

# Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-25



## 1. FOREWARD

Under the provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) all councils in Victoria develop a domestic animal management plan (DAMP) which is renewed every 4 years.

The DAMP outlines the council's:

- services
- programs and policies established to address the administration of the Act
- management of dog and cat issues in their community.

### **Council's Responsibilities**

Council is responsible for developing a DAMP which:

- promotes responsible pet ownership and the welfare of dogs and cats in the community
- protects the community and the environment from nuisance dogs and cats
- identifies a method to evaluate whether the animal management services provided by them are adequate
- outlines the training programs for their Authorised Officers to ensure these Officers are capable in administering and enforcing the provisions of the Act.

### **What's in the DAMP**

The plan provides information on the daily operation of Council's Animal Management team, as well the current programs Council has in place, and the policies Council has adopted, to:

- promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats
- ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations, and any related legislation
- minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
- address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats
- encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
- minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance
- effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with the Act and the Regulations.

The DAMP also identifies the current local laws and Orders made under the Act and reviews them for effectiveness.

### **Council's review of the DAMP**

Council reviews the DAMP annually and publishes an evaluation of the implementation of their plan in the Council's annual report.

The DAMP, including new initiatives, is required to be fully reviewed and submitted to the State Government every 4 years.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In preparing this plan, Council has conducted considerable research into current animal management issues in the City of Greater Dandenong.

Current interventions and their success or otherwise in addressing those issues has been reviewed, with the data (Table 1) showing the key challenges for animal management in the City of Greater Dandenong being:

1. Cats wandering at large
2. Dogs wandering at large
3. Barking dogs
4. Unregistered animals
5. Aggressive dogs

Table 1

	Cat Wandering	Dog Wandering	Barking Nuisance	Unregistered Animal	Aggressive Dog
2018/19	558	556	237	154	153
2019/20	467	563	303	127	147
2020/21	613	478	233	133	124

These figures are based on the total number of requests for service received by Council prior to any investigation being conducted. Therefore, the actual number of substantiated reports may differ to these figures, however these figures show where the concerns of the residents lay.

### Off Leash Areas

Our community has also told us that they want further improved access to safe off leash areas for exercising and socialising their pets. The 2019 Off Leash Strategy has committed to increase the off-leash areas available for pet owners from 15 areas to 21 areas within the term of this plan. Of particular note has been the introduction of two small-breed specific off leash areas as a result of community feedback to the 2019 Off leash Strategy.

### Service Cost Comparatives

When looking at comparisons for 2019-20, the data shows when compared with other local governments across the State, the City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) has service costs which are 39% lower than average. This figure is significantly lower than previous years mainly due to a change in how the cost is calculated from a cost per registered animal basis to a cost per population basis.

- CGD: \$4.89 per animal, per annum
- other councils average – \$12.54 per animal, per annum.

### Service Response

CGD has a much faster average response time to service requests (1.13 days) from receipt of request, compared to State average of 2.77 days. CGD achieves this with a lower than average numbers of officers – at 1 officer for every 58,000 residents, compared to an average of 1 officer for every 46,000 residents, at neighbouring councils.

## **Service Budget**

Total revenue raised from animal management in 2019-20 was \$741,933, whilst total operating costs were \$822,348, a shortfall of \$80,401.

In 2016/17, Council increased pet registration fees, bringing them in line with the fees of neighbouring councils. This cost comparison has been maintained through to the current budget.

The State Government levy, which is payable by Council for every cat, dog and domestic animal business registered in the municipality, has increased and continues to increase in line with CPI.

Where this cost had been absorbed by Council, given the increasing costs associated with providing our animal management service, and the shortfall in revenue to cover those rising service costs, the State Government charge for the levy has now been added to the registration fees.

Given the socio-economic status of the City of Greater Dandenong, Council is of the view that is no scope for any further significant increases in revenue from pet registration.

In early 2021, Council entered a new contract for animal pound services, which saw a significant increase in the cost of these services. That impact will not take full effect until the 2021-22 year but will then continue for the life of this plan.

The focus of this plan for the next four years will therefore be on investigating ways to reduce unnecessary costs, reduce the number of impounded animals and increase the number of registered animals.

Council will also advocate strongly for more action at the State government level, to improve both community education and the legal frameworks associated with pet registration and cat over population. Within the constraints of the current economic situation for local government, Council will focus its field efforts on wandering animals, dog attacks and increasing the number of pets registered.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

The City of Greater Dandenong supports the strategic approach set out in the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) which requires that each municipal council prepare an animal management plan. Council has therefore developed this plan in accordance with all legislative guidelines.

In this plan, Council has sought to balance the competing needs of animal owners, the broader community, and the animals that share people's lives. Council also recognises the positive health and wellbeing outcomes that arise from pet ownership. The programs and activities set out in the plan have therefore been developed with the aim to encourage more people to enjoy the pleasure derived from animal companionship, within a framework of responsible ownership.

The plan is designed and presented in a format recommended by the DEDJTR.

### **2.1 Context**

Encompassing an area of 129 sq/km, Greater Dandenong has a population estimated at 175,000, in 2021. With the forecast construction of 7,500 dwellings by 2031, the population is expected to surge to approximately 203,000.

Over half (54%) of local, occupied private dwellings are fully owned or being purchased by their occupants, while most of the balance are rented. The extent of home ownership in Greater Dandenong – that is, fully-owned or being purchased – is substantially lower than the metropolitan average of 71%.

For example, 58% of residents were born in non-English speaking countries, compared to the wider Melbourne average of 28%. The median annual income for our residents, recorded by the 2016 Census, is \$24,700 – 70% of the corresponding metropolitan level, of \$35,000.

In light of these conditions, it is to be expected that the City of Greater Dandenong would exhibit lower rates of pet ownership than the metropolitan or State average.

