

Dubbo Animal Management Centre

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ABSTRACT

With the introduction of the Companion Animals Act into New South Wales in 1998 and the gradual but sure shift in community attitudes towards animal management by local government, it became necessary for Council to look at the possibility of a new animal shelter. The introduction of a volunteer work force, an old, deteriorating and inadequate facility set up in the mid 1970's and increasing human and animal populations has hampered the ability to operate effectively and efficiently and created a real threat of operational collapse. Something needed to be done. With local Government under increasing financial pressure and continued diversification by the provision of new and expanding roles within the community, the question was asked - how does one influence the decision makers to spend money on animal control rather than new art galleries and museums? How much does one ask for and then justify that request to obtain the elusive dollar for such a mundane and routine task in the face of such popular, colourful and attractive competition? Basically, what is it we need anyway?

INTRODUCTION

I have been employed in Ranger Services at Dubbo for around twenty one years in the capacity of Ranger and Senior Ranger. I'm the Ranger in charge of our Branch and have had direct involvement in urban animal management for my entire period with Dubbo Council.

Dubbo is centrally located in New South Wales with a population of around 38,000 people living within the 3425km² local government area. There are nearly 15,000 rateable properties and 2200 businesses operating in the area, 15% of which are farms, with a growth rate of 1.1%. Dubbo is a major supply point for satellite towns of the Orana region and an estimate of 110,000 people depend on the goods and services that exist or pass through the local businesses. During 2000/2001, 819 developments were approved by Council to a value of 40.3 million. There are currently around 5000 animals registered in Dubbo, believed to be about half the total population.

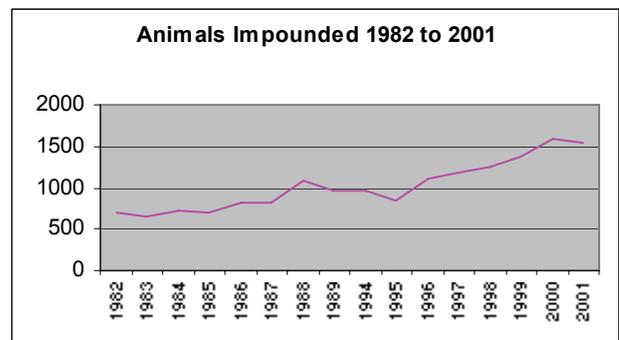
In 1998 the New South Wales government introduced the Companion Animals Act with new regimes for management of urban animals. Dubbo pound building was then 35 years and when built, had a population of 21,000. The building houses 35 dog pens and 9 cat pens which are actually commercial metal bird aviaries. The design is simplistic being a row of consistently shaped cages. The facilities are inadequate to deal with the demand placed upon them with the increased impounding rates and staff levels.

RESEARCHING A NEW FACILITY

It would have been so easy to design a new facility from personal knowledge and experience but the first step was to acknowledge that we don't know everything and do need to consult and learn from others, encompassing their triumphs and their errors. We only get one crack at this and have to live with it a long time. We deliberated a length over what needed to be taken into account in requesting a new facility and how does one ask? We concluded that it was important to develop a plan before making the request.

Animal Control in Dubbo is a responsibility of Ranger Services. Four Rangers are employed, three full time and one part time, plus a clerical assistant and a number of shelter volunteers (currently 12). In addition, support is utilised through the 'Work for the Dole' program, 'Community Service Order' participants, work experience students and community volunteer groups such as sheltered workshops. Dubbo also have a very active and dedicated Companion Animals Advisory Committee. Ranger Services also have 45 listed responsibilities in addition to urban animal management, these include activities such as parking enforcement, environmental law enforcement, straying stock and environmental monitoring and enhancement. The shelter is located in West Dubbo and the administrative office is located in East Dubbo so activities are split and we spend a portion of resources simply travelling to and fro. This information needs to be documented and properly presented.

Records of activity of the pound (shelter) dating back to 1982 were computerised and of note is the impounding rate showing an increase of 3.4%. The population of our shelter was increasing at a greater rate than that of our human population.



No reason has been determined for this other than the use of the facility by the occupants of towns outside the local government area. Records indicate that the shelter is receiving animals from a 300 km radius of the city which raised the questions: what to build, where to build it, how to justify it politically.

The planning of the request phase took 5 years to complete. During this time the data collected from our operations was reviewed and the information was determined to be critical to being able to present a defensible and accurate argument, particularly the information that related to the demands placed on the facility and the staff. The pound register was converted to an Excel spread sheet and information gathered concerning impounding rates, euthanasia rates, adoption and release rates. Also included were volunteer staff hours, animal bed nights, identification percentages and financial transaction details.

From this we were able to demonstrate a pattern of demand in comparison to the ability of the facility to supply. Animal bed nights were monitored to ensure no animals were kept longer than required in order to demonstrate efficiency in the use of the facility. A new adoption policy and procedure was put in place to provide protection against over use of euthanasia.

