

UAM - Looking Forward, Looking Back

Dick Murray BVSc, MSc, FAVA, MACVSc, OAM, President, AIAM, 2007-8

Email: rwm@westernsuburbsvetclinic.com.au

Abstract

Animals in general have a major impact on community quality of life in Australia. Companion (pet) animals are a significant part of this "balance of benefit" story. The net benefit depends on how well these animals are managed, both at home and in public. Urban Animal Management (UAM) service provision by Local Government is a large part of the balancing act.

This paper (2008) is a President's review that looks back on how urban animal management has evolved since the first urban animal management conference was held in Brisbane in 1992. It also looks ahead at where the urban animal management community might want to set its sights in pushing ahead from here.

of assumptions & elephants Companion animals and their management

At the Canberra UAM Conference in 1994, David Paxton delivered an elegant and thoroughly researched paper on the subject of the evolutionary relationship between people and their companion animals¹. David's paper follows the theme of co-evolution which if summarised into one paragraph, might go something like this: "Animals should be considered an integral part of the normal 'us'. We have evolved living in the company of animals and as a consequence, it is perhaps as natural living with them, as living without them is not".

It is important to point out however, that the effects of humans living with animals are not universally beneficial – there can be negatives in this relationship and the negatives can be significant. Having said that, our society would, one assumes, have abandoned the keeping of animals long since if there wasn't a strong perception that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages in the overall equation. Getting the best balance of advantages over disadvantages will always remain a matter of how these animals are managed - the better the management, the better the outcomes.

1. Twenty years ago and before that, what we now call urban animal management was universally called animal control. The first major transitional step in the evolving philosophy of urban animal management involved dropping the word "control" and replacing it with the word "management". There is a world of difference between the meanings of control and management and that difference is still relevant today. Control was always a word that had its roots in surveillance, infringements and enforcement measures while management, on the other hand, infers a different ambience that includes a strong element of public engagement and cooperation.
2. During the early '90s, it became clear that urban animal management was in many ways actually more about managing *people* than it was about managing *animals*. In other words, there was a realisation that perhaps the best way to better manage *animal* behaviour, was through the better management of their *owners*. While that might seem today, a fairly self evident observation, it represented then, a significant mind shift. I venture to suggest that there are some out there today who *still* don't really get it.
3. There has, since the turn of the century, been yet another (perhaps most significant of all) philosophical shift towards an emphasis on *community*.

The game continues to be in part about *animal* management... and it continues to be in part about *owner* management, but now there is now a realisation that *community*, above all, lie at the real heart of the whole matter. Consider the following four points:

- a. While not all of the people in any given community will have animal companions, they are all nevertheless affected by them.
- b. It is the community that determines what is acceptable and what is not when it comes to owner obligations and responsibilities.
- c. When councils provide animal management services they are not only doing that for the animals nor are they only doing it for the animal owners, they are before all else doing it for their community.
- d. The community is, through its local authorities and via the representation of its elected councillors, the ultimate urban animal management influence.

As much as each of these three transitional stages has shaped the environment of animal management in Australia today, perhaps more so has been the progressive appreciation that there is a great deal more involved in urban animal management than just having legislation, local laws, enforcement procedures and infringement notices. Animal management is in fact a *surprisingly* complex undertaking. It involves the management of three separate but interactive disciplines:

- a. Animal behaviour,
- b. Animal owner behaviour and
- c. Community behaviour.

3 'complex' sciences

Once it is appreciated that each of these three elements is a science in its own right, it is not hard to see why the combined effect of all three, as they bounce off each other all at once, makes for such a uniquely demanding mix. It is this complexity that will always befuddle those who still see animal management as a matter of responding to animal nuisance at the animal level.

The depriving face and AM Plans

One of the biggest hurdles facing urban animal management continues to be its lack of popularity. The "bad guy dog catcher" stereotype persists and necessary (and universally accepted) processes of control and regulation still seem to *not* get the resource commitment or momentum they require to deliver their best outcomes.

