



Richmond
Valley
Council



Companion Animals Management Plan

Adopted 17 May 2016

Table of Contents

OBJECTIVES.....	3
BACKGROUND AND SCOPE.....	3
POLICY.....	4
1 – Companion Animals.....	4
Animal management in the Richmond Valley	4
Identification and registration.....	5
Impounding	5
Dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds	6
2 – Community Issues.....	6
Pet ownership and community conflict	6
Community education	6
Animal shelter (impound facility)	7
Off leash exercise areas.....	8
Places where dogs are prohibited	8
Places where cats are prohibited	9
3 – Environmental Issues.....	9
Noise pollution – barking dogs and cat noise.....	9
Faeces management.....	10
Impacts on wildlife and biodiversity.....	10
ACTION PLAN.....	11
1 – Administration, Control and Review	11
2 – Community Education	11
3 – Facilities	12
4 – Regulatory Control and Services.....	13
5 – Grant Funding.....	14

OBJECTIVES

- To promote responsible companion animal ownership through support, education and regulation and to encourage voluntary compliance of the Companion Animals Act (CAA) by companion animal owners.
- To provide an efficient and effective service to the community in relation to companion animal matters.
- To maintain best practice care and animal shelter facilities.
- To assist pet owners to enjoy their pets by providing facilities and services.
- To ensure the activities of owners and their pets do not adversely affect the rest of the community or the environment.

BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

Companion animals provide an important function in our Community. They create many social benefits and are positive in terms of companionship and human health. The benefits to the young, elderly and people living on their own are well documented.

There are also some sectors of the community which do not share the enthusiasm for companion animals and therefore companion animals may be a cause of conflict between neighbours and throughout the broader community. People's right not to be affected by the activities of companion animals must also be protected.

Good companion animal management is a valid community service. Poorly controlled dogs and cats have the potential to cause problems including a risk to public safety and traffic, predation on livestock, intrusive and aggressive behaviour, scavenging and noise nuisance.

The Companion Animals Act provides Council with the legal authority for the control and management of dogs and cats. In recent years this legislation has been strengthened in relation to dog attack incidents and the ownership of restricted and dangerous dogs.

There is also increasing recognition that enforcement approaches will not on their own, result in lasting changes in human behaviour. They need to be supplemented by a range of other tools that focus on passive and voluntary approaches to achieving responsible pet ownership.

This management plan provides a balanced and common sense approach to companion animal management in the Richmond Valley and helps achieve a harmonious co-existence between pet owners and the broader community.

The plan is confined to management of domestic dogs and cats.

POLICY

Council will provide a quality service to the community in relation to companion animal control. The community expects this to ensure companion animals do not create a nuisance or health, safety and environmental issues. It also ensures that opportunities are provided for owners and their pets to enjoy their local area.

This plan includes all relevant issues prescribed under legislation as well as the generally understood notion of socially responsible pet ownership. It is limited to the management of domestic dogs and cats.

1 – Companion Animals

Animal management in the Richmond Valley

Council employs two fulltime Rangers providing a service between 7.00am and 4.00pm on normal working days. An emergency after hour's response service for serious issues such as dog attacks or straying stock on busy roads is provided at all times outside normal working hours.

A number of services are provided by Council to manage companion animals:

- providing advice to the public
- investigating issues about dogs and cats (attacks, barking dogs, roaming, defecating etc)
- educating people about requirements, animal care etc
- patrolling residential areas and public places such as parks, reserves and beaches
- impounding roaming animals
- management of the animal shelter (pound)
- re-housing stray and abandoned dogs and cats
- running free micro-chipping community events
- issuing fines and instigating legal action
- enforcement and inspection of restricted and dangerous dog enclosures
- off leash exercise areas
- access to dog and cat traps through a controlled process.

The number of requests and enquiries related to companion animals has steadily increased in recent years and this trend continues with population growth. In general Rangers receive approximately 800 – 1,000 requests a year registered into Council's customer request system. Enquiries are also received via written correspondence and more informal avenues such as out in the field or doing patrols.

Staffing levels need to be monitored to ensure that the efficient and effective management of companion animals can be maintained.

