

1.4 DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2021-25

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes the submissions received as part of the community consultation on the Draft Domestic Animal Management and the officer comments associated with each submission.*
2. *Receives the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 as presented in Attachment One to this report, and*
3. *Adopts the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25.*
4. *Notes that a copy of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-2025 be provided to the Secretary to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions 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 to recommend that Council adopts the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 (Attachment One).

BACKGROUND

At its meeting of 31 August 2021, Council resolved to release the draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 for public comment.

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

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

The Act specifies that a Council's DAMP 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.

Council's DAMP is to be expected to be submitted to the Secretary to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions by 3 December 2021.

CONSULTATION

To help inform the development of the DAMP a Community Survey was conducted via the Shape Monash portal during May 2021. This survey sought community input on a range of issues, including access to open spaces, animal registration and nuisance cats.

177 residents provided feedback, submitting 186 responses and these are set out in Attachment Two.

The survey results can be categorised into the following themes:

- Education to be provided in a number of languages with this to be provided in hard copy and online
- Requests for fenced 'off leash' areas including those to separate smaller and larger dogs
- Education around dog faeces (including enforcement & more availability of dog poo bags)
- Encouraging animal adoption
- Nuisance animals – both dogs barking and cats trespassing

Following the draft DAMP being released for comment on 31 August 21 the opportunity to provide feedback via the Shape Monash portal was promoted on Council's website and in its social media. Officers also wrote to the following stakeholders inviting feedback:

- Environmental 'friends' groups
- Local Veterinarians
- Domestic Animal Business proprietors
- RSCPA
- Sport Clubs (Active Monash tenants)

A total of 36 submissions were received as presented in Attachment Two which includes an officer response to each submission.

The submissions echoed much of the feedback already received however there were two issues that were consistently raised with these being concerns about dog faeces not being picked by owners and concerns about sports facilities being used by dog owners to exercise their pets.

The submissions can be summarised as follows:

Concerns about dog faeces and calls for more	<i>Officer comment:</i> <i>The plan includes the following actions:</i>
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<p>poo bag dispensers and bins.</p>	<p>Increase awareness of the requirement to pick up dog faeces by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distributing brochures; and • using stencilled designs on footpaths in reserves • procure and utilise a range of stencils in languages other than English. <p>Continue to roll out the provision of dog faeces disposal bins and bag dispensers in parks subject to annual Council budget process</p> <p><i>Local Law controls provide that dog owners are required to carry a bag with them at all times they are exercising their pet for the purpose of cleaning up after their dog. Poo bag dispensers are provided at parks where patronage is the highest and whilst the plan includes the roll out of more dispensers there needs to be a balance applied to the number of bins provided in terms of need, convenience and serviceability.</i></p> <p><i>At present around half a million poo bags are already provided each year and the existing dispensers are being upgraded to increase the number of bags they can hold in order to keep pace with demand. Dispensers are currently refilled twice a week.</i></p>
<p>Concern that pet owners will be fined if they fall behind on animal registration.</p>	<p><i>Officer Comment:</i></p> <p><i>Consistent feedback from the community supports Council's enforcement approach to pet owners failing to register their pets. Animal registration sits as the cornerstone of animal regulation in Victoria. Reminder notices are issued as well as text messages and phone calls made in relation to late registrations and no enforcement action is taken when a person responds to these. Fines are generally issued in circumstances where an animal has never been registered or remains unregistered following reminders to do so.</i></p>
<p>Owners of barking dogs that annoy people should be made accountable.</p>	<p><i>Officer comment:</i></p> <p><i>For Council to take action about a barking dog it is required to undertake an investigation to determine if a nuisance, in the legal sense, is occurring. This goes beyond annoyance and the test for a nuisance to exist must meet the legal standards around persistence, substantialness and unreasonableness, Few cases meet this standard. Nonetheless,</i></p>