Perhaps the answer to this perplexing and frustrating situation lies in what Brendan Bartlett² termed "the depriving face of control". At the (first) Brisbane UAM conference in 1992 Bartlett explained how rules and regulations, even when applied fairly, reasonably and honestly, are in most cases, still going to be resented as personal confrontations and a deprivation of freedom. He then went on to explain just how much strain this places on AMOs and their managers as they try to carry out their necessary regulatory tasks.

2D cone heads - look at yr envt

Bartlett referred to what he called "an awful chain of negatives" in urban animal management that perhaps best captures the effect of the depriving face in this context. The following brief extract from the paper he gave at that inaugural conference describes why this is so:

"I think Animal Control Officers should know that deprivation will always elicit a non-accepting or negatively-adaptive behaviour from the one deprived. A sense that the deprivation is just, and therefore acceptable, may come with time, if that time allows for appropriate changes in what is known, understood and can be handled. Education strengthens the possibility of change. But it does not ensure it. Nor, does it make it happen immediately.

Unfortunately, we cannot wait for a better educated public with an anticipation that any one of its members will become more pleasant on an initial contact. Animal Control Officers will always find the person confronted by the depriving function of their work, initially reactive. And, the depriving function is an unavoidable and major part of their work. Our officers must understand this and build-in some useable coping mechanisms.

Just as their own reactions in the face of real or perceived withdrawal or withholding of support for them in the field from bosses, allied services and community, exemplify this phenomenon, so too the "normal" reactions of people informed of a complaint, or issued with a warning, or otherwise visited by a depriving officer, will be negative."

The regulation and control of pet animals *does* seem to bring out unusually intense emotional, personal and defensive responses in people. Even the most reasonable regulatory constraints associated with animal ownership often draw a vocal chorus of complaint from some section of the community or other. This is purely the depriving face doing its disruptive work in what is an unusually sensitive environment.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel:

- Animal management involves a necessary element of control and regulation. This *does* have a depriving face and that is how it *has* to be. But, the depriving face can be managed, and it can be managed successfully.
- The first secret is to ensure that AMOs are supported, trained and equipped sufficiently to cope well with this aspect of their job.
- The second secret is to successfully explain to the community the causes and the effects of inappropriate behaviour
- The third secret is to convincingly link this to the regulatory framework that defines what are the preferred and if necessary, enforceable codes of conduct.

Looking back to Brendan Bartlett's paper from right back at the beginning of UAM in Australia in 1992, it seems we may have been sitting on a pile of gold all along. It is a fair argument that the "depriving face" might be what makes the pursuit of basic animal management objectives seem a little risky and unattractive for politicians.

As a matter of respect for the subject, any agency undertaking any kind of animal management program should (if for no other reason than its own self preservation) do a few essential things:

1. Determine what objectives they seek – Have a mission statement and a strategic plan for achieving the goals desired

2. Explain to the community why management measures are necessary – Transparently communicate the detail of their management plan with its subordinate operational plan so the public can think it through and decide whether or not they agree with it

3. Strive to ascertain if there is in fact general support for the measures outlined – Ask the public, point by point if there is majority support for their strategy and if there isn't, then endeavour to determine what the community *does* really want and modify the strategy where it needs to be amended

4. Understand that until such time as the regulatory measures deemed necessary within the animal management mission and strategy *are* understood by the public and *are* accepted by a majority, then the whole job is reliably going to be *all* depriving and *all* up hill.

This is what strategic planning for animal management is all about.

This is why every council should have an open, easily understood, publicly accessible and actively promoted animal management plan.

This is why animal management process has to be active, dynamic and interactive with the community.

This is why animal management actually does involve the whole community and not just animal owners.

The significance of community

Hugh Mackay in his book "Reinventing Australia"³ discussed the functional meaning of the term *community*. In doing this, he stepped through the meaning of ethics, social values and morality that are the foundation of community.