Identification and registration

The Companion Animals Act requires the compulsory identification and registration of companion animals.

It is a requirement that companion animals must be microchipped from 12 weeks of age however cats owned before 1 July 1999 can be identified by either a microchip or collar and tag. Animals must be registered from 6 months of age (cats owned before 1 July 1999 are exempt).

Registrations are entered into a State wide register with a once only payment for the life of the animal. The State register serves an important role to assist in returning lost pets, identifying offending animals, and as a way of communicating with pet owners.

There are currently 9,611 dogs and 1,430 cats registered and / or micro-chipped in Councils LGA. This is a total of 11,041 companion animals. Rangers estimate that approximately 20% of dogs and as many as 60% of cats are not micro-chipped and registered so the number of dogs and cats in our LGA is likely to be much higher. We estimate that there may be as many as 11,500 dogs to manage.

Impounding

Council responds to complaints and actively patrols for animals straying in public places. When an animal is seized, the following actions are followed:

1. The animal is checked for external identification, and
2. The animal is scanned for permanent identification (microchip), and
3. The contact details are accessed from the State Companion Animal Register, and
4. Contact with the owner is attempted, and
5. The animal is returned to the owner's address if they are in residence, or
6. The animal is transported to the animal shelter, in accordance with the legislation and standard operating procedures.

The Companion Animals Act outlines the procedure for dealing with seized or surrendered animals. Seized animals may be sold or destroyed after 14 days if the animal is identified and registered or after 7 days if there is no identification on the animal.

Council prioritises the re-housing of animals that are abandoned, roaming, or surrendered. Our rangers have established strong links with animal care establishments to find new homes for the animals that come into our care. Council has a well-publicised webpage and Facebook page where we actively seek good homes for these animals.

It is a pro-active program which has come about due to the support it receives from our community and the significant effort put in by our Rangers. Many fantastic outcomes for the dogs and cats are achieved.

To achieve this Rangers are required to dedicate significant time to liaise with animal welfare and re-housing groups and with the community.

Dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds

Council can declare dogs kept in its local government area to be a dangerous or menacing dog.

Part 5 of the Companion Animals Act specifies the requirements for owners of a declared dangerous or menacing dog. Requirements include desexing, muzzling them in public and confining them in a childproof enclosure (dangerous only).

Restricted Dogs (s55-58) are required to comply with similar requirements to the owners of dangerous dogs. The Act defines restricted dogs as:

- American pit bull terrier or pit bull terrier
- Japanese Tosa
- Dogo Argentino (Argentinian fighting dogs)
- Fila Brasileiro (Brazilian fighting dogs)
- Any dog declared by Council to be a restricted dog.

2 – Community Issues

Pet ownership and community conflict

The health and social benefits of owning pets are now well understood and have been documented in numerous studies. Companion animals can be especially important to the young, elderly, people with mental illness and people living on their own. Recent studies also show that dog owners tend to be more active than people who don't own a dog due to the need to walk their pet.

There are also people in the community who may not share this enthusiasm for companion animals.

The right for people to not be affected by the activities of companion animals needs to be considered along with the needs of providing opportunities for owners and their pets.

Conflict between people and companion animals does occur, particularly when there is close proximity to neighbouring dwellings. The type of issues raised by the community shows that the issues can be widespread.

Community education

Education plays an important role in achieving good companion animal management in the community. A regulatory approach is necessary but on its own is inherently inefficient because of its focus on means rather than ends and because it consumes significant resources in maintaining an enforcement presence.

It is therefore imperative that Council has regard, initiates, and adopts approaches that take advantage of the individual strengths of both the regulatory and educative means.

Council has changed its focus in recent years and Rangers now actively pursue an educative approach. This is very important as Rangers are in the front line and deal directly with the public providing the opportunity to inform and educate.

Voluntary compliance of requirements generated through education will just about always provide more meaningful, lasting changes in behaviour however it can change behaviour slowly and can also be expensive. Serious and urgent matters or repeat offenders are likely to require a regulatory approach.

Council has developed effective communication platforms using social media to get the message out along with the more traditional methods.

It is important that use of this platform is maximised to get the message out to the public about companion animals and requirements. It is also considered valuable to promote positive messages including Council's rehousing program and stories of animals successfully being rehoused and other local animal stories.

