

Prologue

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What is a UAM conference? In our review of the 2005 conference in Canberra, we sought comments from all delegates. Some suggested that it was just an excuse for a "piss up". While getting together with old and making new friends is an important part, no one would come back to a conference, and no council or other employer would send someone back year after year, if that was all it was.

The social component is important, of course. There aren't many who work in animal management around the country, and many of you are either the only employee in your council doing this work, or you share the responsibility for animal management with many other ranger duties. There are few opportunities to gauge your self against others in the field, there are few opportunities to share your thoughts, experiences, highs and lows with those who *actually* understand what it is like to have to capture an aggressive dog, to negotiate with dog owners who are either verbally or physically aggressive, to feel like you are at the whim of council and councillors, while every community group wants to whinge to you about the policies you only enforce but don't make.

This UAM conference is an outstanding opportunity to share with your colleagues from around the country, and overseas.

Of course, it is primarily a great educational opportunity, and I know you will be impressed with the speakers who have come together from as far afield as Darwin and Hobart to share with you their technical knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm for animal management.

In particular this year, I am excited by the paper by Tania Small from Animal Industries Resource Centre. What makes a good Animal Management Officer? How do the views of staff differ from that of management? What type of person should employers be looking for? Who will cope with the pressures of this work and stay in the job, serving the community and Council (or the Animal Welfare organisation) effectively and with a minimum of costs for sick and stress leave?

Our annual survey shows that animal behaviour is your most requested topic -, and I know that you will both enjoy and learn a great deal from Kersti Seksel, Robert Holmes and Joanne Righetti. And all the speakers who have put so much thought and experience into their papers and presentations on Risk Management will provide much to optimise the way you work.

I know you will join me in thanking all our speakers, the Local Arrangements Committee led by Kester Nolder, our conference organiser Doreen Culliver, and the members of the Urban Animal Management Committee for all their efforts.

The way forward

The Urban Animal Management Committee has been through an upheaval this year. We have always been a committee of the Australian Veterinary Association, and early in 2006 the AVA revised the membership and Terms of Reference of the UAM Committee. What do these changes mean for the future?

The UAM Committee lost Dick Murray, Rick Walduck, Shane Scriggins and Deb Kelly, and Geoff Irwin leaves after this conference. These five have, as you know, worked exceptionally hard for the cause of good UAM for, in some cases, more than fifteen years, and we feel their absence and miss their wisdom and experience. I am pleased, to announce, however, that the UAM Committee is gaining new members, the first of whom is Virginia Jackson whose many papers at UAM conferences, and other writings have inspired me to continue in this endeavour. Virginia's many years of working with Councils throughout Australia bring a wealth of experience at balancing the needs of pet owners and non-pet owners through good urban planning, at making the job of AMOs easier especially by developing effective animal management plans. Her enthusiasm is contagious.

The UAM Committee is delighted that some of the members who we lost have formed the Australian Institute of Animal Management, and we look forward to cooperating with this new group in the future.

The Committee's new Terms of Reference will take us more strongly into policy, planning and legislation, and while we will definitely not be ignoring the desires and needs of officers at the coalface, this new Institute promises to provide for their needs in ways that a Committee of the AVA cannot, especially by enabling membership. We wish the Institute and all its members success in all their endeavours.

Our challenge is to fully recognise the role that different groups have in the community in managing urban animals – not just local government, but also welfare groups, veterinarians, pet owner groups including breeders and dog clubs, and the support industry (pet shops, boarding and caring facilities etc). All groups need to be engaged in providing and obtaining more suitable pets, in encouraging husbandry which enables easy animal ownership and management (desexing, identification and registration), in identifying and managing animals which are unsuitable in some or all households.

We need to work together to find solutions to our ongoing problems such as the high euthanasia rate in pounds and shelters, the risks of dogs in households and the community, and the impact of domestic animals on wildlife. We seek to provide such expert advice to governments at all levels that animal management policy and legislation will continue to take the strides forward that we have seen in the last decade.

Just like for you, each day brings new challenges for the UAM Committee, and we look forward to serving animal management officers, managers and policy makers, legislators, welfare personnel, and through you all, the community.

This means new initiatives to reach policy makers and legislators as well as others with whom UAM has not engaged in the past.

Roll on 2007 – our conference in Newcastle will be different!

Michael Hayward
Convenor