1. **Ethics** is a sense that has its foundation in taking the rights, the needs and the welfare of others into account – (*Perhaps this can be extended to include the rights, needs and welfare of animals as well*).
2. **Social values** are the outcomes of a community's sense of ethics. They are what we learn from living in community with others. They are about understanding the difference between right and wrong.
3. **Morality** is an overall sense of combined social values.

Managing the "depriving face" and creating a strong sense of community for the promotion of good outcomes in urban animal management, are different aspects of the same story.

It is a "self regulation" theme.

It is a "doing the right thing" theme.

It is a community management theme.

Mackay explained how when community is compromised, the essential power of morality, social values and ethics is also and when community starts to fail, insecurity and uncertainty results. When this happens, he observed that there tends to develop an urgent wish by society to regain control and *more* regulation often seems the best way to patch over the cracks. Mackay warned that this kind of pro-regulatory (more legislation) approach, may however, serve to only further compromise individual "connectivity" (the essence of community) and just make things worse.

Following the Hugh Mackay philosophy about the merit of community "connectivity" in reference now to urban animal management, it is probably fair to say that people who feel "disconnected" from the community in which they live are less likely to be responsive to the needs and welfare of those around them.

Two observations flowing from this might be considered:

1. If this is so, in situations where there seem to be epidemiological clusters of unreasonable (inconsiderate) behaviour in animal ownership, it might be useful to review management strategies to see if the methods being applied are delivering the goods as well as they should.
2. Extra (new) legislation is unlikely to motivate those who are "disconnected" in the first place. Such people are unlikely to be any more compliant or considerate just on account of there being more rules and regulations. If they could be "re-connected" again, there would probably be no need for it anyway.

Management and welfare – boundaries and linkages

As far as I know, there is thus far no official universally declared definition of the term "urban animal management". It is time there was and here now is as good a place as any to start writing the job description. My take goes like this:

- Urban animal management involves the control and regulation of pet (companion) animals by Local Government in Australia. It is a Local Government service intended to realise the following principal goals:
 1. Having a municipal environment that effectively promotes responsible and considerate pet animal ownership.
 2. Having municipal environments that effectively minimise public pet nuisance.
- Urban animal management involves working with a complex and interactive mix of the following three scientific disciplines:
 1. Animal behaviour,
 2. Human behaviour, and
 3. Community behaviour.
- Urban animal management is a community management service that dovetails directly into Local Government's quadruple bottom line of:-
 1. Community (public health, welfare and amenity),
 2. Economy (commercial activity and employment),
 3. Environment (wildlife and habitat protection) and
 4. Governance (transparency and integrity of community service delivery).
- The processes of urban animal management are supported by the following three main service delivery functions:
 1. Public education / awareness,
 2. Regulation and enforcement, and
 3. The provision of animal management infrastructure.

Historically, in Australia at least, animal management and animal welfare have been separate enterprises. My distinctions between the two go like this:

Animal Management involves the regulation and control services that are intended to protect public safety and prevent animals from being a public nuisance.

- It is about the ethical obligation animal owners have to manage their animals in a way that is *sensibly considerate of other people*.
- The duties involved are carried out by Local Authorities.

Animal Welfare, on the other hand, involves how our society believes the people who choose to keep animals should be obliged to care for them.

- This is about the ethical obligation that animal owners have to manage their animals in a way that is *sensibly considerate of the animals themselves*.

- There are many organisations at national, state and regional levels in Australia that have animal welfare roles.

The objectives of the two have evolved differently. One has been about preserving public safety and amenity, while the other is about preventing cruelty.

Although these definitions delineate where animal management has traditionally stopped and animal welfare has traditionally started, the reality is that welfare has always been a concern of animal management teams. AMOs who handle animals in the course of executing their routine regulatory tasks are obliged to treat them humanely.

