who attends to the Pet Care Help Line, delivers a range of educational services that can be accessed by all members of the community and provides home consults to help pet owners address specific animal behaviour issues.

The education services provided by Council are designed to provide support to all pet owners and community members and aims to increase their understanding of responsible pet ownership, now and into the future.

Community Awareness Campaigns

Council runs regular community education campaigns throughout the year to help remind pet owners about their responsibilities and obligations to provide support. These campaigns are designed to address common areas of complaint or make owners aware of upcoming dates such as registration expiry. The Animal Education Officer will attend and coordinate community outreach events to address any issues community members or pet owners may have. These events can include RSCPA Million Paws Walk, Educational expos, and school visits. Through these events, Council is able to create and maintain positive contact with pet owners or people thinking about getting a pet. It is also an opportunity for staff to receive feedback from pet owners and community members on a range of issues.

Education Targeting Specific Issues

Territory Day Fireworks

Territory day is celebrated on July first each year. Territory Day marks the commencement of self-government in the Territory on 1 July 1978. The day is celebrated in the evening with fireworks, including the famous Territory Day fireworks at Mindil Beach. This is the only day of the year when fireworks are permitted to be let off by members of the public.

A high percentage of dogs have a phobia of fireworks. This phobia stems from the loud unfamiliar noise with the combination of bright lights which is extremely frightening for dog. A dog's response to fear can be to run, hide or fight. A dog is unable to fight fireworks they are only left with two options to run or hide.

Council collects and impounds many dogs during Territory Day celebrations and receives a large number of lost dog reports. Registered dogs that are impounded by Council due to fireworks noise on Territory Day are given back to their owners with no fee or at large infringement.

Cyclones and Thunderstorms

Cyclones and severe thunderstorms affect Darwin during the Wet Season, October to April. Due to the high level of anxiety some pets can feel during these events, there tends to be a large number of pet problems reported, including nuisance barking and pets escaping.

For more information about these issues, or to access the information and advice available, call the Pet Care Help Line on 8930 0606.

City of Darwin information dissemination

Prior to the event, Council runs a campaign to remind pet owners and residents about the effect fireworks can have on pets. In particular, owners are encouraged to make sure their pets are safely contained to reduce the chance of their pet running away through stress or anxiety. This information is expressed through an annual campaign and distributed via Media, webpages and the Pet care help line. If a cyclone is approaching, Council to remind pet owners about their responsibilities, provide tips for keeping the pet safe and information on what will happen if their pet is impounded as a result of a cyclone or severe thunderstorm.

Tips to Reduce Firework and Thunderstorm Stress in Pets:

- Allow your animal to come inside your house or provide your pet with a kennel or sound proof area- Bricks, foam lined kennel or Crete.
- Use comfort items such as pheromones, favourite toys or blankets.
- Play music or leave the TV on to create white noise and change of focus. This will also help to block out the distressing noise.
- Include your pet in your cyclone emergency response- including pet transport, food and water
- Be tactile, dogs will look for reassurance from owners therefore giving them a pat or showing affection will calm an animal- Never punish an animal showing fear.
- Avoid leaving your pets home alone.
- In cases of severe anxiety, see your vet for prescription sedatives.

REGISTRATION, MICROCHIPPING AND LICENSING

Registration:

All cats and dogs over three (3) months of age and have been in the Darwin municipality for one (1) month must be registered with Council including microchipping. There are many benefits of cat and dog registration. Pets under 12 months of age that are microchipped and de-sexed will be registered free of charge for the initial 12 month registration period. After the initial first year registration the desexed registration will be required for every year thereafter. If your cat is not registered and microchipped or you do not have a licence if required, you may be fined in accordance with the By-Laws. (63A Failure to comply with condition of registration)

There are many benefits to registration.

