1.8 DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017 - 2021
(TC:PP)

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1) Receives the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017 – 2021 as amended following public consultation to include the introduction of a night time cat curfew in addition to the delivery of an education program that highlights the benefits of keeping cats contained at night.


3) Notes that a copy of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017-2021 be provided to the Secretary to the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources as required under S68A(3)(b) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to:-

- Report to Council on the feedback received following the release of the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan for consultation; and
- Recommend that the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017-2021 (Attachment One) be adopted.

BACKGROUND

On 27 June 2017, Council resolved to release the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan for public comment.

Under Section 68A of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 all Councils are required to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan at four-yearly intervals.

The purpose of the Plan is to provide Council with a strategic framework that delivers policy direction for animal management in Monash.

Section 68A(2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 specifies that a Council’s Domestic Animal Management Plan must include the following:

- a method for evaluating its animal control services;
- an outline of programs for training of authorised animal management officers;
- an outline of intended programs, services and strategies;
- review all existing orders and consider the need for further orders;
- any other matters; and
• periodic evaluation of all programs, services and strategies.


The draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017–2021 was prepared following initial consultation with the community through the 2021 & Beyond Community Survey (March 2017) and an internal review of the current Plan.

Key themes
The key themes that arose through the initial consultation with the community and the review of the Plan included:

• reducing cat nuisance with community support for the consideration of a night time cat curfew;
• continued improvement of dog off-leash areas;
• consideration of the feasibility of a dedicated fenced dog off-leash area;
• promoting the registration of pets;
• promoting de-sexing of pets;
• strong support for the active enforcement of animal controls;
• promoting responsible pet ownership; and
• reducing nuisance from barking dogs.

CONSULTATION

Consultation on the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan was conducted by:
• publishing the draft Plan on Council’s website and advertising it in the Monash Bulletin;
• writing to all registered pet owners providing them with a flyer setting out the main areas of the focus of the draft plan and inviting comment on it; and
• writing to all key stakeholders, including the RSPCA (the provider of Council’s Animal Pound Services) and ten local veterinary practices inviting their comments on the draft Plan.

Residents and stakeholders were encouraged to provide feedback via an online survey or by writing/emailing Council.

DISCUSSION/SUBMISSIONS

A total of two hundred and eighteen (218) responses were received in response to the release of the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan.
Feedback was sought in relation to the Plan in general, but specifically in relation to the following main areas of focus:

- reduce cat nuisance by developing and delivering an education program outlining benefits to wildlife, the environment and cats themselves, by keeping cats in at night;
- increase awareness of dog owners’ responsibility to pick up dog faeces by distributing brochures and using stencilled designs on footpaths in reserves;
- investigate the feasibility of a dedicated fenced off-leash area;
- improve compliance with pet registration requirements by undertaking an annual door knock program and seizing animals that remain unregistered after enforcement action was taken; and
- promoting de-sexing of cats to reduce the number of unwanted and stray cats, protect wildlife and reduce the number of homeless cats being euthanised by organising discount de-sexing days to encourage pet owners to de-sex their cats.

The feedback received is discussed in further detail below.

Reduce cat nuisance by developing and delivering an education program outlining benefits to keeping cats in at night

Seventy two (72) respondents commented on this issue. Of these, forty six (46) were in favour of cats being contained to their owners’ property by the introduction of a curfew, whilst ten (10) respondents were opposed to such a measure. The remainder of the respondents made general comments on this topic but did not express a clear view either for or against the proposal. Respondents referenced the danger to native animals/birds from wandering cats, the nuisance caused by domestic cats defecating in neighbouring properties, cat fights and the spread of disease.

Officer Comment:

The introduction of a cat curfew was not included in the draft Plan, but rather it was proposed to develop and deliver an education program outlining benefits to keeping cats in at night. This was recommended on the basis of a decline in the number of complaints about nuisance cats being received by Council.

The introduction of a cat curfew is however an issue that has been, and continues to be raised with Council by residents and wildlife conservationists.

As a result of the consultation it is clear that there is strong support for the introduction of a curfew. Participants in the Monash Community Survey conducted in March 2017 were also strongly in favour of the introduction of a cat curfew. During this survey, 65.41% or respondents indicated that they support the introduction of a night time cat curfew.
From the feedback it is clear that respondents are particularly passionate about nuisance caused by domestic cats and believe that education alone would not address this issue effectively, but rather that the introduction of a curfew is required.

Whilst there may be concerns around the cost implications to residents should a curfew be introduced, e.g. the cost of constructing cat runs, officer experience has shown that the majority of residents who contain their cats to their own properties, do so by simply keeping the cats indoors. Concerns about the cost implications should therefore not be seen as an impediment to the introduction of a curfew, particularly in light of the strong resident support for it as indicated by the feedback received.

