Inter-Council cooperation and coordination in regional urban animal management planning

A plain English, practical paper for proactive animal managers

Terry Anne Pert

INTRODUCTION

I am convinced that networking is alive and well in urban animal management around the country. What we need to consider is how to harness the accumulated, diverse knowledge and experience we have gained and communicate that across local government areas and related organisations. Only then can we achieve meaningful outcomes that enhance the quality of urban animal management, and benefit the whole community. It's a win/win situation.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce two hands-on projects undertaken in New South Wales that have achieved these outcomes. Your challenge then is to take these projects into your local area, re-work them if need be, or use them as a base for formulating new projects.

BACKGROUND

"Where there's a will there's a way" is an old saying, but true. After visiting the Sydney Pet and Animal Expo in 1997, (they are also in Brisbane and Melbourne) I decided that it was a perfect event to showcase the great work being done by Councils in animal management. However, I immediately struck a snag when I inquired how much it would cost to have a stand. There was no way that any one Council could afford the nearly $15,000.00 it cost for floor space alone.

I then came up with the idea to ring around other Councils and ask them if they were interested in sharing the costs. That was how the **Councils Unite for Pets** group came about. This paper will address the outcomes from the formation of the group and how beneficial the alliance has been for local Councils in Sydney.

It is rare that a project jumps up at you, however, that's what happened with the **Community Watch-dog Project.** It started with an announcement from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) that grant funding was being made available for 'top of pipe', catchment based projects addressing the issue of dog faeces in stormwater drains. Warringah Council covers the Middle Harbour, Northern Beaches and Cowan catchments. It was decided to submit an application covering the seven Councils involved with the Middle Harbour and Northern Beaches catchments. These Councils are Manly, Warringah, Pittwater, Mosman, North Sydney, Willoughby and Ku-ring-gai.

The grant was for a total of $17,000 and the EPA through its Stormwater Trust Partnerships was asking for $5,000 and ($5,000) in kind. The grant application was written and submitted by Warringah Council. Negotiation with the EPA led Councils to sign off on $7,000 and $14,000 in kind, bringing the total value of the project to $38,000 - $11,000 more than originally required under the grant conditions. Once the project got under way the seven Councils led by project coordinators Warringah Council, jointly committed an extra $2047.00 taking the value of the project to over $40,000.00.

WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT

Councils Unite for Pets

(How to form a coalition of Councils and/or interested groups)

Rule No 1. "Where there's a will there's a way." The key is to find a common thread. For urban Councils it could be something like the Sydney Pet & Animal Expo or other major event. Talk to the agricultural societies who run the Royal shows, there may be an opportunity there. Then there are the local agricultural society shows, or simply plan an event like Warringah's *Dogs' Big Day Out* or *Animal Awareness Days* which are organised in conjunction with the Royal NSW Canine Council. Contact your own state canine Council, animal welfare organisation, pound or anyone else you can think of in your area. The opportunities are limitless.

It may be more difficult for country Councils. However, why not organise a sheep-dog trial at shearing time or some other fun event - maybe some inter-property competition in conjunction with an end of shearing season party.

The Country Women's Association is a wonderful resource and could also be approached. Whilst country Councils are hundreds of kilometres apart, that does not mean that events common to country areas can't be used to promote pro-active Council involvement with community activities. The whole idea is to show pet owners that Councils care about companion animals and recognise their importance and value within communities.

Once you have an event in mind, set about contacting surrounding Councils or other organisations and solicit their support. *Councils' Unite for Pets* started with eight Sydney Councils all chipping in for a stand at the Pet Expo. It was decided that a generic approach was the best. Rather than promote an individual Council, all literature, pamphlets and other printed matter is produced under the Councils Unite for Pets banner.

The logo for each participating Council is displayed within the stand so those pet owners can see if their Council is participating. A visitors' book is kept and there hasn't been one negative comment. The only thing that is obvious is comments such as, "Why isn't my Council represented here"?

The stand is split into three distinct areas:

- **Education -** displays, brochures and promotion of responsible pet ownership including raffles, biodegradable dog litterbags, dung beetles and cat parks.
- **Regulatory** - fines under relevant legislation and the compliance role of Councils in areas such as dangerous and restricted dogs, nuisance dogs and cats and straying dogs.
- **Kids Corner** - interactive games; the pet ups and downs game where children play a floor game like snakes and ladders that is related to responsible pet ownership; finish the game and get a certificate. Painted voting booths with Hugo the dog and Chester the cat (the Councils Unite for Pets logos) featured with tips on how to take care of dogs and cats. Photo opportunities; have your photo taken as Hugo or Chester by putting your head through a hole in the painted animals. Stick the fur on Hugo and Chester; a bit like pinning the tail on the donkey.

It is fair to say that the stand has been an enormous success, and with comments from the public like, "It is so nice to see that Councils are interested in fostering pet ownership and not in just sending fines", we know we are on a winner. We are ready to do it all again at the end of November, 2000.

However, the Sydney Pet and Animal Expo is a once a year event and the Council officers involved from the initial eight Councils started discussing issues other than the Expo. It was then decided that a monthly meeting to discuss issues, which affected everyone, was a good idea. More Councils joined and to date there are fifteen Councils in the group.

