

# Performance auditing of pounds and shelters

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## ABSTRACT

In 1996 State Government introduced legislation that replaced the old Dog Act. This new Act called the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act (a title which I still have problems coming to grips with because it only covers domestic dogs and cats), not only reflects most of the old Act for the control of dogs, it extends control into new areas. The most important of these are:

- registration and control of cats;
- the ability of Councils to introduce leash laws;
- enable the declaration of dangerous dogs and controls over them;
- the registration of domestic animal businesses;

It is the latter of these, which is the base of my talk today.

## INTRODUCTION

When referring to domestic animal businesses the Act is talking about businesses such as pet shops, boarding kennels, animal shelters and Council pounds or holding facilities. Codes of practice were introduced for each type of animal business - these set the minimum management and performance standards that are applied across the state. Registration of an animal business is now dependent on the operator meeting the code requirements. While the Code is entitled Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds it extends beyond those perimeters and covers the capture and transport of animals as well.

The Bureau of Animal Welfare developed the Code with the assistance of a number of people and organisations each of which had their own political agenda and direction. I was part of a group formed to advise the Bureau when the document was being drafted. The Bureau is to be congratulated for the manner in which they developed the document.

The introduction of the Act was a breath of fresh air for animal control. For years some Councils had seen animal registration fees and infringement penalties as another method of raising revenue and offset running costs. Others had ignored problems with domestic animals in the hope that they would simply go away.

In contrast some Councils recognised changing opinions and made an attempt to accommodate animals in everyday life. Many of the Council pounds and animal welfare shelters were starting to show their age, buildings were in varying states of disrepair, the standards of buildings built thirty to fifty years ago were no longer acceptable. Education standards had changed, people had become more enlightened and demanded that authorities be held responsible and accountable for their actions. Pound and shelter managers had their practices put to the test and changes were imposed on them by legislation. For the first time that I know of in Australia, uniform practices and standards were introduced. Councils, animal welfare agencies and shelter managers had to adjust to the new requirements or stop operating.

It must be understood that the Act and Codes of Practice were introduced during a period of major upheaval in local government. The Kennett government had dramatically reduced the number of Councils through a process of amalgamation - it had limited the amount of revenue that they could raise through rate increases. Private enterprise, animal welfare agencies and Council staff were actively competing against each other for animal control contracts. Some contracts were won with their bids based on using Council facilities, some of these facilities fell well short of the new code requirements. Some contractors upgraded the Council pound at their own cost only to find that they lost the contract second time around.

While the new Act enabled Councils to contract out functions such as impounding and looking after pound facilities, it provided that all legal and enforcement issues be retained as a function of Council. This meant that only an authorised Council employee could legally inspect and register a domestic animal business. While this posed no problem to Councils for the registration of animal businesses such as pet shops, it did create some concern for me in the registration of Council holding facilities. How could it be demonstrated that a fair process of evaluation had been used and that the same criteria would be used on any other shelter?

The Bureau of Animal Welfare developed a simple check sheet that covered all aspects of the code, with this Council was in a position to begin its own registration process. An animal control officer previously used to inspect and register pet shops who was well versed in the registration processes and the Code of Practice, was requested to undertake the required inspections.

The officer and I agreed that two rules should apply:

1. I was to be treated as the client and that I was to be treated in the same manner as any other animal business manager; and
2. As with the introduction of codes and registration of the other animal businesses in our area I would be given an agreed and realistic time period in which to modify, repair or otherwise make good any faults.

I was confident that the facility would pass inspection with only minor work being required. However, I'm glad we agreed to the second rule because she did identify faults and I had to get the money out of Council's budget system to pay for the modifications.

Registration of the holding pens is an annual event that now passes almost unnoticed. Officers know what's in the code and are encouraged to ensure that the required standards are maintained. Faults that can develop in the holding pens are reported and rectified before they become a major problem. From a management point of view the process makes life much simpler.

Now I've given you the background and set the stage, let's have a closer look at the Code and its' performance standards. The Code in itself is a small but complex document only eight pages long, divided into an introduction and five subjects. By contrast the checklist the bureau developed is ten pages long and can require up to 175 inspection points to be made if both cats and dogs are held at the same facility.

