

## Preface

These papers have been compiled for the second of the national Urban Animal Management Conference series. The first conference was held in Brisbane in 1992 and resulted in a set of proceedings (Murray<sup>1</sup> 1992) which is an important and useful contribution to the complex issue of Urban Animal Management.

The original organising committee began a process of great value to Local Government, when it conceived the idea of a sequence of annual conferences. The current set of papers continues that process by drawing on experience and new ideas, and so building knowledge in Urban Animal Management. The second conference is designed differently from the first: it uses workshops and a practical session.

The papers convey a broad range of views, but two streams of thought can be discerned in all the papers. The first is consideration of the relationship between the pet owner, the pet and society, which often is referred to as 'responsible pet ownership'. The vocabulary of this body of thought tends to include words related to legislation, enforcement, problems, control of the pet and its breeding, and the effect of the pet on the environment.

The second stream of thought deals with concern for the pet itself and with pet keeping. This way of thinking could be termed 'sensible pet keeping'. The vocabulary here uses words like socialisation, urban design, subjectivity, animal shelters, training and the effect of the environment on the pet.

These papers and the previous proceedings show that Urban Animal Management is the process of using both those streams of thought in a mix to develop policies. They also show that the mix has not yet been perfected. Outcomes are often unexpected, for example psychological effects of euthanasing large numbers of pets. On the other hand, there is evidence of improved outcomes simply through better enforcement of existing legislation.

There is discussion of the slowness of effecting change. Probably, the optimum policy mix will vary according to the species of the pet and the (changing) nature of society. It may be useful to see 'responsible pet ownership' as a tactical approach for handling the present situation while welcoming the strategic approach of 'sensible pet keeping' with its quite novel longer term appreciation of sociological, economic and environmental aspects of pet keeping.

Unless both approaches, so ably introduced by these papers, are recognised, little progress can be made. 'Responsible pet ownership' as a concept has limits which the writers acknowledge. It can be a veil for conflicts between classes in society (for example, between the rich and poor, young and old, and different religious groups) because it is almost impossible to define responsibility without making value judgements.

Similarly, if the animal nature of the pet is obscured by the concept of it being 'owned' like a property, a whole body of thought becomes inaccessible to Urban Animal Management. The psychological wear and tear on animal shelter staff, already referred to, is a major issue which is discussed thoughtfully.

The paper on cats warns against accepting orthodox thinking uncritically. It is a warning against prejudging, so obvious in the use of pejorative terms such as feral, pest or noxious when investigating interactions between species. The papers on urban design and dog obedience introduce the idea that pet keeping is a two way bargain, by offering constructive ways of assisting the pet keeper.

On the matter of bargains, it is surprising that a thorough benefit-cost analysis does not appear to have been done on pet keeping in Australia. If Urban Animal Management is understood as managing a resource rather than trying to solve a problem, different approaches might be facilitated. There seems to be no doubt that pet keeping generates a great deal of economic and social activity. The papers reflect the shift in thinking which is occurring, which includes education of the public, training for personnel, obedience and behavioural analysis of the pet itself, and also fundamental reappraisal of past policies. The experience of the writers also indicates that the shift may not be achieved easily. The underlying dilemma seems to be the conflict inherent in trying to develop objective and efficient public policy to apply in subjective and *perhaps* irrational contexts -and this matter is well ventilated in the paper on the role of pets in today's society.

Policy makers in Local Government are calling for a better way of doing things, for a consolidated and cost-efficient approach under practicable legislation which is sensitive to the needs of the pet keepers, other members of society and the pets. It is a challenging task for Local Government. The following papers provide an excellent basis for discussion to meet that challenge.

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D W Paxton

### **UAM 1993 Support Organisations**

**The Australian Veterinary Association  
Australian Small Animal Veterinary Association  
Petcare Information and Advisory Service  
Local Government & Shires Association of NSW**

<sup>1</sup>Murray, R. W. 1992. *Urban Animal Management: proceedings of the first national conference on urban animal management in Australia*, Chiron Media, Mackay.