

Hindmarsh Shire Council
**Domestic Animal
Management Plan**

2021-2025



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Domestic Animal Management Plan

The Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act) requires council to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan (**plan**) every four years.

The plan must set out a method for evaluating whether the animal management services provided by council are adequate to give effect to requirements of the Act and the *Domestic Animal Regulations 2015*.

The plan must also outline programs for the training of authorised officers along with programs, services and strategies to:

- ensure that people comply with the Act, the regulations and any related legislation; and
- minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and
- address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and
- encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and
- minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and
- 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 this Act and the regulations; and
- provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the Council's municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable; and
- provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary; and
- provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

Council is also required to review and where appropriate amend the plan and publish an evaluation of the implementation of the plan in the Council annual report.

1.2 Process applied in developing the plan

This plan has been developed in reference to the relevant legislation and regulations and Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017 – 2021.

Council made the draft plan available to the Hindmarsh community, inviting submissions, from 5 August 2021 until 6 September 2021.

Council did not receive any submissions from the community.

1.3 Overarching objectives

The overarching objectives of this plan are to:



1. **Promote and encourage** responsible pet ownership in the Hindmarsh Shire Community
2. **Contribute** to the health and wellbeing of pets and people in the Hindmarsh Shire Community
3. **Reduce** domestic animal nuisance issues and dog attacks

The Plan is based on the follow strategic directions for the delivery of Council's animal management services:

- Training of authorised officers
- Promoting and educating people about responsible pet ownership
- Addressing overpopulation
- Registration and identification
- Nuisance
- Dog attacks
- Dangerous, menacing and restricted dogs
- Domestic animal businesses

1.4 Demographic and profile of Shire

The Shire of Hindmarsh is located in the Wimmera Region halfway between Melbourne and Adelaide and comprises 7,500 square kilometers and a population of 5,700. Our four main towns (Dimboola, Jeparit, Nhill and Rainbow) are attractive and have a rich history dating back to the 19th century. The Shire shares its boundaries with West Wimmera Shire Council, Yarriambiack Shire Council, Horsham Rural City Council and Mildura Rural City Council.

Recent years have seen an increase in residents from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, particularly in Nhill. Approximately 180 Karen have made their home in Nhill since Luv-a-duck initiated employment of five migrants in 2010.

On census night 2021, there were 5,698 people in the Shire. There were 91 people of Indigenous origin. The median age in Hindmarsh is 50 years compared with Australia's median of 38 years.

82.6% stated that they were Australian-born. English was the only language spoken in 86.0% of homes. Of the other languages spoken at home, the most common were Karen (3.7% or 213 people), Tagalog (0.3%), Malayalam (0.3%), Filipino and Vietnamese (both 0.2%).

1.5 Context and current situation

Description of current animal management and responsible pet ownership programs and services.

Programs / service	Service level
<i>Identification and registration</i>	Approximately 1,500 dogs and cats registered each year
<i>Identification and registration – door knock campaigns</i>	Hindmarsh Shire Council conducts a doorknocking campaign to identify animals that have not been registered
<i>Domestic animal complaints</i>	A response will be provided within 2 days
<i>Dangerous dog complaints</i>	Same day response
<i>Routine street patrols</i>	Council routinely patrols the streets in Nhill, Jeparit, Rainbow and Dimboola
<i>Pound</i>	Council has a domestic animal pound
<i>After hours emergency service</i>	Council provides after hours emergency service 24/7

1.6 Domestic animal statistics

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2021/2022	2022/2023
<i>Dogs registered</i>	1187	1012	1023	893
<i>Cats registered</i>	402	366	350	306
<i>Dogs impounded</i>	17	21	17	20
<i>Dogs euthanised</i>	0%	9%	0%	2
<i>Cats impounded</i>	152	67	123	152
<i>Cats euthanised</i>	85%	37%	91%	93%
<i>Number of declared dogs</i>	1 menacing	1 menacing	1 menacing 2 dangerous	1 menacing
<i>Number of animals seized / surrendered</i>	152	88	141	172
<i>Number of animals reclaimed/transferred for adoption.</i>			11 cats 17 dogs	8 cats 18 dogs
<i>Number of prosecutions</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>Number of complaints relating to dogs and cats</i>	351	397	453	350

