

# Companion Animal Management Plans — why, who, what, where, when and how

Robert Stabler

## ABSTRACT

A key word summary of Strategic Planning for Companion Animal Management is described. Balance, Coordination, Sustainability and Strategy are the key words. In the past, companion animal management planning has often been sidetracked by insufficient assimilation baseline information. A simple but broad-spectrum approach is advised and an example of a specific action plan is given.

## WHY

**Adequate preparation** is vital for the development of an effective strategic management plan.

**Situation (strategic) analysis** uses readily available, baseline statistical data to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the current companion animal situation. Community and companion animal demographics provide the key facts.

**Balanced, common sense approach** (simple yet functional) highlights the benefits of responsible pet ownership and facilitates political, social and cultural changes needed to deal with the disadvantages of pet ownership in the community.

**Community service** is what the public expects from local government. But, as I see it, network coordinator is local government's role. Cooperation and teamwork with community stakeholders utilises the wide variety of resources available in the community. Companion animal management is not the sole responsibility of local government.

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## WHO

**Community consultation** involves active listening to community feedback and encourages community support and ownership.

**Sustainable stakeholder input** is vital in preparation, development and implementation of the plan.

**Brainstorming options** facilitates full and open discussion for staff, committees and the community.

**Companion animal committees** require a strong chairperson and membership commitment to the objectives for maximum efficiency (Appendix 1 has some of the committee membership possibilities).

**Staff empowerment** is engendered by involvement sooner rather than later.

**Sound professional advice** is a distinct advantage to avoid debate polarisation.

**Political climate awareness** has an integral influence on planning eg proximity to local government and state election years.

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## WHAT

**Introduction** contains an overview of the state legislation and a profile of the local government area (LGA).

**Vision statements** for the LGA and the companion animal management direct long term planning.

**Aims** (goals) are the broad categories of approach. For example the main aims of the NSW Companion Animal Act 1998 could be summarised under the following headings:

- animal welfare;
- environmental preservation;
- community amenity;
- community education;
- responsible pet ownership;
- service and facility provision.

**Linkage** (integration) with all council plans and policies that are relevant to companion animals creates a framework for harmonious and achievable outcomes. Some relevant local government documents are listed in Appendix 2.

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## WHERE

**Preservation of unique local environment** is finally achieving a high priority. Individual, corporate and community responsibility needs to be emphasised.

**Partnerships with neighbouring LGAs** are an efficient use of limited resources and are crucial to consistency between areas.

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## WHEN

**Realistic timeframes** need to be moulded not only to other important local government departmental agendas but also to companion animal annual trends (eg barking can be a winter problem with owners spending less time outside).

**Three-year plans** with annual reviews are currently the most feasible and practical course of action.

**Suitable boundaries** (scope of activity) need to be set to avoid 'biting off more than one can chew'.

**Cost benefit analysis** is one of the many financial planning tools to ensure limited financial resources are allocated for long term sustainability of the plan.

**Human resource availability** depends on 'wise counsel' to achieve a successful outcome.

**Judicious asset management** is crucial to maintain access to leash free areas, for provision of appropriate equipment and vehicles for rangers and for efficient pound facility management.

**Technology audit** is of particular interest in NSW with regards to microchipping and registration transmission to the NSW Companion Animals Fund.

**Customer satisfaction surveys** access the public perception of companion animal management.

**Relevant local issues** need to reflect community interest. Effective cat colony management is one of these issues that is currently working its way out of the 'too hard basket' and into the satisfactory and achievable outcome category.

**Urban and rural planning** need to be finely balanced and tempered with common sense to ensure unreasonable demands are not placed on particular sections of the community

**Regular review** (evaluation schedule) allows anticipation and rapid adaptation to this dynamic area of local government.

**Contingency planning** is having the foresight to have in-built safeguards for the 'what if?' scenarios. As previously mentioned, political, social and cultural trends need to be addressed.

