

ADOPTED	
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Objectives

- Comply with the provisions of the Companion Animals Act 1998
- Achieve a high level of responsible pet ownership through education, consultation and cohesive management within the community.
- Increase the number of animals microchipped and registered, therefore reducing the number of animals in the pound.
- Increase the number of impounded animals being returned to owners or rehomed to the community or rehoming organisations.
- Reduce the negative impacts of Companion Animals within the community and the natural environment.
- Ensure adequate resources and facilities for the control, impounding, management and care of companion animals.
- Ensure procedures for enforcement of the Companion Animals Act are conducted to educate animal owners and to protect the broader community.
- Establish guidelines for dealing with feral and infant animals.
- Ensure the safety, security and welfare of Companion Animals whilst in Council's care.

Legislative Requirements

- Companion Animals Act 1998
- Companion Animals Regulation 2018
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979

Policy

Mid-Western Regional Council will annually develop and make publicly available a Companion Animals Annual Work Plan that will identify the actions to be taken by Council to achieve the objectives of this policy and fulfil its responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act, 1998.

This Policy provides the strategic framework for key areas of responsibility and focus of the Companion Animals Annual Work Plan and 9 Key Priorities.

The **priorities** in the Companion Animals Work Plan are;

Priority 1: Public Education Programme & Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership

Priority 2: Public Safety, Dangerous Dogs and Restricted Breeds

Priority 3: Registration and Identification

Priority 4: Nuisance Animals and Excessive Barking Dogs

Priority 5: Impounding and Rehoming of Companion Animals

Priority 6: Animal Welfare

Priority 7: Management of Feral and Infant Animals

Priority 8: Cat Management

Priority 9: Off Leash Dog Areas & Importance of Effective Control

PRIORITY 1: PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME & PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

OBJECTIVES

- *To achieve a high level of responsible pet ownership through education, consultation and cohesive management within the community*
- *To ensure that owners of dogs, particularly in rural areas, are well informed about their responsibilities.*

BACKGROUND

Council encourages all owners of companion animals to be responsible for their pets' actions. Owning a pet comes with responsibilities for its care and to demonstrate respect for the animal and the potential impact it can have on the community.

Council aims to promote responsible pet ownership through education, involvement in community events and providing services and programs to the community.

Council will also achieve compliance via a combination of education and enforcement.

Being a responsible pet owner includes:

- Making sure the animal is properly identified and registered,
- Providing for the health and welfare for the animal,
- Minimising nuisance behaviour and negative impact on the environment and community,
- Keeping animals out of prohibited areas,
- For dogs, ensuring they are under the effective control and on a leash while in public.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Encouragement of responsible companion animal ownership through community involvement and education, supported by responsive and appropriate compliance and enforcement activities are well recognised.

The best outcome for the community, companion animals and their owners will be achieved through a well-informed community, supporting Council's efforts to provide a quality animal management program.

Voluntary compliance is facilitated by education and awareness programs as well as incentives and programs with a compliance focus. The whole community, whether companion animal owners or not, should be involved in the process to achieve responsible and rewarding companion animal management.

PRIORITY 2: PUBLIC SAFETY, DECLARED DOGS AND RESTRICTED BREEDS

OBJECTIVES

- *To reduce the potential threat to public safety by management of aggressive animals.*
- *To reduce the number of dog attacks.*
- *To monitor, manage and control the keeping of identified restricted breeds, declared dangerous dogs and menacing dogs.*

BACKGROUND

Council aims to reduce the number of complaints of dog attacks each year.qa

As well as dogs attacking humans, there is also a problem with dogs attacking other animals and particularly in rural areas, where dogs often attack livestock. Council acknowledges the impact that such incidents have on farmers and is committed to ensuring that dog owners recognise their responsibilities to prevent such attacks.

Council recognises its obligation under the Companion Animals Act to investigate reports of aggression in dogs and to use preventative powers under the Act, to control and manage animal aggression.

Under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act, 1998 Council **will**:

- Declare a dog as dangerous or menacing under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act, if it attacks with or without provocation, or menaces a person or animal or repeatedly threatens to attack or repeatedly chases a person or animal.
- Conduct annual inspections as a minimum of the premises where the restricted breeds and declared dangerous dogs are kept, to ensure compliance with the legislation.
- Initiate compliance and enforcement action to ensure the safe keeping of restricted breeds and declared dangerous dogs to ensure public safety.

PRIORITY 3: REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

OBJECTIVES

- *To increase the number of Companion Animals being lifetime registered and microchipped.*
- *To increase community awareness of the benefits of microchipping and registration of their animal.*
- *Lost or stray Companion Animals are promptly impounded and owners notified.*
- *To increase the number of de-sexed Companion Animals.*
- *Encourage owners to be actively responsible for their animals' welfare.*

- *To reduce the number of Companion Animals' euthanised.*

BACKGROUND

Proper identification of companion animals is pivotal to their effective management. Additionally, timely and accurate identification facilitates the return of animals to their owners minimising the need for Council to impound animals. Furthermore, identification and registration makes the owners accountable under the NSW Companion Animals Act.

Council encourages pet owners to:

- Ensure their animals are microchipped by 12 weeks of age and registered by 6 months of age in accordance with the Companion Animals Act
- Ensure their animals wear a collar and tag with name and contact details
- Notify Council of certain changes and events, such as changes to registration or identification information such as address or if the animal goes missing or dies.

PRIORITY 4: NUISANCE ANIMALS AND EXCESSIVE BARKING DOGS

OBJECTIVES

- *To minimise the adverse effects of animal noise in the community*
- *To prevent roaming/escaping animals*

BACKGROUND

Council recognises that noise created by animals can affect neighbourhood amenity and the comfort of neighbours. Complaints about barking dogs account for a large proportion of the noise complaints received by Council.

