

Ten years on in urban animal management

Graeme Raine

INTRODUCTION

Where were we prior to 1992? The term dog catcher was heard frequently from the public through to managers and elected members. Problems were evident - local authorities used a variety of methods to control dogs ranging from the head in the sand approach; "perhaps if we do nothing we won't upset any one and the problem will with a bit of luck go away" - to rigid enforcement where "they always got their dog". Some local authorities got lucky and obtained the services of good officers, others were happy to gain someone who could fill the boots of the previous incumbent and were literally quite pleased not to have to buy a new pair of boots.

Many officers were working in isolation and there was no formal mechanism to spread the word on good operating practices on a national basis. Western Australia had a 'Municipal Law Enforcement Officers Association' to represent rangers. It hosted State conferences on an annual basis and produced a ranger's newsletter. This assisted in the development of animal control from within the State. We seldom received guests from interstate. Several other States had their own associations and attempts were made to affiliate but were thwarted due to lack of funding and the distances involved.

Animal Control Officers (ACOs) and there is a definite emphasis on the word *control*, were by and large the poor relation within Council. They were in the main untrained for the requirements of the job, poorly equipped and their function misunderstood by management, the public and sometimes themselves. Many were frustrated in their endeavours by a management that didn't understand, didn't want to understand and didn't care!

The recruitment of ACOs left a lot to be desired and an effective selection procedure was the exception rather than the norm. How could the right person be selected when the role was not clear or known by those making the decisions?

Why is 1992 a year to be remembered and recorded in the history of Urban Animal Management?

This was the year of the first National Urban Animal Management Conference held in Brisbane. This brought together the major stakeholders in the industry in one venue for the first time and it would be fair to say in hindsight that we didn't know how much we didn't know!

Due to isolation, many people had been developing new strategies without knowing that others were on a similar wavelength. In fact while we in the West were discovering the talents of an Animal Behaviourist named Garth Jennens and finding how this could assist us in our work, in Queensland people like Dick Murray and Shane Scriggins were similarly involved in researching and developing modern animal management techniques.

Many in the industry held deep seated suspicions about the motives of others from different fields and perspectives. Some came from a strong enforcement perspective and others from the opposite extreme - that dogs were furry little humans that could only be good for you. Tell that to the attack victim or those unfortunate enough to live next to the problem barker!

Yes, 1992 was a vintage year for those of us at the conference and as politicians would say, many robust and frank discussions ensued as we defended our individual beliefs. This was extremely productive and through the proceedings we were able to listen to these differing perspectives, consider their validity and evaluate their merit. It would be incorrect to say that barriers came down because of one conference and even today there are strong divisions apparent - I hesitate to mention microchips. Will this issue take another ten years to resolve?

Since this conference we have had the benefit, on an annual basis, to come together and receive the knowledge of dedicated professionals who are recognised as being at the forefront in their fields of expertise. Many friendships have been made both interstate and international and most importantly networking is now a fact of life. It is impossible to do justice to all the speakers who have contributed to the success of these conferences and to recognise the many hours of research that went into the development of their papers.

The reward for this is evident in the continued success of these conferences and in the positive changes that have been effected in the industry and the animal management services now provided to the community.

On a personal level, through the work of Virginia Jackson, a city planner, I now understand the role that proper planning for pets in the community can achieve. Through the efforts of Tony Cooke and the Pet Care Advisory Service, I understand the role of pets in the community.

The dedicated work of Dick Murray has helped me understand urban animal management, the work of Shane Scriggins (Magnetic Island study) helped me develop a considered response to my Council's call for cat control legislation. The many trade displays have allowed me to obtain equipment and services to make my job safer and more efficient. I feel fortunate to have been able to attend all but one of these conferences and to have met and learnt from all those who have freely shared their knowledge with us.

Apart from the conferences many other developments have taken place.