I don't intend to go over every point, however, I think it will be of value to review the main points in the Code and expand on them as necessary

## **THE CODE**

### **Introduction**

Within the introduction it states:

- the head of power to make the code 'the Act';
- the purpose of the Code as

*"... to specify the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care which are appropriate to the physical and behavioural needs of dogs and cats housed in shelters and pounds".*

- that the proprietor and all of those people who work in the shelter must observe the Code;
- the types of facility controlled by the Code - pounds, shelters and holding pens;
- wildlife shelters under the Wildlife Act are exempt.

For those of you who have come from South Australia I think you will find the words very familiar. The stated purpose within your code is almost the same. Does this mean that some common aspects are finally being introduced between states in animal control? I hope so.

Under the heading of General comes the five points I referred to earlier.

## **STAFF**

As with any other business pounds and shelters require staff to operate. The code recognises this and very neatly packages them and their level of responsibility as follows:

### **Proprietor**

A proprietor is responsible for the management of the facility. This can be done through the appointment of a manager or written into the duty statement of a real person. Ideally the proprietor should have completed a course in animal care as this person is ultimately responsible for all of the operations of the facility, the building, animal care, staffing issues, hygiene and health (animal and human), maintenance of records. There are some fairly large asks in the list and while the manager is responsible it doesn't mean they have to actually do all of the work, this can be done by suitably qualified staff. We will cover these aspects in more detail later as we discuss individual points.

### **Veterinarian**

The proprietor is responsible for the appointment of as many veterinarians as necessary to be on call for the treatment and euthanasia of animals. If isolation pens or a treatment area is required and they cannot be provided at the pound or shelter then they must be provided for, off-site at the veterinarian's facility.

*You will note that the code is beginning to talk about the physical nature of the pound or shelter and what has to be provided in it.*

The veterinarian is also responsible for the provision of a vaccination program in the facility should it be necessary.

Some welfare agencies vaccinate all cats and dogs as a matter of policy when they are first housed in the shelter, this issue was one that caused some debate during the development of the Code. Given that a majority of responsible pet owners who claim their pets already have them vaccinated and the remaining animals are only held **in pound** for eight days before their fate is determined the benefits of vaccination are debatable. The bureau opted to leave out any requirement for compulsory vaccination at this stage of the process however, animals are required to be vaccinated prior to being given new homes.

### **Animal attendants**

The proprietor is responsible for the employment of suitably qualified personnel at a ratio of one attendant to every fifty animals.

The attendant is responsible to the manager for the day-to-day functions within the facility; these include feeding, cleaning, exercise of the animals and physical assessment of the animals. Where an attendant finds any abnormality in an animal they have a duty to report it to the manager.

### **Staff health**

Those who attended yesterday's workshop on zoonoses should now be well versed on the subject however, for those who didn't attend I think it's worth touching on.

Certain species of animals are known to carry disease-causing organisms that can be transmitted to man (zoonoses). The proprietor has a responsibility to the staff and must make them aware of the risks involved. Women of childbearing age who work with cats for instance must be made aware of toxoplasmosis.

Staff must also be provided appropriate work clothing, washing facilities etc. Information on personal hygiene must also be provided. The Code also requires that staff be vaccinated against tetanus.

### **The vehicle driver**

The driver of a pound or shelter vehicle transporting an animal must be experienced and is responsible for the care and welfare of the animal during transport and the hygiene and cleanliness of the vehicle

## **HANDLING AND TREATMENT OF ANIMALS**

### **Capture**

Capture of animals must be humane and cause minimum risk to operators, other people or animals. The methods used depends on the type and temperament of the animal. Under the Code the use of tranquilliser guns is not permitted.

### **Transport**

Animals such as cats and small dogs now have to be placed in carry baskets, cages etc. Larger dogs may be restrained, however all animals must be physically separated from each other during transport.

Construction of the transport vehicle should provide that:

- there are no protrusions or sharp edges;
- the vehicle escape proof and prevent protrusion of the animal;
- floors are none slip capable of bearing the animals weight;
- it is well ventilated and weather proof;
- it have ease of loading; and
- it is constructed of materials that are easily cleaned.