## 2.2 Domestic Animal Statistics and Data

	2015/16	2020/21	
Other matters	CGD		Comments
No. of EFT Authorised Officers 1000 households	0.016	0.071	Additional Ranger commenced early 2020
Hours training per officer annually	40	40	All 3 Rangers Cert IV qualified. Annual training is now generally refresher based.
No. of Registered Dogs	8388	7453	The reduction in numbers can be the result of accurate data cleansing and the collation of monthly records.
No. of Registered Cats	3292	3545	In previous years, interrogating the database for the number of registered animals for a specific date was very difficult with any degree of accuracy. Currently these numbers are recorded monthly.
No. of Registered Declared Dogs	21	9	8 Guard Dogs 1 Declared Dangerous
No. of Registered Restricted Breed Dogs	3	1	
No. of Declared Menacing Dogs	4	1	
No. of Prosecutions completed annually	25	30	
% of Prosecutions Successful	100%	100%	
No. Infringements issued	464	379	

No of Warnings issued	198	148	
No. of Compliance Notices	71	53	
No. of impoundments (dogs)	371	231	
% of impounded dogs returned to owner	15%	34%	
% of dogs rehoused	18%	21%	
% of dogs euthanized	9%	6%	
No. of impoundments (cats)	495	665	
% of cats returned to owner	3%	13%	
% of cats rehoused	20%	24%	
% of cats euthanized	50%	56%	
No. animal complaints per year	1898	2028	
No. animal complaints per officer	791	676	

### **3. TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS**

#### **3.1 Current and Planned Training**

To ensure that all staff involved in animal management have the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their work, a set of minimum training qualifications has been established and is set out in officer role statements. Officers are also encouraged to identify and attend 'in-service' training programs applicable to their roles.

Each Officer has an individual annual performance plan, which includes a section related to training and development. Plans are reviewed annually, with training requirements being updated at that time. Responsibility for ensuring that nominated training is completed then becomes a shared responsibility for the individual officer and their supervisor.

#### **3.2 Objective:**

To ensure that all staff involved in animal management obtain and maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their work and to advance to more senior roles within the team.



### 3.3 2.3 Goals

- All staff required to hold minimum Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation.
- Staff encouraged and supported to attain higher level qualifications e.g. Diploma in Animal Management/ Diploma in Business Management.
- Staff encouraged and facilitated to attend all in-service days provided by relevant industry bodies.
- All staff required to be qualified to insert Microchips.

### 3.4 Current Status

All staff in this team currently hold the minimum qualification or its equivalent. Staff are also encouraged and supported to attain higher level qualifications e.g. Diploma in Criminal Justice/Business Management etc.

Any new staff appointed are required to have the minimum qualification or to commit to attaining it within 2 years of commencing employment with Council. Council will fund and facilitate attainment of the minimum qualification.

Officers are also encouraged and supported to undertake other training that may assist them in providing improved services to the community and increase officer safety, situational awareness and conflict resolution.

The table below summarises officer's current qualifications and identifies further training and/or professional development planned over the next four years.

<b>Authorised Officer Training - Basic</b>		<b>Current (2021)</b>	<b>Planned</b>
Certificate IV Animal Control & Regulation	Officer 1 Officer 2 Officer 3 Officer 4	Completed Completed Completed Completed	
Microchip Implantation Training	Officer 1 Officer 2 Officer 3 Officer 4	Completed Completed Completed Not completed	4th Officer awaiting resumption of course at Box Hill
1 Industry Training - animal handling, animal assessment	Officer 1 Officer 2 Officer 3 Officer 4	Completed Completed Completed Completed	
OH&S, Customer service training conflict resolution and dealing with aggressive customers	Officer 1 Officer 2 Officer 3 Officer 4	Completed Completed Completed Completed	Update annually
Animal Welfare Victoria – training and information days	Officer 1 Officer 2	All staff to attend wherever possible.	

	Officer 3 Officer 4		
Bite Stick Training	Officer 1 Officer 2 Officer 3 Officer 4	Completed Due 2021/22 Due 2021/22 Due 2021/22	Updated biennially

#### 4. REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Council currently engages in a range of activities aimed at encouraging the registration and identification of dogs and cats. These include:

- Website information.
- Facebook Lost & Found page.
- Media Releases.
- Prompt reactive enforcement.
- Pet News annual publication.
- Mandatory registration of animals prior to release from pound.
- Annual Registration Renewal follow-up.
- Microchip database comparison with Council registration records.
- Rangers qualified to implant microchips to facilitate registration
- Proactive targeted door-knocks.
- Pro-active patrols of parks/reserves.
- Educational displays at community events.
- No fee for first registration period for pets registered before reaching 3 months of age.
- No fee for first registration period for transfer of registration from another municipality/State.
- No fee for first registration period for all animals adopted from a recognised adoption program
- Strays returned to owner where currently registered and owner can be contacted

##### 4.1 Current Situation

###### Our current data

###### Pet Registration

As at January 1	Dogs	Cats
2017	8388	3292
2020	7902	3290
2021	7453	3545

As at 1 January 2017, there were 8388 dogs and 3292 cats registered within the municipality. In January 2021 there were 7453 dogs and 3545 registered cats. This represents a decrease of 11.1% in dog registrations and a 7.7% increase for cats, over the last 4 years.

Improved record keeping and data cleansing has resulted in a more accurate overall picture of our municipality's circumstances than in previous years.

The increase in cat registrations can be attributed to an increase in cat adoptions during the Covid 19 pandemic. Agreements with recognised adoption agencies to offer no fee registrations for the remainder of the registration period on adopted animals at point of adoption has facilitated a simpler registration process and encourages residents looking for a pet to obtain vaccinated and desexed animals that need a home. The overall percentage of cats being rehomed has fallen due to the rise in the number of cats impounded that are not suitable for rehoming due to disease and temperaments that render them unsuitable for rehoming.

In a report<sup>1</sup> published by Animal Medicines Australia (AMA) in 2019, the following groups of people were identified as being **less** likely to own a pet:

- (single) males
- over the age of 70
- currently unemployed
- living in households with an income of less than \$50,000 (PA)
- living in apartments/townhouses
- Renters
- living alone
- living in households where there is only one adult
- separated, divorced or widowed
- living in households where there are no children
- from a non-English speaking background.

