

Implementing new legislation in Victoria - a council perspective

Fred Pallas

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses some issues relating to the implementation of the new Victorian Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act in one Municipality. The Act replaced the Dog Act that had served the people of Victoria since 1970. It was clear to most of us in Local Government that there were deficiencies in the Dog Act and there was strong support for change.

There seemed to be more aggressive dogs being introduced into society. The incidence of mauling dog attacks rather than dog bites appeared to be increasing. The penalties provided in the Dog Act for offences which resulted in serious injury were considered by most to be inadequate.

There were no controls in the Dog Act covering the sources of domestic animals. Since there was no legislation covering cats, they were free to roam throughout the state. Some Councils had passed local laws (by laws) placing restrictions on cats in particular places at particular times. Local laws have severe limitations when it comes to controlling animals as by their very nature, they are mobile and do not recognise municipal boundaries.

Those responsible for preparing the replacement legislation gave assurances that it would provide adequate powers and processes to Council officers to achieve the objectives of the Act. This was important, particularly in the new areas of cat control, the supervision of domestic animal businesses and dangerous dogs. It had taken a number of years to draft the Bill and there had been a significant amount of consultation with those who would be affected by the legislation.

Has the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act provided useful solutions to the perceived problems? Do the provisions and processes in the Act contribute significantly to the solutions, or have they simply created a new range of problems?

THE ACT

The Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994 (referred to as the Act) gained Royal Assent on 29 November, 1994. It became fully operational on the 9th April, 1996. The Act contains the following statement of purpose:

"The purpose of this Act is to promote animal welfare, the responsible ownership of dogs and cats and the protection of the environment by providing for -

1. a scheme to protect the community and environment from feral and nuisance dogs and cats; and
2. a registration and identification scheme for dogs and cats which recognises and promotes responsible ownership; and
3. the identification and control of dangerous dogs; and
4. a registration scheme for domestic animals businesses which promotes the maintenance of standards of those businesses; and
5. matters related to the boarding of dogs and cats; and
6. payments to the Treasurer from fees received by Council's under this Act; and
7. other related matters."

The Act had its origins some time ago and during its development several Parliaments came and went. The Government changed and a new Minister became responsible for ensuring the people of Victoria were given effective legislation.

During the period between the Bill passing through the Parliament and it coming into force officers from the Bureau of Animal Welfare conducted a number of seminars for local government officers and others. During these seminars local government officers identified features of the Act which they believed would either be difficult to administer, not achieve the aims stated, or simply create more work than was necessary to achieve the aims. In some cases the solutions imposed by the Act meant that significant costs were to be borne by the community, or portions of it, with very little tangible result.

Despite the voicing of these concerns it was claimed by the officers from the Bureau that what was sought by local government officers would not have been politically acceptable and that it would not have received the support of the Parliament. Rightly or wrongly, this is often the political reality and those responsible for administering the Act must make the best use of the tools given them. They must ensure that any failure to achieve the desired outcomes are attributable to the legislation and not any lack of resolve on their part.

TIMING OF THE INTRODUCTION

Every one will be aware of the Victorian State Government's programme to restructure Local Government boundaries. For my Council the order to restructure boundaries came in December 1994. The effects of restructuring on the ability of an organisation to carry out its normal functions cannot be under estimated. An organisation in the throws of restructuring is not well placed to implement new legislation which covers a range of functions not previously undertaken.

It takes time and a great deal of energy to build a new organisation from three and a bit smaller entities. In the months between December 1994 to August 1995 there was a very trying period to be endured by all staff of the former Councils..

Eventually a Chief Executive was appointed and a new structure devised. Staff levels were reduced significantly and recruiting began. New people came into the organisation and old colleagues departed. It took until August 1995 to substantially complete the recruiting process.

During this period considerable personal and corporate resources were diverted to the task of planning and securing the future. Although individuals continued to perform well most people were, understandably, concentrating on their personal situations and there was little opportunity to attend to the long term operational goals of the corporation.

Although it was not realised at the time, these distractions had an impact on the ability of the new organisation to deal as effectively with functions imposed by legislation as had been the case in the past.