	<i>complaints are routinely investigated and it is noted that the plan includes an action to improve the barking dog complaint/investigation procedure.</i>
Calls for dogs to be prohibited from specialised surfaces at sports grounds namely the pitch areas at Gardiners Creek and Jack Edwards Reserves.	<i>Officer comment: The plan acknowledges the need to revisit dogs being exercised on specialised surfaces and includes an action to periodically review on and off-leash areas.</i>
Calls for more patrols in parks and reserves	<i>Officer comment: Park patrols are conducted on a routine and daily basis however the number of patrols, the locations visited and their duration are constrained by the staff resources available to do this. Nonetheless, where concerning behaviour is reported the patrol frequency at a specific site is increased in response, The plan also confirms that 20 patrol hours per month will be delivered on weekends in addition to those conducted on weekdays.</i>
Calls for additional dog off leash areas and concerns that dogs may be prohibited from some existing off-leash areas.	<i>Officer comment: There are currently 31 off-leash areas within the municipality and feasibility work is currently underway looking at improvements to dog off leash areas and 'dog parks' as they may be resolved upon by Council. The plan looks to see this work continue and includes an action to periodically review on and off-leash areas. The reviews will include consultation with dog owners who utilise fields where organised sport is played.</i>
Animal welfare concerns including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The high Euthanasia rate for cats. ▪ Calls for cat desexing programs. ▪ Animals being taken to pound and not straight home. ▪ Ability for Vets to reunite stray animals with their owners. ▪ Microchipping and calls for Council to do this. 	<i>Officer comment: Council's pound services are delivered under a contractual arrangement with the RSPCA who are required to deliver the services in accordance with legislative requirements and industry best practice. The RSPCA are recognised as leaders in animal welfare and there is high degree of confidence that animals in their care are being managed, and if necessary, euthanised appropriately. Under the terms of their contract, the RSPCA will deliver localised animal welfare programs and it is likely these will initially focus on cats. These programs could include cat de-sexing programs and these will be explored with them. Furthermore the plan includes the following actions:</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Engage with animal welfare organisations seeking opportunities to partner programmes specifically designed to reduce unowned cat populations and programmes designed to reduce high euthanasia rates.</i> • <i>Actively seek opportunities to deliver low-cost cat de-sexing programs</i> <p><i>Instead of impounding them, officers routinely return stray animals to their home in circumstances where the animal is registered and identifiable. To assist in this process officers carry a microchip scanner.</i></p> <p><i>Officers do not release animals to the public that are neither registered or microchipped given such animals are released from the pound. It is therefore unnecessary for Council staff to microchip animals as an additional service.</i></p> <p><i>It is anticipated that legislation will soon be introduced that will enable vet clinics and others to hold and release stray animals to their owners as an alternative to them being impounded.</i></p>
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DISCUSSION

Feedback on the draft plan was largely consistent with the consultation that helped form its development. It is noted that the plan responds to the matters raised in the submissions and therefore there are no significant changes to the plan other than to further explore the gender impacts that are discussed in the latter part of this report.

The RSPCA deliver pound services and an after-hours animal collection service to Council. Importantly there has been some valuable feedback around animal welfare that will be discussed with them to help inform the localised animal welfare initiatives to be delivered as agreed under the pound services contract recently awarded to them.

The feedback on the draft plan also confirmed there is on-going community support for dedicated exercise areas for dogs in the form of 'dog parks' and there are increasing pressures and conflicts on recreational spaces, particularly where organised sport is played and where ground improvements including the introduction of synthetic playing surfaces in certain locations.

Given officers wrote to sports groups inviting feedback on the draft plan their concerns are further understood however it should be noted that dog owners who provided submissions also expressed concern about sports

grounds being made unavailable to them in the event an off-leash status is removed.

Whilst acknowledging the tensions that exist the feedback confirms a rethink is required as to the appropriateness of these areas being shared spaces for dogs and specialised recreational pursuits, including whether these can be better managed and designed to better coexist. The plan therefore remains unchanged in that a periodic review of on-leash and off-leash areas will be the subject of a periodic review.

It is also important to note that an action has been added to the plan around the need to further explore the gender impacts the plan may have on the community and this is discussed in further detail below.

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Gender Impact Assessment conducted as part of the development of the plan revealed the growing understanding of the link between animal abuse and family violence. Accordingly, the Plan includes authorised officers receiving training on prevention of family violence and responding to disclosures.

An intersectional approach was also considered, with one of the key activities of the plan being to increase publicity and education among Council's non-English speaking residents.

Furthermore, to understand any gendered differences in the community's views, gender-disaggregated data was collected and analysed to inform the final version of the Plan.

The data collected showed that different genders experience pet ownership differently. For example women were more likely than men to own a cat and were less supportive of stronger law enforcement as compared to men. Similarly, 43% of males as compared to 36% of females were supportive of increased registration fees to fund additional animal management programs. Those who preferred not to say which gender they identified with were the least inclined (12.5%) to support such a proposal.

The examination of gender impacts in terms of animal management and ownership are still not well understood but given their importance the following objective and action has been included to explore them in greater detail:

Objective: Further explore the impacts on gender that are associated with the implementation of this plan.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Develop a methodology to gather data and investigate research to inform a more detailed assessment of the	November 2023	Gender impact assessment completed and included in the

impacts on gender associated with this plan and the plans that will follow.		2023 annual evaluation process.
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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The proposal to revisit dog off-leash areas will have relevance to the following:

- Monash Open Space Strategy
- Monash Football (Soccer) Plan
- Active Monash Facilities Hierarchy

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst the majority of plan actions will be met within recurrent budget allocations, some activities such as a review of off-leash areas will require budgetary consideration.

CONCLUSION

The DAMP has been developed in accordance with the requirements of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

The community has been consulted in the development of the plan and it is recommended that the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25 be adopted by Council and that a copy of the plan be sent to the Secretary to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. A copy of the plan for general release has also been prepared and is attached to this report as Attachment Three.