With the introduction in July 1999 of the lifetime registration component of the Companion Animals Act 1998, being able to interact and debate what Councils perceived as the shortcomings of the Act, was most beneficial.

Where there were problems, (and there have been many), the group was able to invite representatives from the Department of Local Government to meetings where concerns could be expressed and action taken.

Councils' Unite for Pets continues to lobby the NSW State Government and has gained the support of the Minister for Local Government. The Minister recognised the benefit of having the knowledge of a 'hands-on' person on the Companion Animals Advisory Board and has appointed a representative of the group to sit as an official observer.

Councils in the group hail from Wollongong and Sutherland in the south, to Penrith and Blacktown in the west, Botany and Woollahra in the east and Warringah and Pittwater in the north with many Councils in-between. The group continues to grow and it is anticipated that by the 2001 Pet Expo, twenty Councils will be participating. Alliances can be formed in many ways. For more remote Councils, try joining up with a welfare organisation, vet practice or community group. All it takes is the desire!

The Community Watch-dog Project

The Community Watch-dog Project came about because the Environmental Protection Authority had grant funds available for a project that addressed the issues of pollution of stormwater caused by dog faeces entering stormwater drains. They were looking for an innovative way of getting the message to the general public about the effects of dog poo on water quality and the environment.

Warringah Council was already using the environmentally friendly biodegradable dog litterbags and had already had samples of the POOch Pouches. (These were introduced by Warringah Council at the 1999 UAM Conference on the Gold Coast.) These two products formed the basis of the grant application.

Combining these products with an educational brochure, it was decided that community volunteers from each Council would receive professional training at a central location. Individual Council hotlines would be set up where complaints about dog poo could be directed and the problem addressed by brochure drops. This concept was the basis for the successful grant application.

A sub-committee was formed with representatives from the seven participating Councils. The officers ranged from Stormwater Engineers to Council Rangers. This was very helpful for the project with a good balance of professional expertise and hands on experience brought to the table. Project time lines were drawn and sub-committees formed with responsibilities for designated areas of the project. It is worth noting that the goal posts moved quite considerably during the life of the project. A few hiccups made it necessary to re-evaluate at regular intervals and make adjustments as necessary. The project however, was completed on time.

It should be noted that at the time of writing this paper, a report is also being prepared for the Environment Protection Authority. Upon their satisfaction with the project, the remainder of the grant funds of $5,000 will be allocated. The steering committee have agreed that these funds together with the small amount of funds in hand will be used to purchase additional POOch Pouches, thereby extending the life of the project. Limited copies of the volunteer training package educational brochure and poster are available. Suitable acknowledgement to Warringah Council is requested for replication of the project material.

Evaluation of the project is not yet complete, however, the methods used for quantitative analysis are dog scat counts in recognised 'hot spots' pre and post project. Qualitative data is being collected via a survey of volunteers asking for feedback on comments received from the public. This will be discussed more fully during my presentation at the UAM Conference.

Following is an entry prepared by Warringah Council for the Community Watch-dog Project and submitted to the Metro Pride Awards run by Keep Australia Beautiful NSW. The announcement of competition winners will be made at an awards dinner on 9th November, 2000. This entry gives all the information relating to the project and ancillary activities required for anyone, anywhere to replicate it. *(If you would like a copy of entry please contact the author or a scaled down version is available in the hard copy of UAM Proceedings 2000, contact AVACOS ph 02 6273 8855, fx 02 6273 8899, email avacos@avacom.au)*

CONCLUSION

Council officers and companion animal managers have been networking in a fragmented way for many years. I have received numerous inquiries from Councils around the country and abroad requesting information relating to Warringah Council initiatives.

We all need to start thinking at a regional level. What's happening in my area? How can I improve animal facilities and management in my area? Whom can I contact to set the ball rolling? All it needs is for one person to spot an opportunity, involve other Councils, organisations and/or the community and take the first step. Perhaps some of the information and suggestions contained in this paper will be of assistance, or they will start the thought processes for generating pro-active companion animal management within your local community.

Whenever anyone says to me "**it can't be done**", that's a challenge I can't resist. Can you? Good luck.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Terry-Ann Pert
Warringah Council
Civic Centre, 725 Pittwater Road
Dee Why NSW 2099
Ph: 02 9942 2715
Fx: 02 9942 2781
E-mail: pertt@warringah.nsw.gov.au

Terry-Ann's experience in animal management began in 1972 when employed by Uncle Ben's of Australia to oversee the organisation of the Pal International Dog Shows. In 1974 Terry-Ann was invited to join the NSW Royal Agricultural Society's Kennel Control where she was involved in the registering of pedigree dogs and with the organisation of the Sydney Royal Easter Show for dogs until 1978. From then until her appointment with Warringah Council in 1992, Terry-Ann was involved in a number of businesses and gained valuable marketing and promotional skills. Terry-Ann has been with Warringah Council as the Animal Advisory Officer for over eight years, and is responsible for a number of initiatives which have been 'firsts' for local government such as the introduction of dung beetles to control uncollected dog faeces. These initiatives led to Terry-Ann being chosen by the AVA as the inaugural UAM Australian Animal Control Officer of the year in 1995. Terry-Ann has presented at various conferences, assisted the NSW Department of Local Government with education relating to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 and presently is an official observer to the NSW Companion Animals Advisory Board.