**Disaster planning** is not so much a matter of 'if' but when, so adequate preparation is vital.

## HOW

Appendix 3 contains an example action plan format:

- action;
- timeframe;
- responsibility;
- priority;
- performance indicator.

**Achievable objectives** (goals) framed within the broad goal categories are built from the situation analysis.

**Effective strategy choice** is assisted by the many excellent information resources now available such as conference proceedings and those listed in the references.

**Background briefing** for each action (recommendation) establishes the current situation and how it will be improved.

**Delegated responsibility** necessitates the commitment of all stakeholders to the task at hand.

**Setting issue-sensitive priorities** enables the staff, stakeholders and community to understand the depth of purpose behind a particular strategy.

**Performance indicators** enable visualisation of specific targets and accountability for inaction.

**Suitable evaluation (monitoring) methods** should enhance the strategic development of sustainable solutions while encouraging the screening of unworkable recommendations.

## CONCLUSION

Companion animal management planning can no longer be ignored. Careful analysis, appropriate strategies and stakeholder input can avoid potential 'potholes'. The benefits of companion animal ownership clearly outweigh the difficulties. I have no doubt that, together with a simple, balanced, well-coordinated approach, we can all plan to achieve a successful outcome.

## REFERENCES

- Draft Greater Taree City Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plan (1999).
- Jackson V. 1999. NSW Companion Animal Act 1998 Management Plan Workshop Summary.
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- Laysell Pty Ltd 1998. Guidelines to Developing an Integrated Urban Animal Management Strategy. Petcare Information & Advisory Service.
- Murray, D. & Penridge H. 1997. Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment & PetPlan – Interactive Information & Training for Pet Management Officers. CD-ROM, Chiron Media, Mooloolah.
- The City of Newcastle Local Companion Animals Management Plan 1999.03.16.

**Benchmarking** is a worthwhile option to compare progress in operational efficiency between similar groups.

**Education distribution networks** to enhance community awareness and knowledge are important.

**Target marketing** ensures the 'responsible majority' are not penalised for the 'problem few' who continue to reject educational promotions.

**Human resource training**, with appropriate accreditation, builds public and team confidence. Efficient standard operating procedures and occupational health and safety audits enhance essential skills, expertise, competency and experience. For example training in cat handling is a high priority with the advent of new legislation for identification and registration of cats in NSW.

**Best practice pound facility management** should be the goal of local government.

**Conflict resolution protocols** need particular attention due to the high neighbourhood dispute potential associated with urban consolidation and companion animal issues. For example the City of Newcastle has a close working relationship with the local Community Justice Centre, which provides valuable assistance in this area.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr Robert Stabler  
Stabler Animal Management  
PO Box 518  
Cardiff NSW 2285  
Ph. 02 4954 3415  
Mob. 040 9988 931  
Email. stabeam@andor.com.au

Robert Stabler graduated as a veterinarian from University of Queensland in 1981 and has worked in companion animal practice in Newcastle since 1983. He is studying for his Member of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists in Animal Behaviour. He is a Category C (Welfare) member of the University of Newcastle Animal Care and Ethics Committee and represents the Australian Veterinary Association on a number of local companion animal management committees. He has thoroughly enjoyed preparing companion animal management plans for three local government areas. He provides an animal behaviour consultation service for owners of difficult companion animals and runs animal behaviour seminars for veterinary surgeries, RSPCA and animal training groups.

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[UAM 99 Index Page](#)

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Companion animal committee membership possibilities**

#### **Council**

Councillors, Director/Manager of Environment and Health, Environmental Health Officer, Ranger, Support staff (receptionist), and Planning and Recreation Department representatives

#### **Community**

Breeders — cat breeder, dog breeder, dog obedience person, non-companion animal owner

Environmental/Conservation — State Forest, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Koala Preservation Society, Native Animal Trust Fund

Industry representatives — Australian Veterinary Association, Guide Dog Association, National Farmers Federation, pet shop

Other interest groups — disabled, ethnic, indigenous, senior citizen groups

State Government — Department of Agriculture, Department of Land and Water Conservation, Police, Rural Land Protection Board