RAISING THE PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS

During the months between the Act being passed and it coming into force there was considerable publicity given to the new reforms, in particular those relating to cats and dangerous dogs. Various media articles created an atmosphere of expectation. In the minds of some media commentators, all problems regarding domestic animals would be expeditiously handled by local government officers on the 10th April, 1996 and not a day later.

So, what did the public expect when the Act came into force on the 9th April, 1996? The public had, over an extended period of time and in a variety of ways, been told, "wait until the 10th April and go to your local Council." Radio commentators, print journalists and others frequently provided commentary on the new legislation. Issues which were commonly discussed included:

- wandering cats,
- feral cats,
- dangerous dogs, and
- barking dogs.

CATS

The expectation

The public had been told that registration was the key to dealing with the perceived cat problems. The expectation was that because the law required it, all cats would be registered in the way that all dogs were under the old legislation. This in turn would lead to the Council immediately stopping all cats from wandering. Those that did wander would be seized and impounded. Nuisance cats would be dealt with and all cats would wear collars. Wild life would no longer be at risk from cats. In other words, overnight there would be an end to cat problems.

This would be easily achieved by the Council because, after all, the registration money would pay for it (one reporter asked me if half a million dollars was too close to the revenue we would raise from cats in the first year).

The reality

Registration

The reality is that registration rates for dogs are said to vary between 50 and 80 percent depending on the source of the information. It has never to my knowledge approached 100%. How then does one go about getting the majority of owned cats on the register? My Council decided to circulate to each and every household in the municipality an animal registration form which could be used to register either cats or previously unregistered dogs. This resulted in Council incurring significant costs in circulating forms to 55,000 residences.

For the first time the registration fee structure was enshrined in legislation. A neutered animal (either a cat or dog) must cost no more than one third of the cost of an entire animal. A pensioner must pay no more than half of either fee. My Council set fees at levels which it hoped would not be a disincentive to cat owners to register their animals. The fee to register an entire animal was set at \$70.00. Council decided that a neutered animal would cost \$10. Under the formula it could have charged \$23.33 however this greater differential was seen as a tangible inducement to cat owners to neuter their animals (this logic had worked with dog owners so why not cat owners?). Under the Government imposed formula, a pensioner paid \$37.50 or \$5.00. Of these amounts \$1.00 for each registration went to the State Government.

Wandering and nuisance cats

The Act sets out a three stage process to be followed by a land owner who does not want a neighbour's cat trespassing on his/her land. The aggrieved property owner is required to observe the cat on his/her property on at least two separate occasions. They are required to advise the cat owner on each occasion that the cat is not wanted on the property. This notice may be given in writing or verbally. If the cat is seen to trespasses a further time the aggrieved property owner can ask the Council to serve a notice advising the owner of the cat that they must prevent the cat from straying onto the property of that particular land owner.

If the cat again trespasses on that property, the owner of the cat is guilty of an offence and the cat can be seized. Alternatively the owner of the cat can be served with an infringement notice or summonsed to appear in court.

Despite literally hundreds of calls regarding neighbours cats in the months since the legislation has come into force there have only been two occasions where this Council has been requested to issue a notice. Only two other property owners have notified Council that they have advised a neighbour that they do not want the cat on their property. There are only three conclusions that can be drawn from this. One, the urban cat problem is a myth. Two, that all cat owners respond to aggrieved property owners when requested to confine their cats without the intervention of Council. Or three, that aggrieved property owners will not pursue a resolution which involves them taking punitive action against a neighbour.

The process set out in the Act is applicable where the owner of an offending cat is known. The situation regarding all other cats is in dispute. It is my view, and that of my Council's legal advisers, that the Act does not allow a Council to seize a cat unless the Council has made an order governing behaviour of animals.

Orders by the Council

The Act does allow a Council to create orders setting out times when cats (and dogs) are prohibited from being in certain places (a curfew). My Council took the view that, without considerable research and understanding of the issues, it was premature to create orders regarding cats at this early stage. Imposing curfews on cats where there is no demonstrated reason or purpose is not the way to win support for the legislation from cat owners.