Most, if not all of these groups are represented in higher numbers within the City of Greater Dandenong, than across other municipalities in Victoria. For example, 58% of our residents were born overseas, in non-English speaking countries, compared to the wider Melbourne average of 28%. Average annual income for our residents is \$24,700 compared to the wider average of \$35,000. Given these conditions, it is to be expected that the City of Greater Dandenong will have lower rates of pet ownership than either State or national averages.

Council has three full-time Rangers, supported by a team leader and administration team. In addition, Council also has a team of six Local Laws Officers supported by a team leader, each of whom is trained and equipped to deal with basic animal management issues such as collection/transport of strays, dog attack triage, and livestock wandering.

#### **4.2 Our current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures**

Council currently has the following Orders in place:

- Prohibiting exercising of dogs off leash, other than in designated places
- Enabling Council to declare certain areas to be prohibited to dogs/cat (This is the tool used if we wish to introduce a cat curfew in the municipality.)

The City of Greater Dandenong Local Law No.2 (Community Amenity) creates local laws that ensures domestic animal owners:

- Provide adequate housing for animals
- Keep animals in a way that is adequate and appropriate for the type and numbers being kept
- Keep Poultry and animal housing adequately maintained so that it does not cause a nuisance or become offensive or harbours vermin.

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<sup>1</sup> Animal Medicines Australia, Pet Ownership in Australia 2019, p11

- Don't keep a rooster on land which is less than 5000 sq/min area.
- Don't without a permit, keep an excessive number of animals or birds on their property ensuring being proper controls are in place.
- Carry a device for the collection and disposal of an animal's excrement when outside of their property.
- Immediately collect and dispose of animal excrement when outside of their property.
- Must produce to an Authorised Officer the device for the collection and disposal of an animal's excrement when the animal is outside of their property.

Council's animal management service is delivered by the Regulatory Services Department. That department has a comprehensive Code of Practice (CoP) which addresses general policy and procedure relating to the receipt, investigation and actioning of all types of complaints, including animal management issues. The CoP has specific chapters dealing with animal management, enforcement and prosecution.

The CoP also includes a specific and comprehensive procedure for dealing with Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed dogs and barking dog complaints.

#### **4.3 Our current Education/Promotion Activities**

The current education activities and programs that CGD offers, aimed at promoting responsible pet ownership include:

- Barking Dog Booklet.
- Fact Sheets.
- Brochure stands installed at all customer service areas, containing a broad range of information booklets, some in other languages.
- Annual publication of Pet News magazine now also provided in electronic format.
- Activities at local festivals, events.
- Website.
- Lost & Found Facebook Page.

#### **4.4 Our current Compliance Activities**

- Annual pet registration renewal follow-up. A use of electronic means via SMS and/or email has developed due to Covid social distancing restrictions and allowances made for customer services centres being temporarily closed.
- Monthly cross check of microchip database against registration records.
- Routine street patrols.
- Domestic Animal Business Inspections.
- Dangerous, Restricted Breed Dog inspections.
- Proactive patrols of parks, reserves, bicycle paths.
- Response to complaints.
- Low cost, in-home microchipping service for pensioners and residents with mobility issues.
- Enforcement of legislation.
- 84Y agreements with veterinary practices with access to current registration records to enable vets to return currently registered animals directly to owner

In the 2020-2021 financial year, 148 animal related Official Warnings, 71 Compliance Notices and 379 infringements were issued. 30 court prosecutions were also undertaken in that year. The number of court prosecutions has been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic causing the closure of the magistrate's courts and the frequent adjournments of hearings.

#### **4.5 Summary**

As a municipality with one of the lowest socio-economic ratings in Victoria, Council's resources are limited in terms of new activities that might be undertaken to increase the number of registered animals, however with the addition of another officer in 2020, more proactive work is being undertaken, such as monthly microchip database cross matching, proactive park patrols and investigating ways to improve return to owner rates and develop relationships with foster carers and rescue agencies. Changes to legislation have around source codes and animal breeders had also resulted in additional proactive work to identify illegal breeders and advertising of animals and assisting new pet owners with the registration process.

Council is also of the view the current legislated process for pet registration and microchipping is duplicative and cumbersome. It is therefore confusing for pet owners and this can lead to lower rates of registration. As part of this plan, steps are being taken to speed up and simplify the registration process via online applications.

#### **4.6 Action Plans**

As indicated earlier in this report, there has been a decrease of 11.1% in dog registrations and a 7.7% increase for cats, over the last 4 years. Improved data collection has resulted in more accurate reporting.

The number of registered domestic animal businesses has increased from 5 to 9, now comprising 3 boarding kennels, 4 pet shops, 1 training establishment and 1 shelter. The fee for DAB permits was waived in 2020 due to Covid lockdowns significantly impacting these businesses.

There are currently no registered breeding DAB's in the City of Greater Dandenong, however examination of the microchip records has revealed several micro-breeders and a recreational breeder.

In 2015, Rangers compared the records of animals microchipped over a several year period within CGD, against Councils registration records. This proved a cumbersome exercise due to the high numbers involved and taking into account the transient nature of CGD's population. With the addition of another Ranger in 2020, this project is now conducted monthly where resources permit, and identifies anywhere between 60 and 120 unregistered animals per month, properties housing excess animals and potential rescue and breeding establishments.

Other activities that will be undertaken to increase registration rates include additional community education, in person where appropriate and utilising more online and digital media forms. Further pro-active patrolling to identify unregistered pets and research into ways of simplifying and expediting the process of registering will also be undertaken.

The implementation of a no fee registration for the first registration period has seen an increase in registration applications received for adopted animals. This has been more noticeable in cat registrations due to the increased number of cats adopted during the Covid 19 pandemic.

With the additional requirement to obtain a source code prior to microchip implantation, this has made the process of pet registration even more complicated and time consuming which may be having a negative impact on pet registrations.

A project to enable registration renewal reminders to be emailed directly to the customer with a link for electronic payment is currently underway. Some technical difficulties have impacted the rollout of this option, however further work will be carried out to have the majority of pet registration renewals reminders emailed, replacing the need to send a paper copy. This also aligns with Council's sustainability strategies.

