

# Cat pounds - Manningham City Council perspective

**Malcolm Scheele**

## **BACKGROUND**

Manningham City Council is located approximately 12 kilometres north-east of the city of Melbourne. It is bordered to the north by the Yarra river, to the south by Eastern freeway. Extending to Park Orchards and Wonga Park to the east covering an area of approximately 114 square kilometres. The city has a population of 111,000 people with some 40,000 rateable properties. The city is residential in character with significant areas of open space combined with non-urban agricultural areas to the east of Mullum Mullum Creek. The city has approximately 1250 hectares of public open space.

The large amount of environmentally significant areas has placed increased pressure on cat owners to secure their cats, particularly at night-time.

In Victoria up until April 1996 cats were classified as chattels and had no legal standing within the community as opposed to dogs. The issue of stray, feral, unowned and nuisance cats continued to exist without any legislative framework to deal with them.

## **LEGISLATION**

In April 1996 after several years of consultation and change, the Domestic (Feral & Nuisance) Animals Act 1994 was enacted, replacing the Dog Act 1970.

The Act sets out the requirements for cat owners within the State as well as Council's responsibilities.

The greatest single change to cats was the requirement for them to be registered by the 10<sup>th</sup> April each year. This brings them in line with what dog owners have been required to do for years.

The requirement to register cats gave Councils the opportunity to obtain funding to undertake:

- construction of pound facilities;
- cat trapping programs; and
- resources to investigate nuisances.

All cats are required to wear a registration tag when off the owner's property, this gives Animal Management Officers the visual advantage of knowing if the cat is registered or not.

Cat registration has not matched and is well below the expected level of cat ownership throughout the State and Australia. The current statistic shows that 26% of Australian households own a cat and 40% of households own a dog. Reference: *Becton Living Issue 6 Autumn/Winter 2001*.

Manningham Council had a very high initial uptake on registration in April 1996. However, these numbers do not comply with the average cats per household. Since 1996 the registration numbers have only increased marginally. Manningham's current cat registration rate is around 15% of households within the Municipality, falling well below the national average.

Manningham Council has tried many incentives to encourage cat owners to ensure that their animals are registered. A doorknock is the most comprehensive and systematically way to verify if an animal resides at a property and if that animal is registered. However with cats this is difficult to establish ownership.

## **DOMESTIC ANIMAL STRATEGY**

In November 1998 Manningham City Council implemented a Domestic Animal Strategy to facilitate what direction the Council takes in relation to the management of cats and dogs for the next 5 years. This involved an extensive public consultation process for the proceeding 2 years.

### **Mission Statement**

‘To promote and facilitate responsible ownership of dogs and cats, animal welfare and the benefits of companionship focusing on the legitimate needs of pets and their owners while respecting the rights of other members of the community and protecting the environment.’

### **Aims**

1. Provide for the welfare and safety of dogs and cats.
2. Acknowledge the importance of dogs and cats in society.
3. Promote responsible dog and cat ownership.
4. Encourage the enjoyment of and the benefits from dogs and cats by people.
5. Ensure public safety and amenity in relation to dogs and cats.
6. Protect native fauna and flora from the impact of dogs and cats.
7. Ensure the expenditure of registration fees addresses the needs of pet owners as well as domestic animal management issues.

## **CAT MANAGEMENT**

A compulsory cat curfew was not recommended due to the lack of systematic evaluation and because of the difficulty of enforcement. Instead, cat management focuses on public education combined with trapping of cats found in identified environmentally sensitive areas.

The Council receives a very limited number of complaints relating to cats each year, compared to dog complaints. The reason for this is unknown at this stage.

## **TRAPPING PROGRAMS**

Shopping centres and industrial estates are the greatest areas of concern for the control of stray and unowned cats. There is generally a large food source at these locations and are generally isolated. These areas require regular monitoring in order to establish if a trapping program is warranted. Removing these cats will prevent the spread of disease to owned cats residing in the area and stop the nuisance before they spread out into the owned cat population.

## **CAT NUISANCES**

Cat nuisances such as spraying, droppings, howling, trespassing and fighting are becoming a much greater area for officer resources to be devoted.

Cats under the requirements of the Act can be classified as nuisance animals and neighbours can object to them entering their property. Neighbours have the ability to trap and impound stray or registered cats on their property if the cat has been present on one or more occasions. If Council or the property owner can identify the cat owner, a notice of objection must be served on the cat owner within 5 business days. After a notice

has been served and the cat enters or remains on the private property, the owner of the cat is guilty of an offence and liable to a penalty of \$100 for first offence and \$300 for second or subsequent offences.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS**

One of the aims of Manningham Council's Domestic Animal Strategy is to protect native fauna and flora from the impact of dogs and cats.

Manningham Council has many areas of environmental significance east of the Mullum Mullum Creek. Council continues to monitor and determine the impact of domestic cats in these areas.

