

# **Strengthening the relationship between Institute of Municipal Management and Urban Animal Management**

**Barry Beattie**

## **INTRODUCTION**

During this conference you have addressed the very important issues surrounding the task of Urban Animal Management (UAM) today. The topic of my talk is strengthening the relationship between the Institute of Municipal Management (IMM) and UAM. I think the fact that in the researching of this paper we not only used IMM linkages but also UAM linkages shows we are well on the way for a close ongoing working relationship.

Many of you may also be here because UAM's " People and Pets" Newsletter sent out with IMM's Local Government Management journal invited you to attend at this conference.

These actions are only a start of strengthening IMM's and local government's links to UAM. As I discuss a number of issues I hope you will see how a joint approach will be of benefit to our communities.

## **BACKGROUND**

Domestic pets are an integral part of the Australian way of life. Virginia Jackson (1994) states that in 1994 57% of Australian households owned dogs or cats. As well as providing companionship, pets have been shown to provide health benefits to owners, both psychologically and physically. It has been estimated that dog and cat ownership saves Australia up to \$1.5 billion annually in national health costs (Bruce Heady, Baker Medical Institute, Melb. Univ.1996).

There seems, therefore, a very important role for domestic pets in our municipalities. New approaches by local government to a number of issues will be essential if that role is to be fulfilled. There are many problems to grapple with and not a great deal of relevant information to refer to because the whole area of urban animal management is so new.

There are, for example, many different problems inherent in domestic animal ownership and their management in urban areas. Problems of defecation, aggression to humans and other animals, barking and other nuisance behaviour are but a few examples.

In considering domestic pet owners we need to recognise that their needs are likely to differ greatly depending on their stage in the life cycle, housing type, climate etc. In local government management we also need to consider the needs of non-pet owners.

## **ISSUES**

There are many issues to which Councils have responded in an infinite variety of ways and with varying levels of success.

### **1. The value of pet ownership to residents in our municipalities**

The companionship from pets is clearly of great value to families, the elderly and those without close loved ones. Recent research has shown that health benefits for owners also occur and children improve their social skills and self esteem as owners of pets.

You have already heard during this conference of the program implemented by the City of Port Phillip and their Pet Links Program. I am not going to discuss it any further here, except to say that the benefits of the community program that is in place (with funding through the HACC Program) will be looked at very closely by local government throughout Australia. I have no doubt that it will be introduced into a number of our communities throughout Australia in the very near future.

We need to encourage voluntary compliance since we cannot and would not want to police full time for universal compliance. Traditionally local governments have relied on regulatory approaches to urban animal management. However we now know that, on its own, regulation doesn't work. I agree with Virginia Jackson when she said at our national IMM conference earlier this year "...as a policy tool regulation is inherently inefficient because of its emphasis on means (eg leashed dogs and cat curfews) rather than ends (responsible behaviour) and because enforcement (policing) can only be sporadic".

## **2. Councils need to consider other options and take a strategic approach**

Ensuring that the four areas of information, education, regulation and enforcement are implemented effectively requires the support of not just the UAM and IMM, but really of our whole communities and also, more particularly, our local government authorities. To ensure that we get urban animal management links through to local government areas, we need our various departments to be linking together i.e. Town Planning, Community Services, Public Health, Engineering. What is needed is an integrated approach through all those departments to ensure that strategic planning is implemented.

Urban consolidation and smaller backyards are placing ever increasing demands on the use of limited public open space. Conflict in public parks between dog owners and non-dog owners is getting worse. In response Councils are increasing restrictions on their use of public open space either by requiring dogs to remain leashed or by outright banning. The amalgamations and restructuring of some Councils Australia wide means public parks and open space availability needs to be reconsidered.

Two examples of Melbourne Councils that have introduced these areas are the City of Melbourne, and the City of Brimbank. In the City of Melbourne market research showed that there were no free running areas for dogs. Following community input, various areas were trialled. After the trials the community were again consulted and as a result some areas were changed. Within the City of Melbourne there are now a number of areas that are being used for free running animals.

I live in the City of Brimbank in the north-western side of Melbourne, where a similar program is in place. Certain parks are set aside for free running dogs and it has proved to be extremely successful. The only problem is that, of course, there cannot be a park available for this type of activity in every neighbourhood and therefore some people are inconvenienced. Even though it is a large city of 130,000 people the parks are being well utilised and, whilst the program is in its early days, thus far it has been found to be beneficial. Dog owners are utilising this service much more responsibly rather than allowing their dogs to run in parks which are being used by the general public as playgrounds etc.