If a dog bites a man, that is an *animal management* issue. If a man bites a dog, that is an *animal welfare* issue.

Convergence and crossovers

In Australia at least, Local Authorities are no more animal welfare agencies than animal welfare agencies are councils. Urban animal management *does* however, in many instances, deliver direct animal welfare outcomes. Four immediate examples:

- a) Fence laws are front line urban animal management business. But, besides acting to prevent public nuisance and public danger being caused by roaming dogs, they also (if resolutely enforced) effectively prevent dogs being hit by cars on the road, prevent them breeding indiscriminately, prevent them attacking other animals and prevent them getting lost
- b) Registration laws are also front line urban animal management business. But, as well as providing essential animal to ownership data linkage, they also (**if resolutely enforced**) do two other things:
 1. Create an environment in which there are no strays and every animal has an identified owner ie. someone who has to sign off on being the person responsible for its care as well as its control and restraint
 2. Allow the application of desexing incentives through differential registration fees that effectively encourage desexing, without all the difficulty of mandating it
- c) Limits on the numbers of pets permitted per residence are another example of frontline urban animal management business. It is how Local Authorities facilitate pet access while minimising the nuisance caused by over zealous levels of ownership. But at the same time, they also serve to provide a better deal for the animals themselves by preventing welfare issues associated with pet hoarding.

If it is true that competently cared for animals cope better, behave better and make better pets, it can also be said that they will probably makes better neighbours too. In this sense, animal welfare channels to urban animal management outcomes also.

At the end of the day, both animal management and animal welfare are about requiring animal owners to be sensibly responsive to meeting standards of conduct that are consistent with the general expectations of the rest of their community.

The prevention of cruelty to urban animals and the prevention of public nuisance caused by them involve the following four similar functions:

1. Having codes of reasonable conduct for animal owners
2. Having these codes consistent with community (distinct from minority interest group) values
3. Having adequate authorised oversight / review capability for ownership competency
4. Having regulatory powers that provide remedy for nonconforming transgressors.

If this theme of there being similar ethics and social values underpinning both animal welfare and animal management issues is valid, it could then be suggested that the noncompliant sectors (the 80/20 rule) of the community for each *might* even be the same people - deal with one set of issues and you just might solve the other at the same time.

Conclusion

This paper has been my take on what I think are the highlights and focal issues from the past fifteen years of urban animal management in Australia. It attempted to analyse these observations in terms of what might be on the agenda moving on from here. While nothing is going to suddenly change in how Australian urban animal management is seen in overview or done in practice, I believe there is a shift occurring towards closer cooperation between urban animal management and prevention of cruelty in suburbia.

If it is better to be shaping change than having to just react to and then cop it, I encourage conference delegates to stop now, have a think... and then look forward about direction and leadership in urban animal management for Australia into the foreseeable future.

Bibliography

- ¹ Paxton DW. (1994) Community Involvement and Urban Dogs. In the Proceedings of the 3rd National Urban Animal Management Conference (DW Paxton ed), published by the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd. ISBN 0 646 16339 X
- ² Bartlett B. (1992) The Depriving Face of Control. In The Proceedings of the First National Conference on Urban Animal Management in Australia, published by Chiron Media, Mackay, ISBN 0 646 11694 0
- ³ Mackay, Hugh. (1993) Reinventing Australia: The mind and mood of Australia in the 90s. ISBN 0 207 183147 Published by Angus and Robertson Publications

About the author

Dick is a veterinarian who practices in Townsville, North Queensland. He graduated from the University of Queensland in 1973 and together with his veterinary practice commitments, has been heavily involved with urban animal management in Australia for much of the time since then. Dick's MSc (JCU) was on the subject of urban animal management and his membership of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists is in the Animal Behaviour Chapter of that organisation. He was awarded the Gilruth Prize by the Australian Veterinary Association and the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2004 for service to the veterinary profession and the community, largely to do with his work with urban animal management.

Law A?