The inability to deal with any problem cat unless the owner is known is the cause of frustration. In an attempt to find ways around the legislative deficiencies, my Council sought from its legal advisers a further review. A more recent legal opinion indicates that under the Local Government Act 1989, a Council has a responsibility to control animals. One could forgiven for thinking that all controls regarding cats would now be contained in the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act and that any general provisions contained in the Local Government Act would no longer apply. Our legal advisers have expressed the view that the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act is **SILENT** regarding pre-requisites for seizing feral cats. As a result the Local Government Act does allow a Council to manage feral cats. However, in the absence of orders made by the Council, there is still no mechanism to deal with a domesticated cat whose owner is not known.

Try to explain this convoluted system of controls to an angry resident, or even the staff of a local politician, without sounding as if you are avoiding the issues!

Costs

The actual cost of introducing registration to cat owners was greater than many had anticipated. Although we could have waited passively for cat owners to come forward and register their animals we decided to send an animal registration form to each household in the municipality. This cost in excess of \$10,000. To this must be added the cost of computer software changes and data operators required to key in the details relating to new animals as well as the substantially increased volume of telephone and counter inquiries. Data entry is often slowed by incomplete or inaccurate information supplied by the animal owner on the registration form.

Revenue from cat registration was not as great as anticipated. From early trends it seems there is a significantly greater proportion of the owned cat population sterilised than is the case with dogs. A greater proportion of cats than dogs seem to be owned by pensioners. As a result of this trend in ownership most cats are registered for fees at the lower end of the scale and thus generate less revenue.

DOGS

The expectation

The Act came into force at an unfortunate time with respect to dog attacks. There was an unconnected series of dog attacks, some of which had tragic results. Far from raising the profile of responsible animal management, some commentators used these incidents to create an atmosphere of near hysteria.

The public was demanding strong action from governments at all levels. Those who had access to the media extolled the virtues of the Domestic (Feral & Nuisance) Animals Act which would soon be in force and would give local government a new set of tools with which to deal with the problem. In the eyes of the public the Council would now be able to destroy any dog which attacked another person or animal. Even though it was widely known that the maximum penalty prescribed in the new Act for a dog attack, no matter how serious, was only \$500, this did little to quell the enthusiasm of commentators.

The public were told "your Council will be able to declare a dog to be dangerous". At the height of the frenzy even the long held view of the majority, that any controls should be deed based not breed based, was brought into question by some high profile personalities in the industry. None of this hype assisted local government at all.

The public identifies danger on the basis of potential as well as reality. It expects that a dog which demonstrates aggression towards humans should be the subject of dangerous dog controls prior to it pressing home a successful attack. We received a large number of reports regarding dogs which had not attacked but had rushed aggressively at people. Those making the reports quickly became disillusioned when they were told that, unless a person or an animal was seriously bitten, we could not declare the dog to be dangerous except at the request of the owner.

The reality

Dogs which have attacked

The first and most significant change noticeable to Local Government officers was a reduction in the infringement penalty for a dog at large from \$100 to \$50. This must be one of the few cases where penalties have been reduced after such a lengthy period at the higher level. The most basic tool in the animal control officer's tool box had been reduced in effectiveness. There has been a very significant increase in wandering dogs, but I cannot conclude that this entirely attributable to reduced penalties. It is certain, however, that reduced penalties cannot possibly assist officers to manage the wandering dog problem.

Not only has the penalty been reduced but a Council must now process ALL prosecutions under the new Act through open court. There is no longer access to the cost effective processes under the PERIN court system as was the case under the Dog Act. This means that my Council is forced to raise and process up to 1000 summonses per year and make a similar number of appearances with a prosecutor, informant and witness. This cannot be described as a desirable feature of the Act. We are advised that this matter is still the subject of negotiations between State Government Departments.

Much has been made of a Council's ability to declare a dog to be a 'dangerous dog'. But how useful is this provision in reality? The Act allows a Council to declare a dog to be a 'dangerous dog' if it has been trained to attack a person, is used to guard non-residential property or has been declared a 'dangerous dog' by another Council. It may also declare a dog to be a 'dangerous dog' if the owner asks the Council to do so.

A dog which attacks a person or an animal cannot be declared a dangerous dog unless it causes injuries such as broken bones, wounds requiring multiple sutures, wounds requiring plastic surgery, or the loss of use or sensation of a part of the body. Unless an attack results in one or more of the forgoing, a Council must not declare the dog to dangerous.