- It is your proof of ownership.
- Council can return lost pets to their owners quickly
- You can be contacted easily if your pet is involved in an accident or incident and requires veterinary treatment.
- You have access to useful information, as owners receive an information package outlining their responsibilities when they register their pet.
- Fees provide a source of funds for Council's education and enforcement programs.
- Fees provide a source of funds for Council's education programs.
- Microchips are a condition of registration in the City of Darwin.

Conditions of registration

- Have your pet microchipped
- Adequately contain your pet at all times and
- Apply for a licence if you intend to keep more than two dogs or cats on the same premises.

Microchipping

Microchips allow Rangers, vets and RSPCA staff to quickly identify your cat or dog by scanning them with a microchip reader. The microchip gives your pet a unique number, which matches on databases that store information about your cat and your contact details. This helps with the speedy return of pets that are lost, at large or injured. It is important to update any information with the microchip database service if there is any ownership change or any change in address and contact details. There are complex issues that can arise if microchip details are incorrect and can lead to litigation. Central Animal Records can be contacted on 1800 333 202 for further information.

Licence Requirements

Under the By-Laws, persons can keep two (2) registered dogs or cats on their property. If you wish to keep more than two dogs or cats on their property, you will need to register the additional animals and apply for a licence from council. Each application attracts an annual fee. When council assesses the application any previous relevant complaints will be considered. Neighbours will be consulted and the containment is deemed suitable. If a licence is granted it may be approved with specific conditions. No more than five dogs or cats may be registered and licenced to a property.

Being Responsible Pet Owner

As a pet owner:

- You know exactly what your responsibilities are,
- You are offered support by Council
- You understand what will happen if your pet is involved in an incident or you do not meet your legal obligations
- Free registration packs are available on request.

As a member of the community:

- You are supported by Council agencies.
- The guidelines and processes are clearly explained.
- You know exactly what you have to do if you wish to complain or comment.
- You know who to contact in case of an incident or accident.

As a Council:

- We are clear about our responsibilities and can respond with help and advice.
- Animal and pet issues are consolidated and integrated into several Council strategies.
- We can target our community education programs to make them more effective for pet owners who lack awareness and information.
- Promoting and enforcing the message of responsible dog ownership within the community.

There are five important areas you need to be 'AWARE' of to be a responsible cat or dog owner.

A- Be Aware of your responsibilities and ongoing costs of owning a pet.

W- Welfare this includes your pet having adequate food, shelter and water at all times de-sexing, vaccinating and maintaining health care.

A- Be Aware of all relevant By-Laws and the penalties that apply to offences.

R- Registration and Microchipping, assist in your pet being returned to you safe and sound.

E- Exercise and Stimulation this needs to be provided to pets daily this can include taking dogs for daily walks, providing cats with scratching posts and toys to help aid their need to

Select a Pet that Suits Your Lifestyle

Selecting a suitable pet is an important consideration. Many factors must be taken into consideration before choosing an animal to share your home with including how much time you and your family have to spend with an animal, how much money can be spent each month on food and other expenses, and how much space is available for the animal to live.

By spending a time considering your pet's environment, you can avoid behaviours like boredom and anxiety and providing a more enjoyable environment for your pet. You can also ensure that you select a breed that is suitable for your family.

THE POUND

If we find your missing pet

Our Rangers will check and scan all collected cats and dogs for microchip and registration information. If your pet is registered and microchipped we will try to contact you to arrange to return your pet straight away. It is important that your registration and microchip information is up-to-date at all times so that you can be contacted if your pet is found. If we are unable to contact you, we cannot return your pet to your home as:

- the information we have may be incorrect
- they may escape again
- we may not be able to access your home without your permission
- In these circumstances, your pet will be taken to The Pound.

Collecting your pet from the Animal Pound

Before you head to the Pound to collect your pet, please make sure you bring proof of identity. We cannot release your pet from the pound without proof of identity.

Before your pet is released we will check that your details and all fees and charges are up-to-date (this includes your pet's registration and microchipping fees). It is a requirement that all dogs and cats in our municipality are registered and microchipped. Fees are payable on site with EFTPOS and credit card facilities available.