2 TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

Local Laws Officers undertake training to ensure they comply with all requirements as per their position description. This section of the plan outlines the programs for the training of Local Laws officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council’s municipal district. Recurring training should include;

- Animal behaviour management
 - Dog behaviour and body language

- Working with fearful/aggressive dogs
- Dog handling equipment
- Defensive dog handling skills
- Investigations and Prosecutions
- Dealing with difficult and vexatious customers
- Pound maintenance and compliance
- Records management
- Prevention of family violence and responding to disclosures

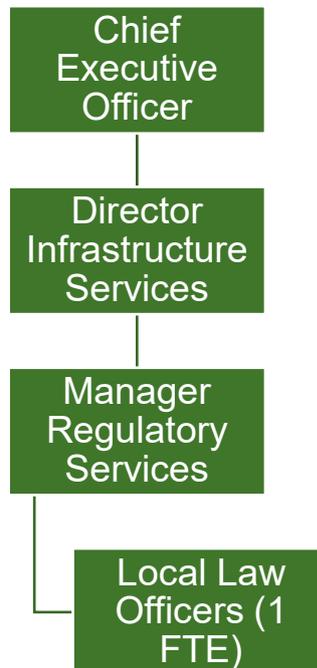
As well as ad-hoc training regarding legislative changes, regulatory requirements and other education and enforcement-related areas.

2.1 Context and current situation

All Animal Management Officers receive ongoing on-the-job training and are encouraged to have or attain the Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation. Council's annual performance reviews include a review of the staff members' skills and training undertaken in the last year.

Council currently has **one full time Local Laws officer** whose responsibilities include enforcing a wide range of legislation. Domestic animal management services form only a part of each role.

2.1.1 Organisational structure



2.2 Our plans

Objective 1: develop a training plan that clearly identifies minimum training requirements and any additional training opportunities that should be undertaken by animal management officers.

ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Identify minimum training requirements for Council's Animal Management staff	Training Plan for Council's Animal Management staff finalised and approved	HR	Annual
Review staff qualifications	Staff have the relevant training	HR	Annual
Identify additional training opportunities by consulting with relevant staff and management	Annual performance reviews include review of skills	Management HR	Annual

Objective 2: Council will encourage officers to undergo further study to obtain higher animal management, welfare qualifications and, where practical, to attend relevant conferences and seminars.

ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Identify additional training opportunities eg, prosecutions training, conflict management, communication / education technique, networking opportunities and conferences	Annually review what training officers undertook that was in addition to their minimum requirements. Meet the objective of providing at least 2 additional training opportunities annually.	Management HR	Annual

3 PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP AND COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION

Council plays an important leadership role in supporting and promoting responsible pet ownership. This section outlines how council promotes and encourages responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation.

3.1 Context and current situation

Council provides information to pet owners within the Shire to encourage responsible pet ownership. Council also makes use of social media and newsletters to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation. Council provides information packs to all educational facilities and community groups to encourage the education of Responsible Pet Ownership for Children, which will focus on the following priorities:

- Registration and microchipping of dogs and cats;
- Desexing of dogs and cats; and
- Confinement of dogs and cats. Council will annually undertake regular doorknocks to identify unregistered dogs and cats.

3.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Council’s Municipal Local Law provides that a person must obtain a permit if they wish to keep more than:

- Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age; or
- Two (2) cats over three (3) months of age; or
- Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age and two (2) cats over three (3) months of age.

Council’s Municipal Local Law also provides that it is an offence for a dog or cat to roam at large between dusk and dawn in a residential area.

Both provisions are in place to encourage responsible pet ownership.

Council has an Enforcement Policy in place which guides Council’s approach in enforcement action.