Try explaining this to the third or fourth victim of a dog attack where the dog has been beaten off before it could inflict the required degree of injury! Explain this to the seventy five year old lady who has been brought down in the street by a dog only to be saved by the intervention of a passing motorist. Perhaps the intervention was a moment too early!

A careful study of the Act will find an opportunity to deal with the situation previously described. Where, in the opinion of an authorised officer, a dog has been guilty of attacking, rushing at, chasing or worrying any person or animal, the owner is guilty of an offence. In this circumstance the dog can be seized and, if a prosecution follows, held until a conviction has been obtained. Once a conviction has been obtained the dog can be destroyed. To access this provision the victim, or another witness, must be prepared to give evidence in court and the court must impose a conviction. The problem here is that few victims actually want to go to court and they are even less inclined if the outcome will result in the dog being destroyed. They want the 'dangerous dog' provisions to apply.

You may recall that one of the circumstances under which a Council may declare a dog to be dangerous is if it has been declared so by another Council. How do we handle a situation where a dog is visiting a Municipality and is involved in a serious attack and is subsequently declared to be a dangerous dog by that Municipality? The 'home' Municipality has not declared it to be dangerous and may choose not to do so. Does this mean that the dog is only a dangerous dog in the Municipality which made the declaration?

Officers from one Council have no jurisdiction in a neighbouring Municipality and it appears that a declaration made by one Council may be meaningless outside of its Municipal boundaries.

If a dog has been declared to be a 'dangerous dog' in one Municipality, does it have to be on a lead and wear a muzzle and the prescribed collar when in another? While the legislation sets out that it must, indications are that a 'dangerous dog' declaration only applies within the boundaries of the Municipality which has made the declaration.

Other dangerous dogs

The legislation allows a Council to declare a dog to be a dangerous dog if it is used to guard non-domestic premises or it has been trained to attack a person. The cost to the owner of meeting the 'dangerous dog' requirements set out in the regulations can be significant. Quotations ranging up to \$1000 have been given to construct the prescribed enclosure. Given this, it is unlikely that many owners of dogs which may meet the criteria will voluntarily come forward to the Council. The task of tracking down each dog which fits the criteria for consideration is enormous. Even when such dogs are tracked down they may actually 'reside' and be registered in another Municipality which may or may not choose to declare them to be dangerous. Many guard dogs are owned by companies and are simply inserted onto a premises at the close of business each day and removed prior to the business opening the next day. Where do they fit in the big picture?

Dogs which have had a career in the police force or the defence forces and have been trained to attack people as part of their former duties need to be identified and given consideration. While they make up only a tiny proportion of the dogs which have to be considered the task of setting up the process is time consuming and costly.

There is no requirement to advise Council that a dog has been trained to attack people. The requirement is to notify Council on the first day that such training is to be given. Owners of dogs which received training prior to the introduction of the legislation (and perhaps continue to do so) do not have to notify. It is up to the Council to track them down and raise issues with owners. While Council can obtain the information if the training establishment is within its boundaries, using its powers to examine the books of a domestic animal business, it cannot do so if the training establishment is in another Municipality. No doubt there will be a sharing of information between Councils but, again, this takes time to arrange, co-ordinate and foster.

Local Government Officers have always wanted the dangerous dog provisions to be managed at the state level.

DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES

The expectation

There has been little in the print or electronic media regarding the fact that Councils now have a responsibility to oversee the management practices of businesses that are required by the Act to be registered with Council. This raises the question "Was there ever a real problem?"

The reality

A domestic animal business can be:

- an animal shelter or pound, or
- a pet shop, or
- an enterprise run for profit which
 - i. breeds dogs or cats and has ten or more fertile female animals of either or both species; or
 - ii. has less than ten fertile female animals of either or both species but the owner is not a member of an applicable organisation or an organisation approved by the Council of the Municipal district in which it operates.

Local Government is responsible for registering each domestic animal business within its boundaries. In order to do so it must first identify them. The owners of pet shops are aware of the requirements due to the high profile its industry body has adopted. Those in other businesses such as grooming and training are not so easy to identify. How do we identify a 'domestic animal business' which is operating from a residential property? We have to establish that it is 'run for profit'. But we cannot, nor do we want to, search a dwelling for documents that would establish the financial status of the enterprise.