Release fees

If your pet is impounded, a release fee will apply upon collection at the Animal Pound.

Unregistered cats and dogs \$249.00 release fee + registration and microchipping fee. Unregistered cats and dogs must be registered and microchipped at time of release.

Registered cats and dogs \$103.00 release fee.

First time impoundment for registered and microchipped pets

Registered and microchipped cats and dogs can be collected on the same day of impoundment without incurring a release fee. This waiver applies for the first impoundment only. At-Large infringements will still apply. If there is a record of previous impoundment, release fees and infringements will apply.

NUISANCE BEHAVIOUR'S

Nuisance Barking

Nuisance dog barking can be a source of irritation to some people in our community and generates a lot of complaints to Council. We all want to live in a community that is safe, pleasant and enjoyable and one where dog owners take responsibility for their dog's behaviour. Council works with complainants and pet owners to investigate, substantiate claims and to find a resolution that works for everyone. Ideally the first step should be that neighbours can raise their concerns with the dog owner and resolve the matter amicably before it results in a formal complaint to Council. Everyone has different levels of tolerance and sensitivity to dog barking. When Council is investigating a complaint, the presence of a 'nuisance' must first be established, especially as dogs naturally bark. Evidence is gathered from multiple sources.

Reporting nuisance barking and Process

A referral to the Community Justice Centre is usually offered in the first instance of a complaint to try to arrange a mediation meeting between the parties involved. When you report a barking complaint to Council phone 89 300 600, the operator will request details relating to the complaint.

Council has an established process for dealing with complaints about nuisance barking. By following this process, Council intends to place more responsibility on the dog owner and help them with professional advice and guidance on dog behaviour patterns.

Council has an obligation to act fairly towards all parties. For this reason evidence must be collected to confirm the complaint. Currently Council asks for a barking Dog Diary to be completed to record the dog's nuisance barking over seven day period and to be return to Council on completion.

A Ranger will contact the complainant to seek feedback on the nuisance barking. If the nuisance has ceased, the dog owner will be provided with feedback and encouraged to continue with the action they have taken.

Should the nuisance barking complaint remain unresolved, the dog owner may be issued with conditions of registration an infringement notice or potential prosecution.

Owners of confirmed barking may receive a 'show cause' letter on the dog's registration. A 'show cause' letter requests information from the owner or; reasons why the dog's registration should not be cancelled.

If the dog's registration is cancelled, the dog owner will then have 24 hours to remove the dog from the Darwin municipality. If there is failure to comply, Council may acquire a warrant from the courts to remove the nuisance dog. If Council removes the dog with a warrant, it will be impounded and held for four (4) days. If the owner makes no attempt to contact Council or find an alternate property outside the Darwin municipality, the dog may be destroyed euthanised or otherwise disposed of. (711 Dog causing nuisance).

PETS AT LARGE

It is natural for animals to want to explore different environments. As such, animals that are not regularly exercised may develop behavioural issues due to the lack of stimulation. These behaviours can include a drive to escape from their containment making them vulnerable to many dangers. This can potentially shorten the life span of the animal – they can become lost, injured, killed or are stolen while roaming unattended in the street. Unfortunately, with the busy lifestyle of today's society, catering to the needs for pets to be exercised and socialised outside their own backyard can sometimes be overlooked.

When is a pet at large?

According to the By-Laws, a pet is At Large if it is not:

- Properly contained in the owners' property
- Under effective control by the owner, or
- Any part of its body is protruding from the owners property

What is effective control?

Council requires you, the owner, to have effective control of your dogs in a public area by ensure your dogs are

- immediately responsive to your voice command
- always on a lead when it enters and exits the exercise area
- not allow your dog to fight with other dogs
- does not rush up to other park or beach users and
- Does not chase bike riders.
- Properly contained on your property (Applies to cats also)
- any part of its body is protruding from a person's property (Applies to cats also)
- Owners are required to have their cats on a lead or enclosed in a suitable container when they are not being contained on the owner's property.