It is acknowledged that cat curfews are inherently difficult to enforce. Delivery of an education program prior to the introduction of a curfew should however assist to increase awareness amongst residents regarding the benefits of keeping cats contained. An education program would gradually introduce the idea of cat containment to residents and should also increase self-regulation.

In light of the above, the Plan has been amended to include the introduction of a night time cat curfew in addition to the delivery of an education program that highlights the benefits of keeping cats contained at night.

Increase awareness of dog owners’ responsibility to pick up dog faeces by distributing brochures and using stencilled designs on footpaths in reserves

Fifty three (53) respondents commented on this issue. Of these, 77% were in favour of the distribution of brochures and stencilled designs to increase dog owners’ awareness of their responsibility to pick up dog faeces. The majority of these respondents also commented on the need for enforcement if dog owners do not clean up after their dogs and the need for more bins and disposal bags at reserves. Those respondents opposed to the proposal were concerned that the distribution of brochures and using stencilled designs on footpaths would not be cost effective and/or not have any effect on non-compliant dog owners.

Officer Comment:

The draft Plan lists the continuation of the roll out of the provision of dog faeces disposal bags and bins in conjunction with education and enforcement as an objective to reduce and minimise dog nuisance complaints. The plan also anticipates the use of stencils on footpaths to remind dog owners that they are required to pick-up after their animals. Raising awareness of this obligation, along with conducting patrols in places where nuisance complaints occur will help educate dog owners and also reassure complainants that their concerns are being addressed.
Investigate the feasibility of a dedicated fenced off-leash area

Eighty six (86) respondents commented on this proposal. Of these, 86% were in favour of Council investigating the feasibility of a dedicated fenced off-leash area. The majority of the respondents also suggested potential sites for such an area. Those opposing the proposal pointed out the potential for owners not to supervise their dogs properly, which in turn could lead to an increased risk of attacks.

Officer Comment:

The Plan lists the completion of a feasibility investigation, as well as a recommendation to Council, by 31 December 2020.

Improve compliance with pet registration requirements by undertaking an annual door knock program and seizing animals that remain unregistered after enforcement action was taken

Twenty two (22) respondents commented on this issue and of these, 59% supported a door knock program whilst 9% were opposed to it. The remainder of the respondents provided general comments indicating that they are in favour of the enforcement of registration requirements. Those opposed to door knocks indicated that such a program would not be cost effective and/or that seizure of unregistered animals would punish the animal rather than the owner.

Officer Comment:

The promotion of pet registration and responsible pet ownership together with education in ownership obligations are considered high priorities for Council to focus on. As set out in the Plan, increased publicity and education combined with annual door knock programs and seizure of animals that remain unregistered after enforcement action was taken, will work towards achieving these goals.

Promoting de-sexing of cats to reduce the number of unwanted and stray cats, protect wildlife and reduce the number of homeless cats being euthanised by organising discount de-sexing days to encourage pet owners to de-sex their cats.

Twenty four (24) respondents commented on this issue with 79% of them supporting promotion of cat de-sexing and organising discount de-sexing days for cats. The remainder of the respondents provided general comments and none were opposed to this issue.

Officer comment:

Under the Plan discount de-sexing days will be delivered from time to time. People will be encouraged to take ownership of stray cats that they may be feeding and to take responsibility for the animal by registering and de-sexing it. It
is anticipated that this will help reduce the number of unwanted and stray cats and the number of homeless cats being euthanised.

General submissions

General comments received from respondents showed overwhelming support for the Plan and specifically for the focus on nuisance caused by barking dogs, dog faeces and nuisance cats. Several respondents encouraged Council to focus on enforcement and education of pet owners. Some respondents also encouraged the phasing out of pet shops that sell animals, suggesting that they only be allowed to facilitate the re-homing of pets.

The RSPCA wrote to Council indicating their support for the Plan, specifically the actions aimed at increasing the registration rates of pets. A submission was also received from MARS Pet Care Australia (providers of pet care products) requesting Council to continue focusing on the provision of dog parks and the affordability of animal registration fees.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Implementation of most actions in the Domestic Animal Management Plan will be managed within existing budgets. Where additional resources are required, these will be subject to separate consideration within the respective budget periods.

CONCLUSION

The draft Domestic Animal Management Plan has been developed following extensive consultation with the Monash community.

The submissions have been considered and, where appropriate, the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan has been amended.

It is recommended that the draft Plan be adopted.

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 requires that Council’s Domestic Animal Management Plan be reviewed annually by Council, with opportunities to make provision for new or emerging issues.