Further development of the Ranger's ability to access programs and records from mobile devices can also result in less animals being impounded and more returned directly home.

Developing reciprocal agreements with neighbouring municipalities to access current registration records can also increase the number of animals that have crossed municipal boundaries being returned directly to the owner and can also expedite dog attack investigations.

The 2019 Off Leash Strategy is now in effect. The term of this strategy should see an increase of the number of offleash areas from 15 to 21. Two existing offleash areas have seen a small breed specific offleash area added where small breed dogs and their owners can enjoy the area in a less intimidating setting.

#### 4.7 Objectives

##### Objective 1: Increase dog and cat registration numbers

Activity	When	Evaluation
Ensure all seized and impounded animals are registered to their owner prior to release.	Prior to every release.	Annually review registration numbers. Review number of dogs and cats being seized and impounded that are not registered to their owner.
Targeted proactive door-knocks to find unregistered animals	Minimum 1 per quarter dependent of social distancing requirements	Review numbers of unregistered animals found
SMS and email registration renewal reminders to be sent to all owners of un-renewed pets with mobile numbers and email addresses listed	Annually in March	Review numbers of pets being registered after SMS & email reminders sent
Conduct annual inspection of each property that fails to renew registration of animals.	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter each year dependent of social distancing requirements	Review and compare numbers of properties found to have unregistered animals.  % of properties failing to renew registration each year.
Implement first time registration application online	By December 2021	Review numbers of new pet registrations every month compared to previous trends
Advertise Pet Registration renewals in busy pedestrian hubs, utilising A-Frame messages across the municipality, high impact vehicle magnets and community TV in Harmony Square, Facebook Lost and Found page, CGD website and digital media in local shopping centres	Annually in March/April	Analyse new registration and renewal trends at the time of initiative.

**Objective 2:** Improve the accuracy of council registration database by cross-referencing with microchip registry data.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct microchip registry cross referencing exercises.	Monthly when resources permit	Demonstrate council's pet registration database can be accurately cross referenced with at least one microchip registry.
Follow up animals that are on microchip database but not registered with Council.	Monthly when resources permit	Record numbers of pets registered with council as a result of microchip registry cross referencing exercise.
Follow up with identified excess animals and breeders	Monthly when resources permit	Follow up on number of excess animals and breeders discovered

**Objective 3:** Reduce the number of animals impounded

Activity	When	Evaluation
Research alternatives to managing feral and wild cat populations. Advocate for legislative change to improve management.	Ongoing	Reduction in impoundment numbers
Develop relationships with Rescue Agencies and Volunteer Enrolled Foster Cares as an alternative to impounding where possible	Ongoing	Reduction in impoundment numbers
Develop reciprocal agreements with neighbouring municipalities for 24-hour access registration records to enable currently registered animals to be returned to owner	1 December 2022	Reduction in impoundment numbers
Continually monitor and improve procedures to ensure animals are only impounded if there is no other alternative.	Ongoing	Reduction in impoundment numbers
Online registration to allow opportunity to register stray animals found immediately to allow for return to owner	December 2021	Increase number of strays returned directly to owner
Simplify and expedite registration renewal process to encourage timely compliance with pet registration renewal	November 2021	Analyse registration renewal trends
Investigate opportunities to provide low cost/subsidised cat desexing, microchipping and registration in targeted areas to move cats from semi-owned status to fully owned and prevent unwanted litters	1 July 2022	Number of cats desexed as part of program and number of cats impounded over duration of the plan

Develop mobile technology expedite the return to owner process for stray animals and increase the number of animals returned directly to the owner	Jan 2022	Increase the number of animals returned directly to owner
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## 5. NUISANCE

### 5.1 CURRENT SITUATION

#### Our current data

At Greater Dandenong, the most common nuisance complaints for animals are wandering/at large and barking dogs. In the case of wandering dogs, the number of reports per annum decreased by approximately 15.8%, between 2018 and 2021. Complaints about wandering cats increased by 9.8%

	Cat Wandering	Dog Wandering	Barking Nuisance	Unregistered Animal	Aggressive Dog
2018/19	558	556	237	154	153
2019/20	467	563	303	127	147
2020/21	613	478	233	133	124

Although the number of complaints regarding wandering cats has increased, the number of cats impounded in 2020/21 has fallen by 6%. This may be partly attributed to the temporary suspension of cat trapping during Covid 19 lockdowns as well as work carried out redirecting young litters through foster programs.

Barking dog complaints decreased by approximately 14% since 2018. This could, in part be attributed to effective and prompt investigation procedures focused primarily on education. This has also resulted in a reduction in the number of Compliance Notices issued by 42% from 2018 to 2021. The number of Infringement Notices issued fell from 3 to 0 in this timeframe. One matter was heard in Magistrates Court in 2019 and none in 2020/2021. With the nuisance provisions being removed from the City of Greater Dandenong's Local Law in July 2021, the Code of Practice will need to be updated to reflect the use of appropriate sections of the Domestic Animals Act 1194.

During the life of the last Plan, Council committed to increasing the number of dog off-leash areas from 15 to 21. Two small-breed offleash areas have also been created adjacent to existing off-leash areas to allow owners of smaller dogs to exercise their pets in a less intimidating setting. New sites are being fully enclosed due to public demand. It is believed that improved access to dog off leash facilities should increase the amount of exercise owners give their dogs. This is expected to have a flow-on effect, in terms of reducing nuisance complaints over time.

### 5.2 Our current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

See Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this plan.



### **5.3 Our current Education/Promotion Activities**

In relation to nuisance specifically, Council provides the following material:

- Barking Dog Booklet
- Fact Sheets and
- Noise Diaries
- Direct contact with all stakeholders
- Council also provides generic information from State government sources.

Animal nuisance is also dealt with on Council's website and at community education sessions delivered at festivals and events.

Rangers also undertake direct contacts with complainants and animal owners each year, assisting them in understanding the causes of dog barking, the remedies available and the process Council will follow to investigate and action complaints.