3.3 Our plan

Objective 1: Reduce the number of pecuniary compliance actions by educating the community about their legislative obligations.			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Review fact sheets and web content regarding legislative obligations to ensure that it is relevant, engaging and accessible	Reduce infringements issued	Management	Annually
Objective 2: promote ‘Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife’ messaging among residents.			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Circulate safe Cat, Safe Wildlife education material throughout municipality (Find out more: www.safecat.org.au)	Less reports of wandering/nuisance cats per annum	Local Law Officers	Annually in March

4 PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS OVER POPULATION RATES AND ANY HIGH EUTHANASIA RATES

This section outlines how Council addresses over population and high euthanasia rates in dogs and cats.

4.1 Context and current situation

Council’s pound and euthanasia policies are guided by the *Domestic Animal Act* 1994. Council operates under its own pound and policies and procedures in accordance with the *Domestic Animals Act* 1994 and code of practice for shelters and pounds.

Council’s Municipal Local Law provides that a person must obtain a permit if they wish to keep more than:

- Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age; or
- Two (2) cats over three (3) months of age; or

- Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age and two (2) cats over three (3) months of age.

Council has cat cages which can be hired out to community members to assist with trapping nuisance cats.

Council currently undertakes the following compliance activities in support of increasing registration and reducing euthanasia rates:

- Renewal follow-ups for registration and identification for domestic dogs and cats;
- Vehicle patrols;
- Nuisance complaint response;
- Compulsory registration of animal released from the pound;
- Enforcement where required.

<i>Euthanasia Rates</i>				
	2018/2019	2019/2020	2021/2022	2022/2023
<i>Dogs euthanised</i>	0	2	0	2
<i>Cats euthanised</i>	129	25	112	142

4.2 Our Plan

Objective 1: To provide readily accessible information to the public in relation to overpopulation and high euthanasia rates			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Promote confinement of animals to owner's premises to prevent stray cats and dogs and possible euthanasia if the animal is not microchipped and registered.	Promote compliance and the importance of registration	Local Law Officers	Ongoing
Circulate safe Cat, Safe Wildlife education material throughout municipality (Find out more: www.safecat.org.au)	Less reports of wandering/nuisance cats per annum	Local Law Officers	Annually in March
Objective 2: Reduce the number of cats and dogs euthanised			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Investigation of the suitability of entering into section 84Y agreements with animal welfare, re-housing and adoption groups. A section 84Y agreement can allow for a person or body to seize, retain or dispose of cats or dogs.	This can be evaluated against figures for euthanasia after the program is up and running.	Manager	Ongoing
Objective 3: Apply for government grant funding to support delivery of a low cost (or free) cat desexing program.			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Implement the Hindmarsh Shire Council Cat Desexing Program, as funded through the Animal Welfare Grants Program.	Number of cats desexed by the end of the desexing program.	Manager	January 2024 completion. Reapply as opportunities arise.

5 REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Registration and identification of domestic animals is considered to be a core task for animal management. It is the basis for distinguishing between owned and unowned animals, returning lost pets to their owners, identifying offending animals etcetera. This section of the plan outlines the programs services and strategies to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats.

All newly registered dogs and cats now need to be microchipped before they can be registered. Council recognises that this is difficult in isolated areas with few veterinarians.

5.1 Context and current situation

Hindmarsh Shire Council's current identification and registration activities include:

- Publishing regular articles in Council’s community newsletter and social media promoting the need for residents to register their pets and to keep their pets contained to their property.
- Increased application of Infringement Notices to owners of unregistered animals.
- Providing a ‘free ride home’ for registered dogs found wandering at large and not causing a nuisance provided it is not a repeat offence or an ongoing concern.
- Conducting door knocking campaigns to identify unregistered pets.

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2021/2022	2022/2023
<i>Dogs registered</i>	1187	1012	1023	893
<i>Cats registered</i>	402	366	350	306

5.2 Our Orders, Local Laws and Policies

Council has no Orders or Local Laws relevant to the registration of cats and dogs, however, Council’s Municipal Local Law does require a person to have an excess animal permit if they have more than two dogs or two cats (or a combination of both). Council’s main controls relating to registration of animals come from the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*. Council currently provides:

- Registration and identification for dogs and cats, including renewal and follow-ups and doorknocks;
- Registration and identification of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs;
- Regular animal registration updates via our website and social media.