Animal shelter (impound facility)

Council's animal shelter was constructed in 2004 and contains eleven dog pens and a cattery located under the same roof in a separate area. It is located at Dargaville Drive, Nammoona within the grounds of Councils Casino landfill.

The shelter is open to the public seven days a week between the hours 8.00am to 4.00pm.

Council operates the shelter having a high regard for animal health and wellbeing. Rangers regularly assess the dogs and cats in our care and arrange veterinary care or other assistance as necessary.

The service includes:

- A dedicated re-homing program involving a significant amount of liaising between Rangers, animal care and welfare groups and the community
- The vaccination and desexing of all animals re-homed and discounted micro-chipping and desexing service
- A website for people to view lost and impounded animals
- Potential owner interviews and animal meet and greet service for re-homing
- Educational services
- Sustenance, shelter and veterinarian care to all impounded animals along with daily walks and/or release into dog runs
- A service to temporarily hold animals in Evans Head for transfer to the Casino shelter.

Council has been committed to improving the facility with recent upgrades and modifications including:

- Additional dog runs
- An area for cats to go outdoors and sun themselves
- New dog beds
- A recycled water cooling system for the shelters roof.

Off leash exercise areas

Council can declare a public place to be a dog off leash area. Off leash areas provide a benefit to dogs and their owners and are generally popular and well received.

Currently there are ten dog exercise/off leash areas throughout the Local Government Area as follows:

- Queen Elizabeth Park Oval No.1 from outer fence to riverbank, Casino
- McDonald Park, adjacent to river at western end of Fergusson Street, Casino
- Vacant land off East Street, Warren Park, Casino
- Fenced area within turning circle off Centre Street, Crawford Square, South Casino
- Unfenced area east of Fishermans Co-op, South Evans Head
- 1.3km of Airforce Beach, Evans Head from Terrace Street 4WD access, north to designated signage
- The unformed road reserve known as Parkes Street, between Grenfell and Adams Streets, Coraki
- Public Recreation Reserve adjacent to the Richmond River, Coraki running from the bridge south
- The Pony Club area adjacent to Woodburn Oval
- The Rappville Oval

Council invests regularly to provide additional off leash areas and to provide improvements such as fencing, drinking stations, doggy poo stations etc at off leash areas.

Places where dogs are prohibited

Companion animals are prohibited from some public places (s14, s14A and s30 of the Act):

- Within 10 metres of a children's play area
- Recreation and public bathing areas where dogs are declared to be prohibited
- School grounds, child care centres and community event areas
- Shopping areas where dogs are prohibited
- Wildlife protection areas
- Food preparation/consumption areas (meaning any public place, or part of a public place, that is within 10 metres of any apparatus provided in that public place or part, for the preparation of food for human consumption or for the consumption of food).

NOTE: Dogs are not prohibited in outdoor dining areas in certain circumstances (s14A of the Act) provided the dog is under the effective control of some competent person and is restrained by means of an adequate chain, cord or leash that is attached to the dog, and the person does not feed the dog or permit the dog to be fed, and that the dog is kept on the ground.

Places where cats are prohibited

Under the Companion Animals Act, cats are prohibited in the following public places:

- Food preparation or consumption areas; and
- Wildlife protection areas (unless it is a public thoroughfare such as a road, footpath or pathway).

A wildlife protection area is a public place that has been declared by Council for the protection of wildlife. The Council is requesting cat owners to ensure that their pets are kept out of these areas at all times.

Other options for protection of wildlife vulnerable to attacks by cats include:

- Education to encourage people to keep their cats indoors, particularly during the night to prevent cats from roaming,
- Cat proof fences and enclosures, and
- Use of housing designs to help owners to responsibly confine their cats.

3 – Environmental Issues

Noise pollution – barking dogs and cat noise

While all dogs bark, it is those that bark excessively that require management. Barking dogs account for approximately 12% of complaints about companion animals received by the Council.

Barking dogs are a significant community problem and can result in loss of neighbourhood amenity, anxiety, sleep disruption and aggression. However, an animal barking may be due to: territorial behaviour, boredom, separation anxiety, illness, visual stimuli/distraction or teasing.