### **5.4 Our current Compliance Activities**

- Comprehensive barking dog procedure.
- Permit system to manage excess animal numbers.
- Door-knock program and microchip data matching to identify properties with excess animals.
- 7 day per week patrol and response program for wandering animals.
- Use of court issued 84W orders in relation to recidivist wandering dogs
- Regular foot patrol of reserves and offleash areas.
- Cat trap hire program.
- Free cat trap loan for pensioners and residents with mobility issues.
- Strict enforcement of legislation.

### **5.5 Summary**

Over the last three years, dog nuisance complaints and enforcement have reduced, however overpopulation of cats remains a cause for concern throughout the community, in terms of the welfare of the cats, nuisance complaints and predation of wildlife.

The City of Greater Dandenong currently has approximately 3,500 registered cats, 98% of which are currently desexed. It is estimated that this comprises only around 15% of the current population of cats within the municipality.

Cats are generally classified into three main sub-groups:

- Owned

These are cats that live in a domestic household and may live totally indoors or a mixture of indoors and outdoors. Although they may prey on birds and other small mammals, they largely depend on their owners for food. Only around 4% of impounded cats are owned and reclaimed by their owner.

- Semi owned

These cats are typically directly reliant on people for food with some predation. They are generally not desexed and are prolific breeders where a food source is abundant. This is thought to be the largest sub-group of cats in Australia and most responsible for the spread of

disease and injury between cats, the cause of nuisance complaints and predation on birds and wildlife. Semi owned cats may be responsive to human contact and may make suitable pets either by the person feeding them taking full ownership, or by being trapped and put through an adoption program.

- Wild

These cats are generally indirectly reliant on humans for their food source – scavenging around food businesses, factories and taking food left out for strays as well as predation. They will not tolerate human contact and so do not make suitable pets. Around 52% of impounded cats are euthanised due to adverse temperaments.

The term ‘feral’ is now generally only used in relation to cats that live in the wild with no contact or reliance on humans for their survival.

Work needs to be undertaken to move more cats from the semi-owned, into the fully owned sub-group, increasing the number of, desexed, microchipped and registered cats. This in turn would reduce the number of unwanted litters and therefore the number of impounded and euthanised cats.

Further work needs to be done to strengthen community education on confinement of animals and feeding stray animals. The need for a cat curfew also requires consideration.

Section 23(3) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 gives Council provision to serve a Notice of Objection on an owner of a cat that has been found trespassing more than once on a private property. If the cat is trapped on the same property after a Notice of Objection has been served, an infringement notice can be issued to the owner of the cat. Historically, the person who has trapped the cat has not been comfortable having the Notice issued as there is a legislative requirement for the address of the private property to be included in correspondence to the owner. This provision would enable Rangers to address repeat offenders.

**5.6 Our Action Plans**

**Objective 1:** Reduce dog nuisance complaints

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate introduction of responsible pet ownership training programs, conducted by qualified trainers in partnership with CGD Domestic Animal Businesses	December 2024	Programs in place by 2019
Investigate the benefit of the use of digital media displays in high traffic shopping centres to increase awareness of dog confinement and key dog attack messages	Ongoing	Reduction in customer complaints
Review dog off-leash strategy	Annually	Track progress and ensure that the priorities are still in line with community expectations and requirements

**Objective 2:** Reduce nuisance complaint in relation to cats

Activity	When	Evaluation
Develop multi-stage, long term strategy to address nuisance issues caused by overpopulation of issues in cats	March 2022	Reduction in cat nuisance complaints and cat impound numbers
Review the need to introduce a cat curfew	Feb 2023	Council decision on introduction of a curfew.
Investigate the option of mandatory desexing of entire cats impounded and returned to owner prior to release	July 2023	Increase percentage of desexed registered cats
Develop further education material for recognised problem areas/industrial areas	November 2022	New/improved material available
Enforce use of Notice of Objection to cat trespassing	Nov 2023	Number of Objection Notices issued Number of Infringement Notices issued
Investigate opportunities to provide low cost/subsidised cat desexing, microchipping and registration in targeted areas to move cats from semi-owned group to fully owned group and prevent unwanted litters	December 2022	Number of cat nuisance complaints Number of registered desexed cats Number of impounded cats
Strengthen community education in relation to feeding stray cats	August 2023	Number of complaints regarding feeding strays Number of impounded cats

## 6. DOG ATTACKS

### 6.1 Current Situation - Our current data

In 2018/19 changes were made to the way dog attack complaints are processed. This was done to enable more accurate reporting of the number and severity of incidents being reported.

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 classifies attacks into three categories:

1. Rush – where a dog has approached a person to within less than 3 metres in an aggressive manner, displaying aggressive tendencies that may include snarling, growling and raised hackles.
2. Non-serious attack – where a dog has attacked and caused injuries that are not in the nature of a serious injury
3. Serious attack – where a dog has attacked a person or other animal and caused an injury requiring medical or veterinary treatment in the nature of a broken bone, a laceration, partial loss of sensation or function in a part of the body or an injury requiring cosmetic surgery.

	Rush	Non-Serious Attack	Serious Attack	Totals
2018/19	8	22	16	46
2019/20	15	20	23	57
2020/21	12	22	18	52

Council has a firm policy of enforcement in cases of dogs wandering, dog attack and rush incidents. Action is taken in all cases of confirmed attack, where a perpetrator can be identified.

With the introduction of more fully fenced off-leash areas, Council has seen an increase in the number of attacks in these areas. More work needs to be done to identify how these areas can be made safer. In 2021, two small-breed specific areas were opened to allow for smaller breed dogs to be exercised in a safer environment. The success of these areas will be monitored closely.

During the period 2018-2021, Council made 1 Menacing Dog declaration, 5 Dangerous Dog Declarations for guard dogs and none for Restricted Breed dogs. Over that period, Council found it necessary to issue two destruction orders for dogs that had attacked.