Council’s current compliance activities are:

- Issuing registration notices annually;
- Following up non-renewals with phone calls and door knocks;
- Conducting random door knocking each year to check for unregistered cats and dogs
- Requiring that all seized and impounded animals are registered and microchipped prior to their release;
- Patrolling public places, such as streets, reserves and parks to check that dogs are registered;
- Issuing notices to comply, infringements where required and prosecution of owners with unregistered dogs and cats.

5.3 Our plan

Objective 1: Increase the number of dog and cat registrations by conducting door knocks and educating residents in relation to their legislative obligations			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Increase registration by conducting annual door knocks throughout the municipality to ensure dogs and cats are registered	Demonstrate increase in numbers of pets registered with Council following annual door knocks	Local Law Officers	Annually
Advertise pet registration renewals – webpage, entry points of Council and social media posts	Increase in numbers of pets registered with Council	Local Law Officers	Annually

6 NUISANCE

Nuisance complaints received by Council are generally related to barking dogs, dogs at large, dog attacks and feral cats. This section outlines the programs and services in place to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance.

6.1 Context and current situation

Council's response to barking complaints is to encourage the complainant to discuss the problem with their neighbour. If this course of action fails, Council will inform the dog owner of the problem and provide them an opportunity to rectify it. Council employs investigation, negotiation, communication and education strategies to resolve most nuisance issues. If legal action is identified as being required, it is necessary for the complainant to become involved and provide much of the evidence.

Council provides a dog seizure and impoundment service to help prevent dogs found at large from being harmed or becoming a nuisance. Registered dogs found at large are returned to their owners who are informed of their obligation to keep their dog contained. Unregistered dogs at large are delivered to the pound and penalties applied.

Council has for many years made up to ten cat traps available for hire by residents. These traps are continually out for hire with on-going demand reflected in a waiting list of residents seeking to access the cat trapping program in order to alleviate their cat related problems.

6.2 Our orders, local laws, Council policies and procedures

Council's Municipal Local Law contains provisions to mitigate domestic animals causing a nuisance including:

- A person must obtain a permit if they wish to keep more than:
 - Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age; or
 - Two (2) cats over three (3) months of age; or
 - Two (2) dogs over three (3) months of age and two (2) cats over three (3) months of age.

- A person must not allow any dog or cat to be in or on any road, public place or Council land unless the dog or cat is under effective control.
- A person must not, in a residential area, release a dog or cat so as to enable that dog or cat to attack or endanger any person or animal.
- A person in charge of a dog that defecates in a public place must immediately remove the faeces.

Council responds effectively to nuisance complaints relating domestic animals.

6.3 Our plan

Objective 1: Reduce cat nuisance complaints			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Provide education material about cat enclosures	Increased use of cat enclosures	Local Law Officers	Ongoing
Circulate safe Cat, Safe Wildlife education material throughout municipality (Find out more: www.safecat.org.au)	Less reports of wandering/nuisance cats per annum.	Local Law Officers	Annually in March

7 DOG ATTACKS

Whilst the number of dog attacks is not high in the Hindmarsh Shire, managing them is a critical animal management role. This section outlines the programs, services and strategies Council has in place to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals.

7.1 Context and current situation

All dogs are required to be confined to their property. This is a requirement under the Act and Council will continue to place importance on the need for dogs to be confined. Council will also continue to place importance on the need for cats to be confined. Council will encourage people to have their dogs and cats de-sexed. This can help to reduce aggressive tendencies.

Council believes the State Government's state-wide schools visitation program is an excellent means for educating children in how to behave around dogs.

Council currently investigates reported dog attacks and where a serious attack has been substantiated, endeavours to have the dog(s) responsibly euthanized. If an owner refuses to surrender a dog for euthanization, Council will investigate the matter with intention of prosecuting, provided there is adequate evidence to support a successful prosecution.

Infringements are issued for minor attacks and articles are routinely published in local media alerting residents to the potential consequences of allowing their dog to wander at large.