Prevention

To help prevent your pet from wandering you should ensure it is properly contained, it receives the right amount of exercise and your yard is appropriately fenced. You must have your pet on a lead or enclosed in a suitable container whenever you exit your property. When you have your dog in an off-lead area, you must still ensure that your dog is under effective control and you must have a lead with you.

Areas that is restricted for pets:

- **Bicycle and walking paths-** In Darwin we have a lengthy and well maintained network of cycle and pedestrian paths. Most of these paths are for shared use, with many people using these facilities with their dogs. You can walk your pet on the path if you are in control of it and it is on a lead. If your pet is not on a lead, it must be 10 meters clear of the path, playground or BBQ area.

Restricted Areas for Dogs

There are some areas in Darwin where you cannot take your dog. There are a number of reasons why Council may declare an area to be restricted, including concerns for public health, safety and environmental protection.

- **Market areas** These market areas include those at the Mindil Beach, Parap, Rapid Creek, Nightcliff and Malak. Household pets are forbidden at all times to be in any areas at these markets while they are trading and where food is being served at social functions.

PLEASE NOTE: Guide and companion dogs are permitted.

- **East Point Reserve** East Point Reserve is a recognised nature reserve and is home to many species of native wildlife including Agile Wallabies and Frilled Neck Lizards.

All household animals are prohibited at all times to be in from the area that is bounded by the entry gateway and Lake Alexander perimeter fencing, including the beach area at all times.

Guide dogs are permitted.

- **The Mall** the Mall is a prohibited area at all times for members of the public walking with their animals. Guide dogs are permitted.
- **Casuarina costal reserve** Is managed by the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife commission. Prohibited dogs with the exception to some areas see

<https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park-to-visit/casuarina-coastal-reserve>

Rangers frequently patrol these areas and part of their job is to enforce the By-Law if they find people with a dog in these areas. (65(1) Keeping dog in dog restricted area)

DOG ATTACKS

Any attack or harassment by a dog can cause fear or serious injury and is of great concern, particularly if it involves people, objects or animals. If your dog has attacked you are guilty of an offence under the By-Laws and Council has a range of options available. As the dog owner, you may be prosecuted and fined (up to a maximum of \$15,400 for an individual or \$154,000 for a business). In the event of a Level One attack the Council will prosecute the owner of the dog and issue appropriate fines. The dog will be impounded.

Reporting a dog attack

Council relies on members of the public to report all dog attacks including those that have occurred on private property. Reporting all incidents helps council address problems and deal with appropriately. If you are attacked by a dog or a witness please report it to Council as soon as possible on 8930 0600. This will help Council to respond quickly and effectively. You will need to give Council certain details about the event, including date, time, location, people involved, identification of the animals involved and the sequence of events. The Ranger will talk you through the appropriate complaint process.

What is a dog attack? (55A Attack by Dogs) Council has defined two (2) levels of dog attack.

- Level 1: The dog bites, or holds a person or animal in its mouth whether or not the holding is accompanied by biting, shaking, pulling or pushing or the person or animal suffers an injury, physical or otherwise.
- Level 2: The dog approaches, chases, menaces, harasses or rushes at a person animal in a manner endangering or causing fear, alarm or distress to the person or animal.

Declared Dogs Register (55B Declared Dog Category 1, 55 C Declared Dog Category 2)

Council maintains a Declared Dog Register which records the details of dogs that have committed certain acts, including attacks. Their owner's details are also recorded. If your dog is placed on the Declared Dog Register, extra conditions are placed on your dog's registration. These conditions relate to the dog's care and control and can include:

- placing signage at premises where your dog is usually kept with the words 'Warning Dangerous Dog' clearly legible and visible from all boundaries of the property
- only allowing your dog in public places when it is in the care of a person over the age of 17 and that person can control the dog
- registering the dog as a declared dog and paying the appropriate fees
- microchipping the dog if not already done
- placing a muzzle on the dog every time it is outside its place of residence.