The overall number of declared dogs in the municipality has decreased by 40%. None of the Declared Dogs have been recorded as committing further offences, post-declaration. Failure to comply with the restrictions of owning declared dangerous guard dogs by the owner resulted in two dogs being seized. The decrease in confirmed attacks would suggest that current activities in this area are achieving positive results. In a year where Covid lockdowns have seen more people walking their dogs to get exercise, it is expected that more negative interactions between dogs would occur. More work around education and dog training is required.

## **6.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures**

See Sections 3.2 and 3.3 for details.

CGD's CoP sets out the procedures to be followed when investigating dog attacks, rushes etc. The CoP was the subject of a full review in 2014-15 and is regularly reviewed in response to legislative change and/or experience gained before the courts/tribunals.

The CoP also covers the policy and procedure to be followed in dealing with dogs that have been proven to rush or attack, in relation to Council's legislated powers under the Domestic Animals Act. A full review of this CoP will be undertaken within the life of this plan.

## **6.3 Our current Education/Promotion Activities**

- Fact Sheets.
- Brochures e.g. Dangerous/Restricted Breed Dogs.
- Annual publication of Pet News magazine.
- Activities at local festivals, events.
- Website.
- Direct contact with stakeholders during routine patrols.

## **6.4 Our current Compliance Activities**

- Annual Registration Renewal Door-knock.
- Routine street patrols.
- Dangerous, Restricted Breed Dog inspections.
- Motorised patrols of parks, reserves, bicycle paths.
- Prompt response to complaints (within 1 hour).
- Barking Dog Management program.
- Firm enforcement in relation wandering dogs, attack and rush.
- Consistent use of Declaration/destruction powers.
- 24 hour/365-day response to dog attack/rush complaints.

## 6.5 Summary

The statistics demonstrate that Council's current approaches are having a positive impact on the number of attack incidents occurring in the municipality. Council will continue to apply these practices, with a strong focus on containment, control and registration.

## 6.6 Objectives

Objective 1: Minimise the risk to the community and to Council from aggressive dogs.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review dog attack/rush reports to simplify post-investigation process in relation to declaration proposals.	ongoing	Accuracy of reports
Publicise key dog attack prevention messages (e.g. confinement of dogs to property, leash laws etc.) through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regular media articles,</li><li>• Pet News publication,</li><li>• website info,</li><li>• A-frame signage,</li><li>• Static displays at events and in parks.</li><li>• use of digital media displays in high traffic shopping centres</li></ul>	Ongoing	Prepare a quarterly report on dog attack incidents to analyse trends  Numbers of campaign patrols conducted.  Number of media articles published.  Number of static displays conducted.
Review reporting procedure to enable recording of numbers of dog attacks in offleash areas	Jan 2023	Number of attacks in fully fenced offleash areas compared to number in unfenced
Review Code of Practice for all animal related enforcement	Jan 2024	Policy remains up to date with legislation.

## 7. DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

### 7.1 Current Situation

### 7.2 Our current data

As at 1 July 2021, there were the following numbers of animals with restrictions housed within the City of Greater Dandenong:

Menacing Dogs	1
Dangerous Dogs (Guard Dogs)	8
Dangerous Dogs (declared)	1
Restricted Breed Dogs	<u>1</u>
Total	<u>11</u>

### **7.3 Our current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures**

See Sections 3.2 and 3.3 for details on Orders and Local Laws.

The CoP covers the policy and procedure to be followed in dealing with dogs that have been proven to rush or attack, in relation to Council’s legislated powers of declaration under the Domestic Animals Act. The CoP also provides comprehensive instructions on the process to be followed in determining whether a dog is of a restricted breed. The CoP has been written with a view to ensuring that dog owners’ human rights are protected and that the principles of natural justice are fully acknowledged in the decision-making process.

### **7.4 Our current Education/Promotion Activities**

- Fact Sheets.
- Brochures e.g. Dangerous/Restricted Breed Dogs.
- Annual publication of Pet News magazine.
- Activities at local festivals, events.
- Website and Facebook page.

### **7.5 Our current Compliance Activities**

- Annual Registration Renewal Door-knock.
- Routine street patrols.
- Dangerous, Restricted Breed Dog inspections.  
Patrols of parks, reserves, bicycle paths.
- Response to complaints.
- Use of 84W court orders to ensure dogs are confined to owner’s property
- Proactive inspections of industrial properties for dogs housed or kept for guarding purposes.
- Firm enforcement in relation wandering dogs, attack and rush.
- Use of Declaration/destruction powers.
- 84Y agreements with vet practices to report on dogs returned to owner.

### **7.6 Summary**

Given the relatively low rates of pet ownership in this municipality, coupled with declining rates of attack/rush, Council is satisfied that current approaches to managing these issues are

effective. Existing education programs, policy and procedure will be the subject of annual review, to ensure that they remain current and effective.

The high proportion of commercial properties within the municipality results in a higher prevalence of declared dangerous guard dogs than with many other neighbouring Councils. The registration fee for this classification of dogs is substantially higher than that of pet dogs (\$427.10). This means these dogs are generally only discovered through proactive patrols or complaints made by neighbouring businesses.

**7.7 Our Action Plans**

**Objective 1:** Identify and register all Declared Dogs in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review policy on when to declare a dog.	Ongoing	Policy remains current with legislation and best practice.
Conduct targeted inspections of industrial properties in the municipality for dogs housed or kept for guarding purposes.	Annually.	No. of guard dogs registered in municipality.

**Objective 2:** Effectively inspect and audit all declared dog premises annually to ensure they are following the keeping requirements.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct inspections.	By 30 June each year	Review inspection reports against registration database.

**Objective 3:** maintain up to date and relevant policy, procedure and education programs in relation to Declared Dogs.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review policy, procedure and education programs.	Annually	Policy, procedure and education programs remain up to date with legislation.

**8. OVERPOPULATION AND HIGH EUTHANASIA**

**8.1 Current Situation**

**8.2 Our current data**

Council’s approach to wandering animals appears to be having a positive effect, with the number of dogs being impounded by Rangers gradually decreasing from 337 in 2018/19 to 231 in 2020/21. This figure includes surrendered dogs and dogs seized to protect community safety.