An action from the Domestic Animal Strategy is to monitor how far cats are travelling in relation to environmental areas. Council intends to conduct a trapping program for a 3 month period to determine if the cats are owned or stray. All cat owners in the nearby area will be provided information about the effects of cats and native wildlife. The results of this study will determine if Council should establish a buffer zone around these environmental areas, requiring all cats to be secured to the owner's property, providing Council with a manageable curfew in areas that warrant such consideration.

## **MANNINGHAM WEBPAGE**

For the past four years Manningham Council has photographed dogs and cats at our pound that are either lost or suitable for rehoming. The details are updated weekly and many animals have been given new homes since this program began.

## **MANNINGHAM POUND**

This pound is controlled and run by the Manningham Local Laws Unit. A refurbishment was carried out prior to April 1996 for the dog pound and the construction of the cattery to comply with the requirement of the Act. A key action from the Domestic Animal Strategy was to maintain ownership and management of the pound.

The benefits of managing a pound include:

- point of contact education with animal owner;
- to sight and deal with habitual offenders;
- to deal with enforcement action on the spot;
- community interaction with Council officers;
- central and convenient location for the community;
- expertise animal care and management;
- facilities to house and care for larger stock;
- to provide a return to the community on their registration fees; and
- to provide a level of service commensurate with community expectation.

## **WHAT MANNINGHAM DID**

In 1995 and early 1996 Council constructed a cattery at our pound facility. It was very difficult for Council to estimate the optimum size for the cattery, given that we had no benchmarking. We were unsure and unprepared for how many cats were going to be impounded or handed in.

The cattery was constructed with 26 walk-in module enclosures. Each enclosure is 2 metres deep by 1 metre wide and 2 metres high. There are 2 internal levels with a sleeping box on the top level. The modules are constructed with 20mm tubing and 20mm gauge wire. The floor is a concrete slab with polyurethane vinyl on top this greatly assists with hygiene.

## **Year 1 statistics 1996**

- 61 impounded cats;
- 2 cats were rehoused;
- 1 cat was collect by the owner; and
- the remainder were euthanased.

## **Year 2 statistics 1997**

- 58 impounded cats;
- 1 cat was rehoused;
- 1 was collect by the cat owner; and
- the remainder were euthanased.

The above figures indicate that the facility was not being used to it's optimum. The Council initiative was to divide the cattery into 2, providing 14 enclosures for stray and impounded cats and 10 enclosures for boarding cats. The facility was built in accordance with the Code and was inspected by the Bureau of Animal Welfare to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for Boarding Establishment and the Code for Pounds and Shelters.

Council viewed this as a way of putting something back into the cat community, which is a benefit to all cat owners.

Manningham wanted to create a cattery that was above the minimum standards of compliance of the Code of Practice, with comfortable conditions for all cats.

Some of the benefits of the cattery include:

- the cattery is an additional resource for cat owners within the Manningham Community;
- there is a positive interaction between cat owners and Council officers;
- the cattery is popular with the community;
- the cattery is a good referral from other catteries in the area during peak periods;
- there is a regular cliental and often new inquires;
- the cattery is successfully booked during school holidays and peak periods; and
- the cattery provides a return on Council's investment.

The interaction between Rangers and cats are improved. The cattery creates the ability for rangers to pat a cat as opposed to the majority of stray cats that are impounded. Rangers receive a far more positive feedback from customers as opposed to the regular pound cliental.

## **Year 3 statistics 1998**

- 86 impounded cats;
- 3 cats were rehoused;
- 3 cats were collected by their owners; and
- the remainder were euthanased.

## **Year 4 statistics 1999**

- 97 impounded cats;
- 10 cats were rehoused;
- 1 cat was collected by the owner; and
- the remainder were euthanased.

## **Year 5 statistics 2000**

- 134 impounded cats;
- 10 cats were rehoused;
- 4 cats were collected by the owner; and
- the remainder were euthanased.

All animals that are rehoused have a requirement under the Act to be held by the Council for a minimum period of 8 days. The Code of Practice for Pounds and Shelters stipulates that all animals must be temperament tested, desexed, vaccinated and registered.

Other than Council's previously mentioned re-housing program, Council has an arrangement with a local shelter for rehousing. All animals are quarantined for an eight-day period after vaccination, before being made available for rehousing.

## **CONCLUSION**

The community is now aware of their responsibility as owners of cats. They have a greater understanding of the services that are required of Councils and other agencies, to ensure that cat ownership and community expectations are managed to the benefit of all.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Malcolm was first employed by Manningham City Council formerly known as Doncaster Templestowe Council in 1986. He is on the Victorian Committee of Delta Society of Australia and on the Local Organising Committee for the 2001 Urban Animal Management Conference. He is establishing and currently implementing a Prevent-a-Bite education program for pre-school children. Malcolm is the Development and Implementation Officer for the Manningham Domestic Animal Strategy.

[UAM 2001 Index Page](#)