TRAINING

The very nature of the job for Animal Management Officers (AMOs) places them in a front line role for the local authority and often they can be the first point of contact that the public has with the local authority. The role that these employees perform leaves a lasting impression, not only on their individual performance but also on the Council as a body. Decisions made by AMOs have the potential to cause long term and devastating consequences for the public if performed without adequate knowledge of the legislative provisions and Council's general objectives and policies. The skills and knowledge required to perform these duties is extensive and it is inappropriate to expect this role to be performed without an acceptable level of competence. In most other employment with a public interface/inspectorial nature, qualifications are mandatory and consideration should be given to the level of competence that should be attained by current and new employees to this position.

In Western Australia we developed dedicated courses for rangers and through the efforts of Mr Brian Chanter (TAFE curriculum developer) in 1993 Municipal Law Enforcement A and B were developed. In Queensland Gaille Perry chaired the curriculum development panel for the National Animal Control Officers Certificates III and IV. In Western Australia this course was developed into the Local Government Law Enforcement Certificates III and IV. A Certificate IV Statutory Investigations course was also developed in Western Australia and this course now forms part of the Local Government Training Package. Training is now provided by both TAFE and private training providers in many states although there is still much work to do in making these courses accessible. Dick Murray has developed a CD Rom training package to compliment his book *'Dogs and Cats in the Urban Environment'*.

If the forward momentum that has been evidenced over the last decade is to continue, greater emphasis will need to be placed on appropriate curriculum design and the provision of training for this industry. It has been evident this year that many local authorities have reduced their training budgets for ACOs. In one authority the ACOs productivity bonus is related to coming within one percent of budget. This Council then removed \$15,000 from the ACO budget. It is little wonder that training is not now a high priority within this particular local authority. Training is often the first casualty in cost cutting exercises, as it is easy to demonstrate a cost saving in the short term. The potential long term effect is a different scenario, with a de skilled workforce making more costly errors, a reduction on individual officer performance, demoralised staff and a poorly serviced municipality paying the ultimate penalty for short term decision making.

URBAN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

This term was unheard of in the eighties and is now common to our industry. In South Australia the Dog and Cat Management Board was formed and has produced many well developed educational materials which are an example of what pooled resources, with good management, can achieve. At last year's Gold Coast Conference, the Gold Coast City Council was also able to demonstrate a unique animal management program. These programs are representative of the work now being done in promoting responsible pet ownership in many local authorities right around Australia. It is evident that an over reliance on enforcement as a singular management strategy is no longer acceptable and that strategic planning with broad ranging strategies is essential to good urban animal management. A number of local authorities have undertaken the process of animal management strategies and now have the benefit of a structured plan with goals to be achieved.

ASSOCIATIONS

Through the dedication of Kester Nolder and Steve Rigby the Tasmanian Animal Control Officers' Association has been formed this year. This is a major achievement and the support of the Tasmanian ACOs and the local authorities will ensure the success of this as a means to further increase the professionalism of animal management in this State.

The Western Australian Rangers' Association has been in existence for twenty years and has been involved in professionalising the image of rangers in WA. Several of it's projects have included:

- ranger training accredited courses Municipal Law Enforcement A & B;
- policy manual;
- ranger promotional video;
- web site; and
- founding member of 'Compassionate Animal Control International'.

The following information on 'Compassionate Animal Control International' is provided from a report to the WA Rangers Association by Steve Elvidge who is the secretary of the WA Rangers Association. 'Compassionate Animal Control International' was the initiative of Steve Elvidge.

Representatives from Australia, the United States of America, United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and other interested parties attended the meeting and at it's conclusion we had formed 'Compassionate Animal Control International' (CACI) the largest animal care and control association in the world. The founding members are the WA Rangers Association, National Animal Control Association (USA), National Dog Wardens Association (UK) Association of Animal Shelters Administrators (Canada) and American SPCA. CACI is not a charity, is non-profit and has no commercial interests or sponsors, it is purely an information provider for those in need.

Each participating organisation will be given space on the web site to provide their information. This will be part of the 'Petfinder' web site based in New York, which receives 38,000 hits per month and will be free of charge to those member organisations of CACI. News media coverage will be through a US paper 'Animal People' who have 7,500 organisations and 10,000 individual subscribers. It is envisaged world wide media attention will follow.