Barking dog incidents are often difficult to resolve and consume extensive resources. It is the responsibility of the animal owner to control their animal inclusive of barking issues.

Where Council receive ongoing complaints about a barking dog the animal may be declared a nuisance and on the spot fines apply. Usage of a diary system regarding excessive barking may be effective in determining if a legitimate complaint exists, pinpoints the times of excessive barking, assists in providing solutions and builds a case if legal action is initiated.

Those affected by barking may also utilise a Noise Abatement Order under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*.

The noise of cats fighting in the middle of the night is reported less frequently than dogs but is still a cause of noise pollution.

Faeces management

Companion animal faeces are a significant environmental and public health issue. The pollution of urban yards, footpaths, parks, reserves and beaches by animal faeces and the resulting pollution of waterways by stormwater run-off, are of environmental concern.

Organisms such as parasites, protozoa and bacteria can be transferred to people and animals via faecal matter and contaminated stormwater. There is also the potential for infection to be passed to humans.

Roundworm is a primary health concern, as this organism resides in the small intestine of dogs, and its eggs are passed to the outside environment in the faeces. The eggs may remain infective in the soil for a number of years. While humans do not develop adult roundworm, the migration of the larvae through tissue and organs can cause disease. Young children, active sports players, and people confined to hand-activated wheelchairs have the greatest risks of exposure.

Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious viral disease that can produce a life-threatening illness in dogs. Although not transferred to humans it is an important environmental health issue and can live in the environment including inanimate objects such as shoes, food bowls, carpet and clothes.

Council provides appropriate rubbish bins for animal faeces at the prescribed exercise areas and the provision of 'poo-bag' dispensers is restricted due to costs. There may be opportunities for future poo bag dispensers to be paid for and sponsored by local organisations.

The failure of animal owners to properly dispose of their animal faeces is an offence and on the spot fines may be issued.

Impacts on wildlife and biodiversity

Richmond Valley Council is renowned for its natural environment boasting beautiful beaches at Evans Head, estuary and marine ecosystems and large areas of National Park and State Forest to the west which all support an array of wildlife.

Various species of threatened and endangered flora and fauna have been identified. Notable bird examples being: Pied Oystercatcher and Little Tern located in coastal areas. It is vital that animal management strategies be implemented to assist with protection of these and other species.

ACTION PLAN

1 – Administration, Control and Review

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
1. To provide an effective management and review process for the Management Plan	1.1 Review current Management Plan at completion and report to Council	Manager Environment and Regulatory Services (MERS)	May 2018	Plan reviewed and reported to Council
	1.2 Draft and adopt Management Plan ongoing.	(MERS)	June 2018	Plan drafted and adopted by Council
2. Report regularly on the status of companion animals	2.1 Prepare bi-annual and annual reports including data on registrations, impounding, dangerous/menacing declarations and achievement of performance indicators	(MERS)	2015 - 2018	Reports submitted as required
3. Maximise cost effectiveness of companion animal management	3.1 Seek grant opportunities and sponsorship for programs eg. Education programs and discounted microchipping & desexing	(MERS)	Ongoing	Level of assistance obtained

2 – Community Education

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
4. Provide education to the broader community	4.1 Develop and distribute education material which provides information regards; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> responsibilities under Act registration requirements desexing use of off leash areas consequences of roaming uncontrolled dogs 	Rangers & (MERS)	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of registration & microchipping % of dogs and cats desexed Number of warnings notices to comply and on the spot fines
	4.2 Distribute education packages via pet shops, local vet centres, dog groups, council facilities	Rangers	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. of brochures distributed
5. Use councils electronic communication platform (Facebook, website, rich message software and mobile messaging) to communicate and educate	5.1 Liaise with councils Communications and media staff to develop strategies for use of E platform	Rangers & Communications staff	July 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy developed that allows effective use of E Platform
	5.2 Post articles, messages and information on E platform	Rangers & communications staff	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. of times messages and information posted Feedback received on Facebook and website and phone texts