The rate of return directly to owner without the need for impounding has remained steady at around 36%. Further work to simplify the registration process, further development of mobile technology and work with neighbouring Councils to expedite the process of obtaining the current registration status of dogs crossing borders is expected to increase this number.

The number of cats impounded has fallen slightly over the last 4 years, from around 750 to 665.

The suspension of trapping cats for around six weeks during the first Covid 19 lockdown may partially account for this as well as work carried out by Rangers redirecting young litters through rescue agencies.

The percentage of cats being returned to owners also improved slightly over this period from 3.4% to 6.6% however, this low figure remains a concern. The number of cats being euthanised due to wild/semi-wild temperaments has increased from 38.2% in 2019/20 to 52.5% in 2020/21.

This would suggest that the cat over-population problem in Greater Dandenong comes not from owned, domesticated cat over breeding, but rather from the wild and semi-wild cat colonies. This suggestion is further supported by the rate of de-sexing amongst owned (registered) cats, which sits at 98%.

It is estimated the owned population of cats comprises only around 15% of the population of cats in this municipality.

### **8.3 Our current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures**

Council does not currently have any orders in place in relation to overpopulation or euthanasia rates.

Council participates in a subsidised de-sexing scheme, in partnership with the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA).

See Sections 3.2 and 3.3 for details on Local Laws and Council policies/procedures related to investigation and enforcement.

### **8.4 Our current Education/Promotion Activities**

- Fact Sheets.
- Brochures, micro-chipping, registration.
- Annual publication of Pet News magazine.
- Activities at local festivals, events.
- Website and Facebook page.
- Direct contact with stakeholders during routine patrols.

### **8.5 Our current Compliance Activities**

- Free use of cat traps for residents.
- Cat trapping programs for residents who are unable to do it themselves i.e. elderly/disabled.
- Enforcement of Local Laws in relation to excess animals – permits issued where appropriate.
- Enforcement of registration, micro-chipping and confinement requirements.



## 8.6 Summary

Current data indicates that Council's programs are having a positive impact on reducing the number of wandering dogs being impounded. This evidence would suggest that these impounded animals are owned pets that have escaped from their property and not stray dogs subsisting without human interaction.

Council records clearly indicate that there is an overpopulation of cats and that in the main these are un-owned 'wild' animals that can never be domesticated. It is Council's view that current legislation is not designed to deal with this type of problem. It is also Council's view that there is currently little State government support for addressing this problem. For example, under current legislation, Council cannot engage in trap, neuter, release programs aimed at reducing the numbers of un-owned cats in the community.

In other countries, spay/neuter release programs have proven effective as cats that are unable to breed consume some of the available food and thus reduce the food supply to breeding cats. This in turn reduces the number and the size of the litters. The current legislative framework does not allow for this practice in Victoria.

Research has shown that the size of a feral cat colony will increase relative to the food supply in the area and then remain fairly constant. Food supply is the main determining factor of colony size. The consistency of the number of impounded cats over the last few years would indicate that current practices are having little effect and further research is needed at the State and National levels, to investigate alternative strategies.

Methods of preventing the regular feeding of stray animals will be explored from an educational perspective.

Increasing the number of owned cats that are de-sexed and increasing the registration rates of cats can only have a positive effect on cat overpopulation. In Greater Dandenong, 98% of registered cats and 72.2% of dogs are currently de-sexed. Council is already investigating partnerships with vet practices to provide heavily discounted desexing, microchipping and registration to encourage residents to take full ownership of the large proportion of semi-owned cats. Evidence shown by some other councils have shown this targeted action can reduce the cat impound rate by as much as 80%.

Council has researched mandatory de-sexing where implemented by Councils in Victoria. That research found that the available evidence suggests this initiative does not necessarily increase the number of desexed cats, however it can have the result of reducing the number of registered cats. Given the high levels of voluntary de-sexing for owned cats in this municipality and the strong financial incentive provided by the registration fee structure, Council does not propose to re-consider mandatory de-sexing over the life of this plan, however Council will explore the viability of mandatory desexing for cats impounded and claimed by the owner prior to release.

Council is committed to attempting to further engage with animal shelters and rescue groups, with a view to improving re-homing rates for unclaimed, abandoned or surrendered animals. Council's first Volunteer Enrolled Foster Carer obtained a permit in December 2020 and rehomed around 60 cats in the first six months. Dialogue has also commenced with several other rescue groups with a view to forming partnerships with these agencies within the current legislative frameworks. Council already has such an arrangement in place with the Australian Animal Protection Society (AAPS), which is located in Keysborough.

Further research will be conducted into the need to introduce a cat curfew within the municipality. Some research was commenced in the 2017-2021 DAMP, however resource issues meant this was not completed.

It is anticipated the cost for impounding cats will reach in excess of \$250,00 per annum for the City of Greater Dandenong and is set to continue to increase unless strategies to reduce the number of cats impounded can be implemented.

**Objective 1:** Reduce percentage of registered dogs and cats that are currently entire and not part of a Domestic Animal Breeding Business each year.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Investigate partnerships to provide heavily discounted cat desexing, microchipping and registration for targeted areas.	July 2022	Number of cats de-sexed & registered as part of the scheme.  Cost to run scheme.  Changes in the longer term re proportion of de-sexed animals on pet registration database vs no. of impounded pets that are de-sexed.
Investigate mandatory desexing for impounded owned cats.	July 2022	Increase rate of desexed owned cats
Increase focus on promoting the benefits of de-sexing.	Ongoing	Literature and other educational material available.

**Objective 2: Reduce the number of stray cats wandering**

Investigate the need for a cat curfew in the municipality	Feb 2022	Reduction in cat complaints received by Council. Reduction in impound numbers
Implement use of Letter of Objection in relation to cat trespassing	March 2022	Use of infringement notices for repeat offenders leading to greater compliance
Investigate the need for mandatory cat enclosures for owners with excess cats (more than 2)	Aug 2024	Reduction in cat complaints received by Council. Reduction in impound numbers
Change in Local Law to allow cat enclosures to be closer than 1m to a fence-line	Aug 2024	Reduction in cat complaints received by Council. Reduction in impound numbers. Increased number of cat enclosures.