The person transporting an animal is responsible to ensure that the animal is transported in the minimum amount of time.

### **Admission to the pound or shelter**

When admitted to the pound or shelter an experienced person or a veterinarian must examine every animal. Animals are classified into the following categories:

- healthy animals;
- moderately or slightly injured animals - these are given first aid and maintained under observation;
- severely injured animals, unidentified cats that are wild or uncontrollable and unweaned animals are humanely euthanased; and
- animals with or suspected of having infectious disease are held in isolation and must be under veterinary care.

### **Euthanasia**

The preferred method of euthanasia is by barbiturate overdose administered by a veterinarian.

## **Nutrition**

Animals have to be :

- provided with a permanent supply of clean water;
- supplied with a nutritionally balanced diet in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of the animal.

Food and water containers should be non spillable and easily disinfected and cleaned.

## **Rehousing of animals**

The Code requires pounds and shelters develop practices to assess the temperament and health of the animals. All animals offered for sale from a pound or shelter must be wormed, vaccinated and desexed. Sick, aggressive, pregnant, antisocial, unweaned, deformed or animals with known vices cannot be offered for sale.

All animals sold from a pound or shelter must be sold with a guarantee:

- if returned within 7 days with a veterinary certificate stating ill health or other reasons the purchaser is entitled to a full refund or replacement animal;
- an animal returned for other reason within 3 days is subject to a 75% refund; and
- the owner of an animal that dies or is euthanased as a result of a disease that is traced back to the point of sale is entitled to a new animal with the same guarantee or their money back.

New owners are supplied with appropriate vaccination certificates and responsible pet ownership material. The maximum time animals can be held in a pound or shelter and offered for sale is 4 weeks after which they must be either permanently removed (put into foster care) or euthanased.

## **Animal research**

Pound animals can only be released for research purposes under the provisions of the relevant Code of Practice.

## **PROMOTION OF RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP**

The Code only requires pounds and shelters which sell animals to provide information on responsible, pet ownership, in reality it should require all animal refuges to provide information, I'm sure they do anyway. The type of advice given should include pet selection, pet care and legal requirements eg: registration, restraint.

## **BUILDING AND FACILITIES**

This is one of my favourite subjects, it's not often that you get the opportunity to design, build or alter a pound facility.

In 1977 the Council I was working for had an agreement with a welfare agency to look after impounded dogs. The agreement was that dogs were to be held until the Friday and then transported to their shelter for processing.

Extra pick up services were provided upon request, usually when room became desperately short. In a brick building referred to as 'the pound' were 4 mesh pens each measuring about 3 by 1.5 meters. In each, three or more dogs would be housed depending on their size, sex or temperament.

The floor of the pen was concrete and there was no fall nor was there drainage. Solid wastes had to be scraped up with a shovel and buried. There was no electricity and dogs were unloaded at night using the car headlights. The only luxury in this building was a single tap and wash basin, the tap wasn't even a type you could screw a hose on, this was done by using a rubber sleeve that would pop off the tap when you put your finger on the end of the hose to create water pressure.

After the Vietnam War this was a time of flower power peace and changing community attitudes. People had started to ask why packs of dogs were permitted to wander the streets, they no longer accepted being attacked and bitten and they started to question stock losses, which were prevalent.

The first attempts to document the problems and change community attitudes were emerging. Animal welfare groups and liberationists were finding political teeth things were changing slowly. With the changing community attitude the Assistant Shire Secretary agreed that we should build a new pound facility which was to become self-sufficient. Prior to 1995 it was to be extended twice more. It was further extended and upgraded last year to provide for the continued use of two Councils the Shire of Nillumbik, the new operator of the pound, and my Council, the City of Banyule.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Shire of Nillumbik for their assistance and for permitting me to use their facility for this presentation.

Lets now look at the pound facilities and how it works.

