

Proudly South Australian

Ken McCann

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects some of the activities and in particular public education undertaken by the South Australian Dog and Cat Management Board. It also emphasizes the importance of a central organization providing guidance and advice to State and Local Government and the community and dispensing of information and material which is both uniform and consistent.

PROUDLY SOUTH AUSTRALIAN

We believe that South Australia has lead the way in this country with both its legislation and its appointment of a Board. The Dog and Cat Management Act is almost 2½ years old and has proven to be thoroughly workable and effective legislation. During 1996 a review of the Act was undertaken which included consultation with State and Local Government, associated organisations and the public. The result was that issues raised were not considered to warrant any amendment to the Act.

I will not dwell on the Board and its functions as I have spoken before on this subject. To fully appreciate how we have operated in South Australia over the past 2½ years you would have to believe that there are better ways of managing dogs and cats than to place reliance on sheer enforcement as a means of resolving issues. You would have to believe in public education.

The dissemination of advice, information and material from a central organisation both to councils and the community has been an important step forward. This is a direct function of the Board and equates to consistency and uniformity in terms of services provided.

The Board's funding comes from a percentage of dog registration and, in its first full year of receiving contributions from both city and country councils, an amount of about \$200,000 was allocated to public education and promotion. To spend such an amount in this area would normally be well beyond the budgeting capabilities of councils but has been achieved by the Board. A similar amount could be expended by a consortium of councils working together and it is a wonder that we have not heard of this happening on a large scale.

After a considerable amount of research the Board decided that the task of public education and promotion was to be addressed from all possible avenues and was to be targeted on both a long term and short term basis. The following initiatives were undertaken:

'The law and your dog'

A brochure outlining full details on the legislation. It is not designed to do or achieve anything other than acquaint people with the law. It has subsequently been reprinted by popular demand.

'You and your dog'

A general information brochure for dog owners. This publication deals with all of the meaningful actions involved with responsible dog ownership and has been widely accepted in South Australia.

'Dangerous dog' poster

A poster to create awareness and recognition of the collars and signs depicting a dog declared dangerous by the council. There is little point in declaring that dangerous dogs have to wear a specific collar if the community does not recognise what the collar means.

'Bite back' poster

A poster encouraging the reporting of all dog attacks and advising what to do in the event of a dog bite. Designed to educate people to not only report all dog attacks but also to report more accurate details of attacks and bite injuries.

'Barking dogs in the community'

A brochure outlining the reasons why dogs bark and offering a wide range of preventative measures and solutions to this the most prevalent complaint received by councils and other authorities.

'Responsible dog ownership' video package

A three part video package consisting of a seven minute presentation on all aspects of responsible dog ownership, a four minute presentation aimed at children (our future dog owners) and a two minute presentation highlighting community awareness on dog attacks. This video has met with wide acclaim and has been an important education tool. A decision was made to highlight some of the realities of dog attacks and as a result some extremely graphic photographs were obtained from the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide and incorporated in the video production.

Television and radio commercials

All commercial television and radio stations throughout the State were targeted at different times with 3 public education commercials:-

A 30 second commercial on 'Responsible Dog Ownership';

A 15 second commercial on 'Dog Registration';

A 15 second commercial 'A Puppy Grows Up'.

I would like to show these commercials a little later and explain their effectiveness.

Dog tidy bags

Biodegradable bags to encourage dog owners to pick up after their dogs. There needed to be more emphasis placed on picking up and removing dog faeces from public places. The Board decided to provide leadership and purchase 600,000 of these new, totally biodegradable dog tidy bags for distribution, free of charge, to all councils. The aim, of course, was to encourage councils to start dealing with bags that biodegrade in six weeks and to educate dog owners to use them. The environmental implications are obvious and there has been a great response.

'Dogs 'n' kids'

A concept originally prepared for the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne by Petcare Australia, this is an education program consisting of brochures, posters and manuals, designed to educate families and children concerning dogs. The emphasis is on dog bite injuries to children and preventative measures which can be taken by both parents and children to avoid these occurrences.

'Environment and recreation trail'

The Board participated on this trail at the Royal Adelaide Show and dispensed information to 36,000 children and families. The idea of this trail is great, in so much as a ready-made audience of young children and parents is automatically available. We were one of 12 sponsors on the trail. Each participant taking part receives a hat with provision for a sticker from each sponsor visited. Having completed the trail participants become eligible for a long list of prizes. This outlet for dispensing information was found to be extremely positive and valuable and was a wonderful success.

Community information nights

Organised at the request of local councils and involving presentations by the council, the Board, local vets, dog obedience groups, Guide Dog Association etc, these information evenings are provided free of charge to both councils and the public. The response has been excellent and in each case promoted responsible dog ownership and the concept of people and organizations working together with a common aim.

Radio program

A weekly radio program on Information Radio 5RPH. This radio program called 'Living with Pets' provides a wonderful opportunity to get the right messages across to about 20,000 listeners. It also allows support to be given publicly to dog clubs and associated organizations and to further the objectives of the Board. Although it is a program which deals with all pets, dogs and cats usually predominate. It has proven to be a valuable communication tool.