	2018/2019	2019/2020	2021/2022	2022/2023
<i>Number of declared dogs</i>	1 menacing	1 menacing	1 menacing 2 dangerous	1 menacing
<i>Number of prosecutions</i>	0	0	1	1

7.2 Our orders, local laws, Council policies and procedures

Council follows the requirements set out in the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*. Council's Municipal Local Law additionally provides that a person must not, in a residential area, release a dog or cat so as to enable that dog or cat to attack or endanger any person or animal.

Council has a Dog Attack Procedure which outlines the process that should be undertaken in the event of a Dog Attack.

7.3 Our plan

Objective 1: increase reporting of dog attacks in the community			
ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Improve public awareness of what a dog attack is and how to report it	Evaluate this activity (and overall objective) by comparing number of dog attacks reported to council pre and post campaign. Meet objective of increasing reports by (number) % Could also consider doing a community survey to measure awareness of dog attacks and how to report them, before and after the campaign.	Local Law Officers	Ongoing
Review Council's dog attack procedure	Improve investigation process	Management	Minimum every 2 years
Develop information pack for owner of attacking dog and owners of attacked animal	Ensure dog attacks are being reported	Local Law Officers	Complete, review and update as required

8 DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

This section outlines how Council effectively identifies all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in the Shire and ensures those dogs are kept in a way which complies with the *Domestic Animal Act 1994* and the regulations.

8.1 Context and current situation

Very few dogs are declared in Hindmarsh Shire Council as owners of dogs that are involved in serious attacks are encouraged to surrender their dog to council to be euthanised if the attack is proven.

Council's approach will continue to involve removing dangerous or restricted breed dogs with consent of owners from within the community. In any situation where an owner refuses to surrender their dog, Council will investigate the matter with a view to prosecute. Council will continue to respond to reports of Restricted Breed Dogs as per requirements of the Act.

8.2 Our policies and procedures

Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are controlled by the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*.

Council provides the community with information regarding declared dogs. Council treats all dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs very seriously and undertakes the following compliance activities:

- Declaration of dogs in appropriate situations;
- Registration and identification of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs; and
- Updating the declared dog database.

Objective 1: Developing a policy to assist in deciding whether or not to declare a dog dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dog provides assurance to local residents the decision making is fair and nonbiased.

ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Develop a policy to assist decision making regarding the declaration process	Policy implemented	Management	Complete. Review every 2 years or as required.

Objective 2: Ensure declared dogs are compliant to relevant legislation and regulations

ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Conduct random property inspections of declared dogs to ensure compliance	Compliance with declared dog requirements	Local Law Officers	Ad hoc

9 DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES

This section outlines programs, services and strategies Council has in place or plans to have in place to ensure that people comply with the Act, regulations and relevant legislation regarding domestic animal businesses.

9.1 Context and current situation

Hindmarsh Shire Council does not have many domestic animal businesses. However, Council does provide information and guidance to people who want to start a domestic animal business. There are approved Codes of Practice for the operation of breeding and rearing establishments, boarding establishments and shelters and pounds. Council ensures that relevant organisations are aware of and comply with the relevant code of practice.

9.2 Current policies and procedures

Domestic animal business registration is controlled by the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*.

9.3 Our plan

Objective: identify and register all Domestic Animal Businesses in the municipality

ACTION	EVALUATION	WHO	WHEN
Identify all businesses that should be registered DABs in the municipality, including businesses selling pets / pet products / services in the municipality. Follow up	Compare number of registered DABs before and after activity.	Local Law Officers	Annually

to determine whether they are and should be registered with council.

Inspect properties with excess animal permits to ensure they are not a breeding business

Identify domestic animal businesses

Local Law Officers

Annually

10 ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORTING

The *Domestic Animal Act 1994* requires that a Council must review its domestic animal management plan annually, and if appropriate, amend the plan. This plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Manager Regulatory Services in conjunction with council officers and key stakeholders. A report will be presented to Council and any amendments made to the plan will be forwarded the secretary.

Council Officers will also ensure that the outcomes of this Plan are reported in the Hindmarsh Shire Council Annual Report to the Auditor General.