### **Location and setting**

As with most Councils the availability of appropriate land proved to be a problem. The site chosen was at the rear of the depot in a working tip, not the most pleasant of areas however, it did provide:

- enough space to site the pound so that sunlight reached every pen while maintaining some degree of shade for the animals;
- public access without compromising security or safety of other Council operations;
- ease of access for officers and the public;
- privacy when removing bodies;
- noise control benefits being located in a valley;
- enough space to provide a secure compound for the unloading of dogs.

Being located within a tip didn't mean that it had to look like one. A low cost construction, spray sealed road and car parking was provided together with guttering linked into the tip drainage system. Low maintenance landscaping was established around the pound for two reasons - to further reduce noise from the animals and to make the area look as pleasant as possible. Let's face it, people who have their animals in the pound aren't too happy about being fined or having to pay to get them back. By making the pound a professional, pleasing place to be at, you take the advantage and the sting out of any aggression they may have.

### **Reception and office**

The reception and office area provides space for the officers to complete paperwork and release of animals. A full record is maintained for every animal from the time it comes into Council's care until it is released or otherwise disposed of. Nillumbik Council can communicate via computer to their main office. Banyule hasn't explored this option yet. However, both Councils see the value of a 'web site' and it is hoped to provide this service in the near future. Music and radio talk back programs are constantly played into the kennels from here.

### **Staff facilities**

Without going into detail the normal staff facilities provided are toilet, washing facilities lockers etc.

## **Storage**

The pound has a storeroom in which cleaning equipment, chemicals and food are stored. Dogs are fed a commercially prepared complete and balanced diet. The food is stored off the ground in vermin proof containers, sufficient quantities are held in stock to last at least 1 week. Although stored in the same area, chemicals are not able to taint or contaminate food stock. The construction of the food bins ensures that food is used in the order it is placed in them.

## **Veterinary room**

A specifically designed room has been provided for the treatment and euthanasia of animals. The veterinary surgeon is able to perform first aid and minor surgical procedures in the pound, however in the majority of cases, the veterinarian surgery is used for the treatment of seriously injured or sick animals.

The veterinary room is also fitted out with a dog wash and drier, dirty and flea-infested dogs can be washed and given some relief. A qualified veterinarian administering an overdose of barbiturate undertakes euthanasia of unwanted animals. This is done away from other dogs and certainly away from the public view. Bodies and other waste is disposed of in accordance with the Code of Practice.

## **Exercise yard**

Originally it had been intended to use this area for cat facilities. However, as both Councils have contracted the Cat Protection Society to look after our feline friends it makes an excellent exercise area.

## **The pens**

What started as a small holding facility with a store room and four pens has grown and now caters for two Councils and can house up to 40 dogs in individual pens. Features are:

- pen sizes are all in excess of the 3.5 square metres required in the Code;
- wall construction is of brick that has been sealed with epoxy resin to make it impervious. In the Banyule holding pens the same effect was realised by using a sheet vinyl/plastic material fixed to the wall;
- flooring is concrete graded to a drainage pick up point and sealed with an epoxy resin;
- septic sewerage is provided;
- pens are weather proof and covered for at least 50%, to prevent escape mesh has been used to cover the rest;
- a raised hinged bed has been provided in each pen to get the dog's sleeping quarters up off the ground and make cleaning easy;
- water is constantly available through drinking troughs. These are set at different heights in pens to cater for all sizes of dogs. It also stops fouling the water supply.
- Food is provided in bowls that can be easily removed, cleaned and disinfected

## **Cleaning**

The pound is hosed and cleaned daily using a hospital strength disinfectant. A lemon odour was chosen, this has a lingering effect that for some reason dog owners like. A diluted bleach product is used to wash out the pens whenever they become vacant.

I hope that I've been of value, given you some ideas about pounds and shelters, construction methods, facilities and changing community expectations.

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Bernie has been an enforcement officer in local government since the early seventies He became actively involved in animal management in about 1979 when employed with the Shire of Diamond Valley. Following Council amalgamations he continued his service with the City Of Banyule. During his career Bernie has done the hard miles on the road. He has also been responsible for the introduction of media and enforcement campaigns, school and adult education, formation of a dog obedience club and development of pound facilities. Through the City of Banyule he has assisted the Bureau of Animal Welfare with its legislation reform and research programs.

[UAM 2000 Index Page](#)