The legislation also imposes on a Council the responsibility to ensure that each business operates in accordance with a code of practice. In the case of a business which boards, grooms and trains animals there are three codes of practice to be followed. The Bureau of Animal Welfare has recently distributed a comprehensive check list for each code of practice. These checklists will assist to produce a uniform approach to inspections of businesses by Council Officers.

While guidance for Council Officers is welcome, the checklists reveal that the effort required to manage this function will be considerably greater than initially estimated. Fees to register a domestic animal business were calculated to cover the registration process, the provision of advice and guidance to the public and proprietors and two checks per business per year as well as the inevitable payment to the State Government. The introduction of a check list that is far more comprehensive than anticipated will add significantly to the cost. Inevitably these costs will be passed on to the businesses and ultimately to the consumers.

THE NILLUMBICK SUMMIT

In May this year a summit was convened by the Shire of Nillumbick and was attended by officers from a large number of Councils. The summit was in response to concerns at the number of serious dog attacks that had highlighted to the public the inadequacy of the penalty provisions of the Act. The purpose of this summit was to identify those aspects of the legislation that were incapable of meeting the expectations of the community and to recommend changes. The major concerns expressed at the summit were the inadequate penalties for dog attack, the reduction in on the spot fine for dog at large, the inability to access the PERIN process for infringements, unclear provisions relating to cats and unworkable 'dangerous dog' provisions.

With respect to Councils' powers over cats there is now a considerable body of opinion which supports the view that the powers of Council are not as clear as intended. The Government has been asked to amend the legislation. The response has been less than satisfactory.

Government officers do not accept that the Act is deficient in this regard. They have indicated an intention to wait until the Courts have made a judgement against a Council that has used the disputed provisions to seize and destroy a cat. In some circumstances this may be an appropriate position to adopt. However it is my view that such circumstances do not apply to this situation. Until a Court has made such a judgement - and who knows when, if ever, that will be - some Councils, acting on their own legal advice, will not introduce cat trapping programs. There will be confusion where neighbouring Councils have different views and provide different levels of service to their residents and ratepayers.

It has even been argued that it does not matter if the Act is deficient and Councils do not have the power to seize cats, as who is going to take the matter to court? This is hardly the point. Any statutory body charged with the enforcement of legislation must not exceed the powers given to it by the Parliament. To wilfully act without regard for the law is a form of anarchy and cannot be condoned.

If the public loses faith in one aspect of the legislation it is unlikely to support the remainder. It is imperative that the legislation is amended so that all charged with its implementation can do so without fear of rebuttal by the courts or, at the worst, conviction for overstepping the mark.

CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act are important in the context of urban animal management. However the Act does not effectively meet the more important expectations of the community. Those expectations which it does meet are met inefficiently and with a significant impact on local government during times of heavy financial cuts.

Why are there difficulties within the legislation? It is my view that the consultation process was flawed. Frequently Local Government wanted to approach the issues from different directions but there always seemed to be someone or some group waiting in the wings to oppose it. The process of identifying the issues and developing potential solutions should have been conducted in two quite separate processes and forums.

It is reasonable to consult the various animal welfare groups and animal control bodies, as well as the public at large, during the definition of the issues and identification of possible options stages. However I believe that should have been the extent of their involvement. The Act places responsibility for its implementation squarely with Local Government and, to a very minor degree, the State. No other party has a role, other than as self appointed watch dogs reporting on the performance of Local Government. Given that this is the case the development of solutions to the issues raised should have been largely the task of Local Government and State Government.

Having identified the desired outcomes for the Act, the development of the techniques and processes should have been the subject of consultation between the State and Local Governments. No other body is as close to the people whom this Act purports to serve, nor understands the needs of the people better, than Local Government. If the views of Local Government had been given more prominence then the procedural and other deficiencies being experienced today would have been far less likely.

Why did we not get the results we were seeking? In my view the answer is simple. Local Government did not become sufficiently involved. It did not lobby politicians at the local level to support the reforms it was seeking. It did not have a consolidated point of view either at a regional or at the state level. It relied on the formal structures which exist between the Government and the peak bodies representing Local Government to express its views.