Colour-in Book

'Penny and Patch' - a colour-in book for small children. This project has been enthusiastically adopted by councils. Penny and Patch will be coloured-in by all South Australian children in reception, grades 1 and 2, ie all 5-7 year olds. The messages relate to registration, training, picking up dog faeces, walking the dog, staying away when the dog is feeding and recognising the 'dangerous dog' collar and sign. Many of these messages are reinforced in the 'Dogs 'n' Kids' program.

In follow up research there is very strong evidence to suggest that this project was one of the most important programs undertaken. It is clear that children learn quickly and retain information at this age. It goes further - when parents do not get it right it is the young children that bring them back into line. Kingsley Newman's message at this conference has been 'Get them young and train them' and 'responsible pet ownership starts with the young' and I certainly will not argue with him, because he is right!

This list of public education initiatives is impressive and diverse in its exposure.

There are very few persons in the community who will not have heard the media advertising through all television and radio stations in South Australia.

The Board is of course reliant on the cooperation of councils in dispensing much of the printed material. Originally there was a small minority at officer level who resisted change. However generally support from officers has been extensive and enthusiastic. Councils display the posters in their offices and distribute the brochures, particularly at dog registration time. The posters are also distributed to schools, hospitals, veterinary surgeries, libraries etc. Councils and officers are constantly seeking advice from the Board.

To ensure the provision of uniform information, a set of guidelines and procedures were devised in conjunction with council officers for the handling of barking dog complaints. As a result the majority of councils in South Australia are handling these complaints in a uniform manner. They also have a proforma for interviewing persons involved in dog attacks, thus assisting in the collection of evidence.

There is certainly now a much greater awareness of responsibility in the community.

I should mention that most of the initiatives and material mentioned are on the Internet. Our Internet address is www.lga.sa.gov.au/dcmb.

CAT MANAGEMENT

Very little has been said about cat management and there are some good reasons for this.

In the first instance it is optional whether councils in South Australia have an active involvement in cat management. In the second instance there is no funding for cat management. There is no cat registration although councils can, under legislation, introduce a registration scheme for cats. About 92% of Adelaide metropolitan owned cats are desexed and the organisation, Cats Assistance to Sterilize Inc has been very active, arranging the desexing of 5,500 cats on average over a number of years.

It appears that cat numbers are decreasing and there is an awareness of responsible cat ownership in addition to a high rate of identification.

The Board recognises that more public education on responsible cat ownership is needed and to that end is currently investigating the possibility of funding through the corporate sector. It should also be stated that the genuine cat problems in South Australia do not appear to be as widespread as initially thought.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS?

Our public education programs are succeeding.

There is now greater awareness about dog owner responsibility, the need for dog owners to remove dog faeces and recognition of 'dangerous dogs' in the community. There is greater awareness by children of these issues, together with knowledge on how to behave around dogs and how to prevent dog attacks.

Most importantly, there has been a continual increase in dog registration numbers since the formation of the Board - to a record level - together with a decrease in the number of dog attacks and the number of dogs impounded by councils and subsequently placed in animal shelters.

Considering the effect of recent council amalgamations, it has been especially satisfying to see these results.

All of the initiatives mentioned will continue and new initiatives will be commenced.

Similar programs and initiatives can be anticipated with regard to cat management in the future.

THE FUTURE

From my very first involvement I believed that with a new Act and a Board which provided the ability to achieve objectives, it was going to take five years to attain a significant measure of success in dog and cat management. Two and a half years have now gone, ever so quickly, and I can confidently state that we are well on the way to achieving sought after objectives, all of which revolve around responsible pet ownership in the community.

Make no mistake - there is still a lot of work to be done and it needs to be done effectively, There is no room for any margin of error. In South Australia we have an advantage in so much as we have the ability to link what I believe are the main ingredients for success. Legislation, enforcement and administration, coupled with promotion, awareness and education, is the formula and the important thing is statewide uniformity.

We have gone successfully so far and now is the time when it is absolutely essential that there is a continuance of working together with common aims. There is no room for those who do not wish to do so.

There is a noticeable impetus towards animal management all across the country and I believe that it is all to do with more people communicating with each other. In the last two years we have sent much of our material to councils interstate and have received some very useful information back in return. That is just one reason why Urban Animal Management Conferences are so important in that they provide a magnificent opportunity for networking and meeting people.

I have often remarked to my friend Dick Murray that any person who obtains a copy of the proceedings from all of the Urban Animal Management Conferences will have it all. We now have available Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment by Dick Murray and Helen Penridge. Put it all together and you have the successful formula for succeeding in Animal Management.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken McCann
Chief Executive Officer
Dog and Cat Management Board
16 Hutt St.
Adelaide SA 5000
Ph: (08) 8224 2042
Fx: (08) 8232 6336

Ken McCann was involved in Local Government for 23 years, most of that time in the area of dog management. In 1988 he was appointed advisor to the South Australian Dog Advisory Committee and in 1992 was commissioned by the Minister responsible for animal welfare to effect a Dog Control Review for the State. In March 1994 he was appointed Executive Officer to the Dog Advisory Committee and in May 1995 was appointed Chief Executive Officer to the Dog and Cat Management Board. In addition to the above experience, he has had considerable experience in all aspects of the Greyhound Industry, including management, rearing, breeding and stud work. He has a genuine concern for the welfare of all animals and will continue to work with the aim of ensuring that humans and animals can live together in harmony.

[UAM 1997 Index page](#)