## **3. Environmental awareness and adaptation is vital**

Environmental considerations in urban animal management are important. Some local government organisations have introduced such measures as dog litter bins in unleashed dog exercise areas, pooch patches in parks where children play sport and some have also introduced dung beetles.

To aid in the reduction of noise caused by barking dogs, some Councils have introduced the Aboistop Anti barking Collars and these have proven to be very successful.

You have already heard the benefits of anti barking collars from Terry-Anne Pert and there is no need for me to say anything more on this. In Western Australia there have also been trials of telephone line hook-ups being made available prior to the regulatory stage of dealing with noise pollution through barking dogs.

#### **4. Disseminate successful techniques within local government**

Both these measures, along with other controls, will be closely monitored by local government to ensure that the environmental aspects of domestic animals are implemented in a manner that best fits the particular community and the Council.

#### **5. Better information is a critical requirement for successful urban animal management**

There are many ways in which Councils can support their communities through the provision of information. Depending on the need of the community and their particular areas of concern, local authorities can implement various programs to ensure that there is full understanding in the community.

Councils throughout Australia are identifying various ways and alternatives in which to support information programs. Three Councils in Victoria - Kingston, Nillumbik and Yarra Ranges - have a range of services. All are different municipalities in relation to their demographics.

Yarra Ranges is a municipality where the environment is very much an issue, particularly in relation to feral cats and the preservation of wildlife. Nillumbik, whilst very environmentally conscious, wishes to ensure that their community is fully aware of the environmental aspects of keeping domestic animals, whilst encouraging responsible ownership and maintenance of those pets. Kingston, being a more traditional city in relation to industry and residential areas, has taken an approach of which I am certain there has been mention over the past three days of this conference.

Obviously Councils in other States are depending upon the legislation, and also their will, to ensure that their residents are fully maintained, and are implementing programs to support their residents. The role of the IMM is to get these stories and proposals out into the community; to allow Councils to say "if that program is working in a particular municipality, maybe we should try it here in ours" and to encourage the communities to do the same; to bring ideas to local authorities to ensure that the information is disseminated effectively.

#### **6. Urban planning is about the fair distribution of open space. It is about distributing open space areas throughout the municipality in a manner that takes into consideration urban animals other needs**

Many councils are working towards solutions to many difficult questions regarding dogs' access to public open space and indeed how to plan for the needs of all residents for open space.

#### **7. The needs of tenants in rental housing and public housing must be addressed**

One area which is not the domain of local government, and in which we have not made much headway, is rental housing and public housing. Statistics would show that the benefit of domestic animals within the community would be more prevalent here than in more affluent areas of our society, due to the socio-economic groupings.

Property owners and those who own and control public housing are at best reticent to allow animals to be maintained in their properties and place quite restrictive barriers on tenants keeping animals within the premises. My view is that we should be working more aggressively in this area to change the current position to ensure that people in this category are, like any other person, able to keep the animal of their choice on their property.

This is an area on which the IMM and UAM can work together to change the procedures that currently exist with a view to allowing freer access.

## CONCLUSION

Although I argued earlier that domestic pet ownership is part of the Australian way of life, it can no longer be taken for granted. The place of domestic pets in urban areas is under scrutiny as never before. The media and non-pet owning residents complain about faeces polluting our waterways; cats are portrayed as a menace to native birds and animals; and noise disturbance from barking dogs is a frequent complaint to Councils.

I agree with the readership of the newsletter 'People & Pets' who suggested that what was needed was more helpful comments and more input from municipalities to spread ideas around - especially successful and innovative initiatives in councils that deal with some of the problems.

It is also important for Councils to have a strategic approach that considers issues across the municipality as a whole, rather than a piecemeal approach. Our municipalities in the future will need to accept and embrace diversity in residents needs and pet ownership is one area where conflicts will inevitably result. There are no easy answers and generally no rights nor wrongs, so conflicting needs must be integrated into urban management.

Responsible domestic pet ownership is promoted through information, education, legislation and enforcement. Local government can and should be involved in all these aspects and can greatly increase its involvement in the dissemination of information and the education of its citizens.

---

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barrie Beattie  
Executive Director  
Institute of Municipal Management  
P.O. Box 409  
South Melbourne Victoria 3205  
Phone: 03 9645 9044  
Fax: 03 9691 1377

Barrie Beattie is Executive Director of the Institute of Municipal Management, Victoria.

---

[UAM 96 Index Page](#)