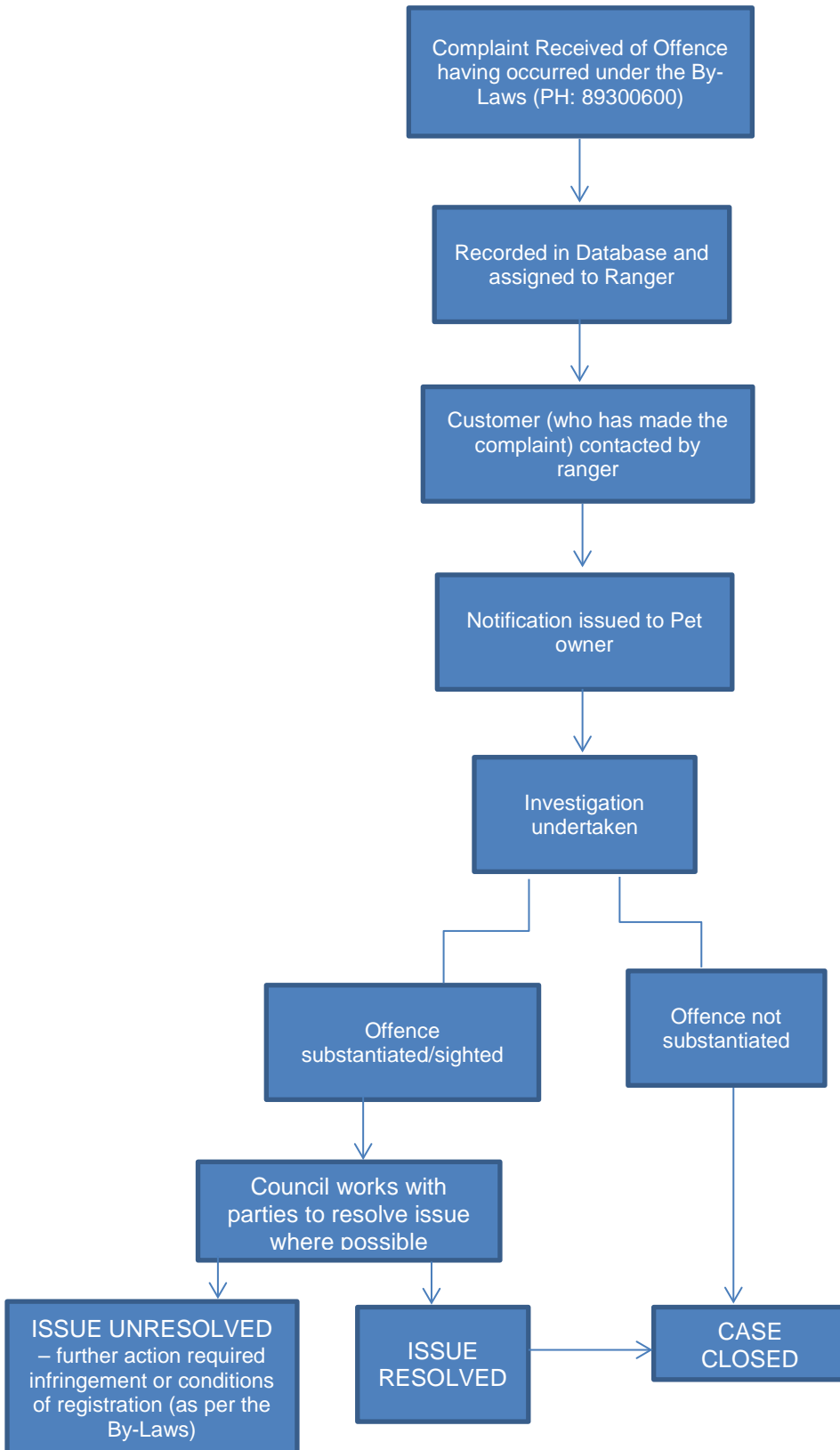
DOG DEFECATION

We all want to enjoy our public places and waterways and protect our natural environment. As a dog owner, you are responsible for picking up after your own dog and removing the faeces so that you do not cause offence to anyone else. When you are on public land, you are required to carry an appropriate container or bag to collect your dog's faeces (By-Law 70A Dog defecating). If a Ranger observes an owner breaching the By-Laws, they can be issued an on the spot notice or fine. Council provides bins to help pet owners clean up after their dogs in parks and popular walking areas.

COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT PROCESS – CAT AND DOG COMPLAINTS

Council has developed a process to manage complaints received about domestic pets.

This process is outlined in the flow chart below. If you make a complaint, or a complaint is made about your animal, Council will ensure you are informed throughout the resolution process. If you require more information please contact 8930 0606.



RESOLVING THE ISSUE

Council By-Laws and Related Legislation

The City of Darwin By-Laws is the primary legislation that guides enforcement activities of Council Rangers. The By-Laws can be viewed or accessed on the City of Darwin website

www.darwin.nt.gov.au

Other relevant legislation to the application of the Animal Management Plan includes:

- Local Government Act
- Law Reform Act 1946
- Animal Welfare Act.

Managing Complaints

Council has well-established processes designed to resolve issues in a manner that takes into account the needs and responsibilities of all parties involved.

The general complaints management procedure identifies:

- the steps involved in resolving a complaint
- guidelines for Council staff to effectively resolve issues and
- how the system works.

Anonymous complaints

Sometimes people are more comfortable making an anonymous complaint. Your confidentiality is ensured and Council will not pass on any details that can identify the complainant.

Council will do their best to address anonymous complaints. However, it can be very difficult to resolve these issues, or to enforce legislation, without the ability to thoroughly investigate and gather evidence and witness information. Council has a process that is specific to resolving complaints associated with dogs and cats.

GENERAL COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE STEPS

1. When the complaint is received, it will be recorded in Council's database and the appropriate Ranger will be given the complaint for investigation/action. Complaints may be made by phone, email, in writing or in person.
2. The Ranger will contact the party that identified the issue and acknowledge receipt of their complaint within 48 hours.
3. The Ranger will:
 - demonstrate that they clearly understand what the complaint is about
 - explain what will happen with the investigation/action and
 - Explain that it may take, in most cases less than, 35 days to finalise the complaint.
4. The Ranger will investigate the complaint as quickly as possible and use all relevant Council procedures which may include enforcement.
5. The individual who alerted the issue will be advised of the progress of their complaint.
6. All investigations, actions and outcomes, will be recorded on the Council database during the course of the investigation and its completion.

Mediation

In some instances Council may refer complaints or disputes to the Community Justice Centre (CJC). Council may decide to take this action when complaints are:

- more general in nature
- a neighbourhood dispute or
- Not able to be resolved using Council's general complaints procedure.

Council advises the parties involved about the services the CJC provides and gives them appropriate contact details. Any mediation is independent of Council.

APPEALS AGAINST COUNCIL DECISIONS

Lodging an appeal with Council

Matters relating to By-Laws:

For matters relating to the application of Council's By-Laws, an application may be made to the Manager of Regulatory Services who will instigate a review of the decision. If a further review is required an appeal may be made to the General Manager, City Life.

Complaints about Council staff:

Complaints about the behaviour of Council staff or any alleged breaches of the law by Council staff may be made directly to the General Manager, City Life.

These complaints are investigated in accordance with Council's Dealing with Complaints Policy.

Complaints about Council policy:

Complaints about Council policy relating to the By-Laws and Animal Management Plan should in the first instance be made to the General Manager, City Life. Matters of policy may also be raised with elected Members.

Names and contact details of Aldermen are listed in Appendix A. Lodging an appeal with the Local Government Tribunal.

Under the Local Government Act, appeals against Council decisions may be lodged with the Local Government Tribunal.