Welfare – Animal Welfare League, Cat Protection Society, RSPCA

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Relevant local government documents**

Biodiversity Strategy

Community Profile

Conservation Area Plan

Development Plan, Disaster Management Plan

Management Plan

Mediation Policy

Open Space Plan

Playground Plan  
 Social Strategy  
 Sportsground Plan  
 State of the Environment Report  
 Threatened Species Management Plans  
 Urban Strategy  
 Waste Management Plan

**APPENDIX 3**

**Action plan format example from Draft Greater Taree City Council Strategic Companion Animal Management Plan 1999 (partially modified)**

**4. COMMUNITY AMENITY**

**4.1. BARKING**

Barking dogs are one of the most common complaints to local councils, especially in urban areas. The diverse rural nature of the Greater Taree area means that many complaints about barking dogs are received throughout the year. A number of councils have implemented a successful ‘barking dog diary’ strategy, filled in by at least two affected neighbours and the barking dog’s owner, to help reduce neighbourhood disputes and the annoyance of persistent dog barking. Council has obtained a number of anti-barking collars and these are available for hire.

- Action                                      Develop Barking Dog Protocol
- Timeframe                                 June 2000
- Responsibility                             Council
- Priority                                        Low
- Performance Indicator                 10% improvement in satisfactory complaint resolution within six months of protocol adoption

**4.2. PUBLIC SAFETY**

In the May 22-23 1998 issue of the ‘Manning River Times’, roaming dogs were highlighted as a particular problem. It is reasonable to expect to walk down the street without having to be threatened by a roaming dog. Although only 16% of dog bite cases occurred in a street or public place as recorded at Victorian Hospital Emergency Departments (Ashby 1998), public safety is still paramount. The NSW CAA 1998 has strong penalties for dogs just for threatening to attack. Council has aimed to achieve a response time within four hours of a dog attack.

- Action                                        Develop Dangerous Dog Protocol
- Timeframe                                 November 1999
- Responsibility                             Council
- Priority                                        Medium
- Performance Indicator                 10% reduction in dog bite incidents

### 4.3. OPEN SPACE

Multi-use open space is a priority. Plans of Management for Council's 67 neighbourhood parks and associated playgrounds and local sportsgrounds were prepared three years ago. Excellent advances have been made in the design of parks to separate dogs from playgrounds, sporting fields and cyclists, eg strategically placed landscaping mounds, hedges or use of topography (Jackson 1998). Families would like to take their children and their dog to the park, but access and opportunities are limited. Safety is a vital issue, but so too, are social interactions, which are actually enhanced by the presence of a companion dog (Rogers 1993).

- Action Incorporate dog-friendly design features in review of open space management
- Timeframe September 2000
- Responsibility Council planning staff
- Priority Medium
- Performance Indicator Inter-departmental planning meetings set up within six months

### 4.4. NUISANCE COMPANION ANIMALS

Neighbourhood disputes can escalate due to nuisance cats or dogs. Mediation protocols that address both animal welfare and community amenity need to be fair and detail step-by-step procedure to help to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of both parties.

- Action Develop Nuisance Cat and Nuisance Dog Protocols
- Time frame December 1999
- Responsibility Council
- Priority Medium
- Performance Indicator 10% improvement in satisfactory complaint resolution within six months of protocol adoption

### 4.5. PUBLIC HEALTH — PET FAECES

Pet faeces deposited on sporting fields or near children's playgrounds present a significant health hazard, especially when dog roundworm eggs can lay dormant in the environment for up to one year (Giesecke 1992). Council has bins at all leash-free areas and dog owners need to be encouraged to dispose of their pet's faeces appropriately. 'Ecosac' is an environmentally friendly plastic bag for picking up dog faeces that decomposes within six weeks.

- Action Investigate provision of Ecosac dispensers at leash-free areas
- Time frame May 2000
- Responsibility Council
- Priority Medium
- Performance Indicator 10% increase in waste collection from leash-free areas