

A model for visualising UAM factors and outcomes - what UAM means and why UAM matters?

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Urban animal management (UAM) means different things to different people depending on where you live, where you work and what your particular interest is in the field. It has also been reshaped over the last decade with the pace of change sometimes outstripping our ability to digest new ways of looking at the UAM world.

I am a passionate supporter of the view that pets make a significant contribution to quality of life. However, working in public policy, I am also aware of the need for a UAM that manages the negatives associated with keeping dogs and cats. The traditional view of UAM is that the latter begets the former. I do not dispute this, however I now believe it is an overly narrow view of the world.

Society is changing rapidly. Our lifestyles are changing, the houses we live in are changing, public opinions are changing and so on and so on. What will pet ownership look like in ten years or fifty years time? Will it still exist? On present trajectories, I'm not so sure that it will still exist in fifty years. The way we're headed, we might end up solving all the problems of UAM without any pet owners left to "manage".

This worries me greatly. There are so many inherently positive things about owning pets, I can't imagine a society without them. Thus whilst "fixing" problems will probably always be the cornerstone of UAM, I firmly believe we also need to look at the other side of the UAM balance sheet: (the health and companionship benefits, the role of pets in leisure and exercise, social interaction and in teaching children about caring for others) and encourage our communities to look for ways in which pet ownership can be accommodated. This is a big task and it won't happen overnight but lets try and think about what UAM might look like and feel like in 2013 if this were our vision.

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Virginia is an urban policy analyst and town planner with over 20 years experience working with state and local governments and other consultancies. She is a Director of Harlock Jackson Pty Ltd, a consultancy established in 1990 to specialise in the growing area of companion animals' management for governments and community groups around Australia. Services include the development of animal management plans and policies, public education campaigns, community consultation, professional development and original research. Many of Virginia's research projects have been world-firsts and have featured in international journals and conferences.