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
6. Update and provide signage in public places to advise owners of requirements and use of space	6.1 Review adequacy of existing signs. List in order of priority for replacing	Rangers & Assets	September 2016 & annually thereafter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review completed
	6.2 Design & install new up to date signs in designated public places	Rangers & Assets	As required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New signage installed subject to funding
	6.3 Ensure signs are maintained on Council reserves, off leash areas, beaches	Rangers	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 monthly inspections undertaken

3 – Facilities

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
7. Provide suitable animal holding facilities that comply with relevant legislation & guidelines that are cost effective and efficient.	7.1 Assess status of impounding facility and holding facility and provide needs analysis (short – medium term and long term)	(MERS) & Rangers	November 2016	Report prepared and submitted to Management Team for consideration
	7.2 Identify upgrade needs for Councils Management Plan and annual budget as per needs analysis (7.1).	(MERS) & Rangers	February annually	Upgrades considered in Council budget process
	7.3 Prepare a procedure/protocol for staff to follow at pound detailing daily activities & requirements	(MERS)	January 2016	Procedure completed
	7.4 Ensure pound facilities are kept clean and well maintained	Rangers	Ongoing	Inspections indicate compliance
8. Prioritise the re-housing of animals in the pound	8.1 Continue to support a network and improve links with registered associations to rehouse animals	(MERS), Rangers & Customer Service Staff	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links with registered associations strong. % of animals rehoused
	8.2 Promote animals that are in the pound available for adoption/rehousing	Rangers, Customer Service & Communications staff	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. of animals promoted.
9. Provide access to public open space for dogs both leashed & unleashed for exercise, socialise with other animals and with their owners	9.1 Provide and maintain the 10 off-leash areas (OLA) to comply with legislative requirements	Rangers & Coordinator Parks and Open Spaces	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off leash areas provided and maintained
	9.2 Undertake an annual review of OLAs	Rangers	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review completed

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
	9.3 Consider as part of any new urban releases and residential developments the appropriate recreational areas compatible to meet the needs of companion animal owners	Environmental Health officers and Coordinator Development Assessment	As required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. of and amount of area provided for use by companion animals

4 – Regulatory Control and Services

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
10. Provide a system that maximises the number of identified and registered dogs/cats.	10.1 Establish an effective system to help capture dogs and cats in the LGA that are not registered at 6 months of age.	(MERS) & Rangers	Ongoing	High % of registrations
	10.2 Maintain follow-up procedures to capture dogs and cats entering the LGA have had appropriate details entered on the NSW registry.	(MERS), Rangers & Customer Service	Ongoing	Changes recorded on the register
11. Maintain noise control provisions for reducing the impacts associated with barking dogs	11.1 Maintain complaint procedures for handling the control of barking dogs.	Rangers & Customer Service	Ongoing	High % of complaints resolved
	11.2 Distribution of information including suggestions for resolving problem and Community Justice Centre details.	Rangers & Customer Service	Ongoing	Information distributed
12. Implement Dangerous Dog / Restricted Breeds Provisions	12.1 Implement Dangerous Dog provisions of the Companion Animals Management Act.	Rangers and (MERS)	Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provisions implemented within 72 hours of complaint Quarterly review completed as part of Management Plan Annual inspection undertaken Register updated bi-annually

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
13. Provide a regulatory framework and competently trained officers and adequate resources to implement the statutory requirements of the Companion Animals Act and Regulation 1998 and the objectives of the Companion Animals Management Plan that is fair and enforceable.	13.1 Provide sufficient full-time rangers / recurrent funding for employment	(MERS)	Annually	Current activity level being met
	13.2 Review staff resources and funding sources for Ranger services to provide an acceptable level of service to meet increased demands and projected population growth.	(MERS)	Annually	Annual review completed as part of Management Plan and budget estimates
	13.3 Undertake scheduled patrols of public places and implement Council policies and legislative requirements.	Rangers	Daily	No. of daily patrols undertaken

5 – Grant Funding

Strategy	Activity	Responsibility	Timeframe	Measure
14. Be proactive in accessing grants available related to Companion Animals Management.	14.1 Identify grant programs available. 14.2 Apply for grants where capacity and needs are identified.	(MERS), Rangers and Grants Officer	Ongoing	No. of grant applications submitted.