Council aims to resolve animal noise complaints efficiently and effectively and always attempts to reach an amicable outcome for all parties involved.

Under Section 21 of the Companion Animals Act 1998, a dog is a nuisance if it:

- Is habitually at large,
- Makes a noise by barking or otherwise, that persistently occurs or continues to such a degree or extent that it unreasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in any other premises.
- Repeatedly defecates on any other person's property,
- Repeatedly chases any other person, animal or vehicle,
- Endangers any other person or animal, or
- Repeatedly causes substantial damage to anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

PRIORITY 5: IMPOUNDING AND REHOMING OF COMPANION ANIMALS

OBJECTIVES

- *To reduce the number of animals impounded.*
- *To ensure the prompt return of identified animals to their owners in accordance with legislation*
- *To increase the number of animals rehomed with rehoming organisations*

BACKGROUND

A large number of companion animals are impounded each year. Council aims to reduce the number of animals impounded, and increase the number returned to their owners or rehomed.

Animals collected or impounded that are not properly microchipped or registered, will be taken to Council's pound. Council Rangers are not trained to accept sick or injured animals nor are Council's facilities equipped to accommodate sick or injured animals.

Council provides a service for the surrender of animals. Council aims to encourage the surrender of animals for reasons such as aggression, but does not encourage the surrender of animals where simple behaviour modification would suffice. Owners seeking advice regarding modification of their companion animal's staff behaviour may be offered brief, experiential, verbal advice in good faith by Council with no liability attached. Animals surrendered due to aggressive behaviour, will not be rehomed to the community. Such animals may be euthanized following the statutory period of impoundment.

Council has limited storage facilities for animals and overcrowding is not permitted, due to the risks which animals can pose to each other in crowded situations. Animals that are not collected or adopted are held for statutory periods, following which time elapses, animals are humanely euthanized. Council would welcome the circumstances which see every impounded animal finding a new, responsible and caring owner. Animals requiring euthanasia are listed for treatment in sequence based on the date of their initial impoundment.

PRIORITY 6: ANIMAL WELFARE

OBJECTIVES

- *To ensure that Companion animal welfare standards are strictly applied and maintained by Council Rangers*
- *To minimise risk to Council staff and other animals*

BACKGROUND

Many pet problems arise from animals experiencing frustration or boredom, causing reactions such as barking, chasing and jumping up. By providing environmental enrichment such as the addition of cognitive, dietary, physical, sensory and social stimuli, physiological and psychological wellbeing can be improved.

Animal welfare is defined as providing appropriate nutrition, shelter, exercise and interaction to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of the animal.

Council aims to work with local veterinary clinics and companion animal stakeholders to ensure animal welfare issues in the community are addressed.

PRIORITY 7: MANAGEMENT OF FERAL AND INFANT ANIMALS

OBJECTIVES

- *To minimise or eliminate the amount of infant companion animals being euthanised.*
- *To manage the numbers of feral animals within the community.*

BACKGROUND

The Companion Animals Act 1998 requires Councils who seize animals under the provisions to either sell or destroy the animal after the statutory holding period has passed (Seven (7) days for unidentified animals and fourteen (14) days for identified animals). This allows Councils to develop policy guidelines for the management of feral or infant companion animals before the expiry of those statutory periods.

A feral animal under this policy is defined as an untamed or wild cat or dog whose owner is unidentified and has been living in undomesticated circumstances.

Feral animals can pose a significant health and safety risk to people and other animals and are unsuitable for rehoming. To confine a feral animal for an extended period of time would cause stress and be considered cruel.

An infant animal under this policy is defined as a cat or dog less than eight (8) weeks of age.

PRIORITY 8: CAT MANAGEMENT

OBJECTIVES

- *To increase the number of identified, registered and de-sexed cats within the Councils region.*
- *To educate the community about responsible cat ownership aiming to reduce the numbers of stray/feral/non-registered cats in the community.*

BACKGROUND

There is a continuing concern about the number of stray cats and unwanted kittens in the community. Council aims to educate the community about the benefits of de-sexing their cats, and to address issues associated with straying cats.

Cats can be a nuisance to surrounding neighbours and when outdoors they also pose a significant risk to native fauna. Under Section 31 of the Companion Animals Act, a cat is a nuisance if:

- It makes a persistent noise,
- It repeatedly damages anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

Council recognises that cats are more difficult to confine to a property than dogs. Consequently, each complaint will need to be examined and assessed individually. Distinctions also need to be made between stray or feral and domestic cats, for the purpose of applying this Policy Council Rangers will make that distinction as required.

Cats born after 1998 are required to be identified and registered under the Companion Animals Act.

Note: under the terms of the legislation, there is no definition for a 'stray or feral cat'.

PRIORITY 9: OFF LEASH DOG AREAS & IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE CONTROL

OBJECTIVES

- *To monitor the operation of off leash areas.*
- *To encourage dog owners use the off leash facility appropriately.*

BACKGROUND

Mid-Western Regional Council currently has three dog off-leash areas:

- Glen Willow Sporting complex, Mudgee
- Peoples Park, Gulgong
- Rylstone Showground, Rylstone (along the banks of the river)

Council recognises the benefit of off-leash facilities. Dogs need to be socialised with other dogs and humans. Exercise can play a part in alleviating unwanted behaviour such as excessive barking and some forms of aggression.

It is anticipated that designated off-leash facilities can also help prevent animal owners from using public parks and recreation areas. By providing suitable off-leash facilities, Council is promoting and facilitating compliance with leash requirements in other areas and responsible companion animal ownership generally.