**Objective 3:** Investigate all Domestic Animal Businesses operating illegally in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Follow up people advertising pets for sale (i.e. in local papers or on local noticeboards), to determine if they are a DAB and are registered with Council.	Ongoing	Compare number of Council registered breeding establishments before and after campaign.
Audit every DAB each year for compliance. Enforce compliance with minimum requirements.	Annually in 4th Quarter	Number of audits conducted and summary of outcomes (including DABs closed due to noncompliance).

**Objective 4:** Provide great focus on responsible pet ownership education in more sustainable electronic formats

Activity	When	Evaluation
Develop regular articles to be posted on Lost and Found Webpage	Ongoing	Lost and Found Webpage provides regular new information on responsible pet ownership.
Develop Pet News publication in electronic format to be utilised on website, Lost & Found Facebook page and included in Council email lists	Annually in 1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter	Cost savings compared to hard copy format and size of audience reached

## **9. DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES**

### **9.1 Current Situation**

### **9.2 Our current data**

Council currently has five registered Domestic Animal Businesses, comprising:

- 4 x Pet shops
- 3 x Boarding kennels
- 1x dog trainer
- 1x Shelter

### **9.3 Our current Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures**

Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs) are strictly regulated under the provisions of the Domestic Animals Act and Regulations, as well as specific Codes of Practice created by that legislation. The relevant Codes of Practice are enforceable under the legislation and are seen as very comprehensive and effective tools for managing such businesses.

Because of the effectiveness of the tools described above, Council does not have any Orders or Local Laws in place in relation to DABs.

Council has developed a comprehensive tool for auditing DABs, that is based on the relevant Codes. Every DAB in the municipality is audited annually, to check compliance with the Codes.

The animal shelter operating within this municipality is the Australian Animal Protection Society (AAPS). Council has a formal agreement in place with the AAPS which enables it to operate as a pound. This arrangement allows the AAPS to receive unwanted/ surrendered animals and then to provide such animals with veterinary care; to rehabilitate them and to re-house them.

#### 9.4 Our current Education/Promotion Activities

As part of the annual audit process, DAB operators are reminded of the Code of Practice requirements and any amendments that may have arisen in the preceding year.

DABs that sell animals are required to provide customers with a specific range of information. As part of the audit process, businesses are also checked to ensure that they are providing customers with all of that information.

#### 9.5 Our current Compliance Activities

- Annual audits.
- Spot checks throughout the year.
- Prompt response to customer complaints (within one working day).
- Strict enforcement of Codes of Practice.

#### 9.6 Summary

There are no registered domestic animal breeding establishments currently in the municipality and changes to the definition of a DAB made in 2017 have so far had no impact on the number of premises required to register as a DAB.

#### 9.7 Our Plans

**Objective 1:** Identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses in the municipality

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify all businesses that should be registered DABs in the municipality, identify businesses selling pets / pet products / services in the municipality. Follow up to determine whether they are and should be registered with Council.	Ongoing	Compare number of registered DABs before and after activity.
Monitor popular trading publications to ensure microchip numbers are listed with all dogs and cats for sale.	ongoing	Compare number of registered DABs before and after activity.
Review current policies and procedure to ensure compliance with legislation changes.	Ongoing	Policies and procedures remain up to date.

**Objective 2:** Annually inspect and audit all registered Domestic Animal Businesses. Ensure 100% compliance with registration and mandatory codes of practice.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Conduct annual audits.  Where required, act promptly to address matters of non-compliance.	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter each year.  Action initiated within five working days of audit completion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit reports available for every DAB.</li> <li>• Levels of compliance recorded.</li> <li>• Enforcement activity reports e.g. Infringements issued, court prosecutions, revocation or refusals of registration.</li> </ul>

**Objective 3:** Establish and maintain 'information kiosks' in relevant DABs and Veterinary practices, to provide information on responsible pet ownership.

Activity	When	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Source range of brochures from existing suppliers - AWV, Council materials.</li> <li>▪ Negotiate size and location of displays with DAB proprietors</li> <li>▪ Source appropriate display units.</li> <li>▪ Install displays.</li> <li>▪ Monitor displays to ensure adequate stock and relevance of material, re-stock/replace as required.</li> </ul>	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kiosks available at participating DABs and Veterinary practices.</li> <li>• Stock levels of kiosks.</li> </ul>
In consultation with Vets and DABs, develop an online 'New Pet Owners Kit'	December 2023	Customer feedback on kit.

## 10. OTHER MATTERS

### 10.1 Emergency Management Plan

The City of Greater Dandenong currently has an Animal Emergency Management Plan in place.

### 10.2 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORTING

The City of Greater Dandenong develops both long- and short-term business plans. This includes annual business plans for each business unit of Council. Business plans are reported against quarterly, with these reports being presented directly to Council. Key activities and indicators are also included into Council's Annual report.

Each year, the relevant activities set out in this plan for that particular period, will be incorporated into the Regulatory Services Department's Annual Business Plan. Actions taken and outcomes achieved will then be reported quarterly. A fixed item in the Business plan will be annual review of this plan.

Council's Corporate Planning and Community Engagement Officer will be responsible for ensuring that required reporting is undertaken each year. Implementation and evaluation of the Plan will be the responsibility of the Regulatory Services Department.

At the end of each business planning cycle (currently financial year) the corporate report will provide a summary on progress in achievement of the plan's targets and objectives. That report will be provided by 31 August each year and where necessary, will also include any recommendations for amendment of the plan, as required by Section 68A (3) (a) of the Act. That report will also be used to inform Council's Annual report.

In accordance with the legislation, a full review of the plan will be conducted every four years. The Secretary of the DEDJTR will be consulted on the major review and then provided with a copy of the adopted plan.

The Secretary will also be advised and provided a copy of any other amendments to the plan which may arise from the annual review process.