

DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2026 ENDORSEMENT

Report Author: Executive Officer Safer Communities
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public.

SUMMARY

Yarra Ranges Council is required to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) at four-year intervals under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. The plan is required to be developed in consultation with the Department of Jobs, Planning and Resources (DJPR).

The DAMP 2022-2026 has been developed in accordance with best practice standards and informed by current available data, research, and community consultation. Council's community engagement activities enabled feedback from individuals, organisations, and businesses, and highlighted key themes that have helped shape the drafting of the DAMP.

The consultation periods ran from March-April and September-October 2022 generating 1,972 visits to the DAMP Shaping Yarra Ranges webpage and 360 downloads of the plan. Four in-person pop-up consultation sessions were also delivered to enable community feedback.

To ensure Council is meeting its legislative responsibilities, a final Council endorsed DAMP is required to be submitted to Department Jobs Precincts Regions by 2 December 2022.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorse the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026 and subsequent submission of the endorsed plan to the State Government Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions.

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

- 2 November 2022 - Forum Meeting – Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022 – 2026 Update
- 27 September 2022 – Council Meeting – Item 10.3 – Domestic Animal Management Plan
- 6 September 2022 – Forum Meeting – Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022 - 2026

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

Council is required to prepare a DAMP at four-year intervals under the Domestic Animals Act 1994. The DAMP is a guiding document that provides Council with a framework for identifying and addressing matters associated with the management and wellbeing of cats and dogs.

Council has a large pet registration database of over 25,185 dogs and 8,483 cats, a total of 33,668 animals. There has been a decrease within the system of 4,438 (-12%) between 2018 and 2021.

As well as current survey data, further research informed the eight key principals that guided the development of the DAMP, moving the plan beyond the traditional scope of animal management planning and services, to explore opportunities and innovative approaches that recognise and embrace the real value of pets. This is reflected in the changes from the previous iteration to recognise the role of pets in helping us achieve both personal and community health and wellbeing outcomes.

Several key themes were recurring areas of focus from the community, including 'Dealing with nuisances', 'Over-population, euthanasia, and abandoned pets' and 'Promoting and encouraging responsible ownership'.

Feedback received during September-October 2022 was overall supportive of the draft DAMP including direct comments such as "I was impressed with the document – it addressed several issues my husband and I have raised over the years..."

On some occasions feedback received was of a contradictory nature, for example "I want Council to allow owners to regulate if cats can go out of the home freely..." and conversely "Rules for cats need to be tightened up to keep native animals safe..."

To address competing views, an evidence-based approach has been taken to support Council action including, where appropriate, considering the impact of domestic animals on the environment. While not all comments can be reflected in the final version of the DAMP, they have influenced final decisions and statements being made.

Please see a summary of responses in attachment 2 (Summary of DAMP community consultation) for more detailed information.

While the DAMP 2022- 2026 has broadened its approach, it still retains Council's legislative responsibility to address issues relating to:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the service;
- The annual review and amendment of the DAMP where necessary;
- The review of policies, Local Laws and Orders;
- The training of Authorised Officers;
- The encouragement of responsible pet ownership;
- Minimising the risk of dog attacks;
- Minimising the incidence of nuisances caused by cats and dogs such as cats trespassing and dogs wandering;
- Ensuring cats and dogs are registered and identified;
- Animal welfare including the euthanasia rates of pets, in particular cats; and
- The management of animals in times of natural disasters.

Options considered

The development of the DAMP is a legislative requirement under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 therefore alternate options that did not meet the legislative requirements of the Act were not considered.

Recommended option and justification

The Yarra Ranges DAMP 2022 – 2026 Appendix A: Consolidated Action Plan outlines the Yarra Ranges Animal Management program over the next four years.

This plan meets the legislative requirements as outlined in the Act and is recommended for endorsement by Council and submission to DJPR.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Programs including the expansion of the cat trapping service (estimated at \$8,000) along with other actions outlined within the Draft DAMP and corresponding action plan, will be supported through existing operational budget and exploration of external funding opportunities through the State Government.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Connected and Healthy Communities;
- Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places;
- Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism; and
- High Performing Organisation.

Further to this, the DAMP 2022 – 2026 also contributes to Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities:

- Connected and healthy communities;
- Resilient and liveable communities; and
- Equitable and inclusive communities.

RELEVANT LAW

- Domestic Animals Act 1994. Section 68A; and
- Neighbourhood Local Amenity Law 2020.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

The DAMP provides opportunities to support local business and promote pet tourism within the municipality by leveraging the reputation of Yarra Ranges as an area which is safe for domestic animals, visitors, wildlife, and our community.

Council officers will actively engage with Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs) and Council's Economic Development team to explore further opportunities resulting from the DAMPs implementation.

Social Implications

The DAMP has highlighted key strategic connections with Health and Wellbeing, including

- People and dogs in parks;
- Safety through minimising dog attacks; and
- Responsible pet ownership.

Council officers will continue to collaborate with internal departments on the development other supporting plans, such as the Dogs, People and Parks Plan.

Environmental Implications

There are several environmental and wildlife impacts caused by cats and dogs. The DAMP seeks to address some of these issues through:

- Enforcement of the cat curfew and management of wandering cats to reduce the impact on native wildlife and opportunities for feral breeding;
- Education campaigns regarding appropriate disposal of dog litter and greater presence of Community Safety Officers in high traffic areas; and
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership to protect and ensure the sustainability of our natural environment and wildlife.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Consultation with internal council departments, external consultants and industry research has informed the development of the DAMP, with online and face to face submissions from the community.

Initial community consultation (March-April 2022) and consultation on the draft DAMP (28 September to 19 October 2022) was undertaken with online submissions and in person feedback being received and recorded. Council officers undertook over 120 hours of face-to-face consultation across September-October in the form of pop-up consultation sessions throughout the municipality.

Online Engagement

- 1,592 individual visitors to the Shaping Yarra Ranges DAMP webpage;
- 360 downloads of the Draft DAMP;
- 460 contributors took the time to provide feedback via Shaping Yarra Ranges;
- 38 pieces of feedback were provided to specific DAMP focus areas;
- 40% of the contributors were aged between 65 and 74 years;
- 80% of contributors identified as female;
- Most comments were supporting existing actions identified within the Draft DAMP; and
- The top three focus areas;
 - 45% of contributors provided input into Dealing with nuisances;

- 36% of contributors provided input into Over-population, euthanasia, and abandoned pets; and
- 27% of contributors provided input into Promoting and encouraging responsible ownership

Pop-up session engagement

- Sessions were held at various locations including
 - Healesville Community Link;
 - Yarra Junction Community;
 - Link Lilydale Marketplace; and
 - Wandin Silvan Field Days.
- Over 100 people took time to discuss the DAMP with Council officers

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In addition to community consultation, input and collaboration has been sought from Yarra Ranges Councillors, representatives from other Councils, external consultants and industry bodies.

Opportunities for innovation were identified during the development of the DAMP and have been captured within the Consolidated Action Plan contained within the document (attachment 1).

RISK ASSESSMENT

It is a legislative requirement of Council to ensure it prepares and implements a DAMP as directed by the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

The development of the DAMP and ensuring an appropriate consultation process minimises the risk of legislative non-compliance.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2026
2. Summary of DAMP community consultation