Many times in response to requests for matters to be varied we were told "it would not be politically acceptable", "we should be grateful for the gains we were making." Why was our view politically unacceptable? Put simply, because others lobbied politicians to accept an alternate position. Politicians were never given an opportunity to experience the difficulties at the coal face nor to hear the Local Government perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Local government officers are the experts in their fields. With respect to urban animal management no one else provides the range of services that are provided by Local Government. When considering new legislation state governments will invariably seek input from Local Government. This is the opportunity for you to act through the formal channels and to create informal channels through which to voice your views. I suggest that you consider adopting some or all of the following techniques.

1. Become informed about the issues relating to the legislation. Talk with others who will be effected by the proposed legislation.
2. Establish local and regional working parties comprising Local Government officers and anyone else whom you believe will help you to be heard. Invite those responsible for drafting the bill to work with you - through the responsible Minister if you can. Appoint a spokesperson who really can speak. If you have not got one then get one.
3. Consult with animal welfare and animal control bodies at the local level. Consensus at the local level can be very powerful.
4. Make sure the local press is aware of your group. Every local reporter is looking for an article which will be picked up by a metropolitan daily.
5. Convene public meetings. Explain to the community the issues and determine the needs of your community.
6. Involve elected representatives. But be careful that they do not hijack the forum for some other political purpose.
7. Get airtime on local radio. By this I mean a local radio station that actually has a diverse listening audience. Never pass up an opportunity to focus attention on the issues.
8. Be prepared to listen to and debate others with opposing views. Do not accuse or blame. You are seeking to find a balance and to have the views of your group considered.
9. Lobby the politicians who are responsible for the decisions of the Government. Invite them to speak to the group about parliamentary processes, party room processes and the like. Find out who is the power player in the issue and focus on persuading them that your views are credible. Do not forget the opposition and independents in the Parliament. They have an opportunity to influence the shape of legislation that is not otherwise available to you.
10. Respond to every article which appears on the topic. Do not wait until the third or fourth time an issue has been raised before launching a counter position. Each time misinformation is presented to the public, it becomes a little more credible. Deal with it at the first opportunity.
11. Guard your credibility. Do not be given to bluster and extreme language to put the views of your group. A thoughtful and carefully constructed argument repeated often is far more likely to be effective.
12. Where possible have representation on Government appointed working parties.
13. Do not rely on formal exchanges between Local Government and the state government to get your messages across. Lobby independently.
14. When the Bill is finally drafted, work it through. Critically examine it to see if it is workable and practical. It probably won't include all you sought, but that is not the issue. Is what is in the document workable and practical? Take current cases and see how the provisions of the Bill would apply.
15. If there is doubt over how a particular provision of the Bill will work seek a legal opinion. Keep in mind, though, that opinions will vary.
16. Where deficiencies are found, document and report them to every one you can. The lobbying process begins all over again. Do not give up.
17. When the Bill has been passed by the Parliament, get a copy of the Act. Use the time until the Act comes into force to examine its provisions and plan their implementation.
18. Remain vigilant. Do not let the media create unreasonable expectations among the public. Immediately counter information which is misleading.

19. Take this lead time to educate your public on the measures which you will be introducing and the programmes which will follow. You must win their support when others are trying to win headlines.
20. Find a local reporter who will follow the progress of your programmes and present feature articles from time to time.
21. Finally, focus on the issues. Do not become distracted. Learn how to lobby effectively.

If you do these things you will contribute significantly to the development of legislation which is workable, practical and meets the expectations of the community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Pallas AIMM
Manager, Neighbourhood Support Services.
Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
Private Bag 1000
ROSEBUD AUSTRALIA 3939

Fred Pallas has been involved in Local Government since 1986 when he left his military career of almost 25 years to accept the appointment of Superintendent of Traffic and By-Laws with the Shire of Mornington Council.

Fred introduced effective animal management programmes to the Municipality and persuaded the Council to adopt widely differing registration fees for sterilised and entire dogs which has impacted favourably on the number of dogs impounded.

He has been a strong advocate of effective legislation and has presented his views to Parliamentary Working Parties on animal welfare. While he supports the direction various governments are taking with legislation, he believes that the tendency is to address the symptoms and not the problems. Problem solving is, in his words, "still being left to those in the field".

Fred is with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and is working to implement the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act amid the uncertainties of a competitive tendering environment.

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