Information will be available for anyone to access including:

- facts and information about CACI member organisations;
- animal laws and legislation in each country;
- enforcement of those laws;
- animal identification, compulsory and non-compulsory tags etc;
- animal shelters and re-homing programs;
- training programs and training providers for animal control officers/wardens/rangers;
- training programs and training providers for animals;
- animal control and safety equipment;

- veterinary news;
- interesting articles concerning Court cases and experiences;
- contact details and assistance; and
- details of upcoming conferences and much more.

"Compassionate Animal Control International' is yet in it's genesis stage and has the potential to become the United Nations of animal care and control. As other countries join the cause, the exchange of information will provide a resource to those countries truly in need and thus help to make our world a better place for people and for animals."

PRIVATISATION

Victoria saw the introduction of privatisation of animal control services. Graeme Smith of the Lost Dogs Home was one of the main driving forces in this area and it was a time of rapid change for this industry generating robust debate from those directly affected and those with a vested interest in the services provided. It would be fair to suggest that Graeme Smith has supported the development of training programs in Victoria which have benefited both the private sector and public sector. In Western Australia a number of private providers provide relief staff to local authorities and several of those are registered training providers to the industry. Privatisation provides local authorities with a mechanism for increased flexibility to cover special events and seasonal fluctuations.

THE PUBLIC

While it is fair to say that we as individuals have developed enormously during the past nine years of Urban Animal Management Conferences lets look at the benefits to the public:

- puppy pre schools are now held in veterinary clinics, an innovation to assist in the socialisation of dogs that will dramatically reduce problem behaviours in years to come;
- the public can now access professional advice to address behavioural problems such as barking, chewing and digging that often lead to abandonment;
- schools regularly receive visits from ACOs where children are taught responsible pet ownership;
- advice for dog owners is readily available through veterinary clinics and local government offices;
- reserves have dog waste management systems in place reducing the problems associated with dog excreta in public places; and
- professional AMOs provide reliable and consistent advice relating to pet management.

THE FUTURE?

The developments in the industry during the last ten years have surpassed any of our expectations. Ten years ago many of us were computer illiterate - now this is considered essential. What technology will we be using in ten years time? Where will our industry be? What will the future hold? What will a review of the last ten years contain in the year 2010 National Urban Animal Management Conference? Could the 2010 conference hold these topics or will we be discussing dog registration rates?

- *ACO vehicles integrated mobile office systems with fax, email, data base access;*
- *Global Position Systems with 'auto-link' to link the closest ACO to the latest job;*
- *national benchmarking with daily reporting function;*
- *AMO info link;*
- *Satellite management systems to monitor dog and cat movements - with automatic issue of direct debit infringement notices for animals leaving boundaries without prior authorisation of the managing agency;*
- *national ID data base for pets;*
- *the new university course 'Animal Management in Communities'; and*
- *'Pet Pak' the new school based interactive on line learning package on pet ownership.*
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At the beginning of the last decade we had no idea of how far and how quickly our industry would develop and change. The ACO of the next decade will require the ability and aptitude to manage change!

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Graeme Raine has been employed in Local Government since 1981 in the administration of local government law. In 1993 he received the Western Australian Ranger of the Year Award in recognition for developing a number of new initiatives for Animal Control in conjunction with veterinarians, dog trainers and an animal behaviourist. In the same year he received a 'Civilian Commendation' from the Chief Officer of the WA Fire Brigade. He was co-author of 'Your Dog's Behaviour and the Law in Western Australia' a booklet designed to assist Local Government in managing dogs. In addition to this he has served on the curriculum development panels of Municipal Law Enforcement A & B, Certificates 3 & 4 Statutory Investigations and Enforcement, the Nationally accredited Animal Control Officers Certificates 3 & 4 and Local Government Operations (Law Enforcement) Certificates 3 & 4. He has lectured at TAFE for six years and developed the 'Centre for Community Protection' at the South East Metropolitan College of TAFE specifically to deliver training for Local Government Rangers. As the Manager of Ranger Services for Gold Security Group (International) Pty Ltd a Registered Training Organisation in WA he is responsible for contract Ranger Services to Local Government and delivering accredited and specialist short courses for Animal Control Officers.

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