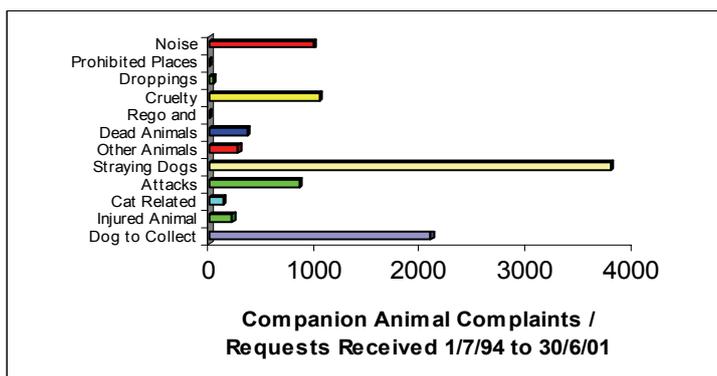
A literature review was conducted including Council's policies, the legislative requirements, codes of practice, ACE'S Model Animal Shelter Design (Meade 1992), Veterinary Economic Magazine (Thomson Veterinary Healthcare Communications 1994 to 1998), other various books and internet resources.

In addition, The Pet Care Information and Advisory Service, RSPCA NSW and Victoria and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service were consulted. Volunteer and paid staff were asked to give written submissions noting what they hate about the current facility and what they would like in a new one. Rangers also conducted an analysis of shelter processes and other activities to ensure the project was all encompassing and not just animal focused. Many questions were asked and needed to be answered with back up data, including:

- How should it be done?
- What can be done with the animals in care?
- Where do we put them? and
- What does this cost?

An interesting example, is that around \$11,000 a year was spent on driving to and from the local veterinarian. This figure came from hidden costs such as vehicle registration, insurance and maintenance costs. Other factors, such as time spent not attending complaints was factored in and compared against work loads.

Whenever a Ranger attended a conference or seminar, road travel was recommended so that visits could be made to as many pounds, shelters, boarding kennels and catteries as possible to broaden knowledge.



Rangers were welcomed by many people and experiences shared. Photographs and video tapes were collected and enabled everyone to see many of the facilities in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

Council's assets were searched for a suitable location to build that would help keep costs down and as fortune would have it, an old farm on the edge of town complete with a house, swimming pool and a collection of various sheds, was selected.

Copies of shelter plans from relatively new facilities were obtained, and all ideas were considered to ensure we incorporated the good and monitored for the bad.

MAKING OUR REQUEST

All this information was compiled into a file and finally condensed into a document titled the "Ranger Services Facility and Animal Shelter Design Criteria Brief" and lobbying began with the manager and director for the project.

With the lack of building design qualifications and talent within the group, no plan was actually drawn up. However, the criteria stipulated how the facility should work, not how it should look or be constructed. This task required an external expert, a consultant.

A meeting occurred with Council's executive staff which resulted in a \$15,000 grant for further development of the proposal through the creation of conceptual plans and a project costing. This was underestimated and a further \$25,000 had to be allocated to finish the plans. The building consultants had a difficult task in making sure every aspect was covered and worked efficiently in relation to each other. Some additional ideas were added and some compromising had to be done.

Each step was filtered through the Companion Animals Advisory Committee and we now knew what we wanted to build and where we wanted to build it with a cost in the area of \$950,000. Elected members were taken on a tour of the current facility and each aspect of its operational faults and short-comings were shown to them. The fact that a volunteer work force is in place together with an active Companion Animals Committee contributed greatly to the decision making. Aspects such as the chemical store also doubling as the ladies change room, were pointed out with the associated occupational health and safety concerns. Included were other legislative developments that had made the current facility redundant and the risk to liability exposure and goal attainment in animal control.

The Council voted unanimously for the project and funds were allocated in the budget for 2002 to 2003 period. The pound managed to gain funds whilst other projects such as a revamp of the swimming pool complex, a new museum and other highly sort after and popular new facilities suffered delays.

The development application has been lodged and the project placed on public display for 30 days. Development consent and funding are complete.

So what are we going to build?

The building design follows work flow processes and is dependant upon the species of animal and other aspects concerning that animal, such as aggression or its health.

For the dogs we shall have:

- arriving pens, where all arriving animals are accepted at the very front to the facility and immediately confined to avoid unpleasant contacts, escapes and worker safety;
- new arrivals, where identified dogs are taken and held for 48 hours to limit their exposure to the stray population and provide some level of disease control;
- general population (multiple), for unidentified small dogs to occupy pens in groups of up to 3 per pen with a shared exercise area that only one group access at a time;
- general population (singular) for larger dogs with again a shared exercise area;
- security pens for aggressive animals so they can be maintained with hands-off tactics;
- pups demonstrate the highest disease rate and highest adoption rates. Puppy pens isolates groups to control disease with separate exercise areas;
- adoption pens are accessible by the public when we are open and have an attached exercise area come training and introduction area;
- quarantine/isolation: quarantine for animals undergoing our adoption process and isolation for other sick and injured animals waiting for the vet;
- euthanasia in a discreet facility with associated lifting aids and storage;
- grooming and treatment room for compliance with expected animal health standards;
- dog area maintenance room for food preparation, cleaning materials, etc;
- the roof has been designed to create a convection air current and so improve airflow through the kennels;
- drop down awnings are fitted to allow us to control the airflow and improve heating or cooling of the area.

Heating is provided in each pen with heat lamps and with heat pads for the cats. Cats have the same facilities as dogs with the inclusion of a feral cat dark room.

Individual cat boxes will be used, made of stainless steel that have been developed by staff and the manufacturer, Mascot Wire Works of Sydney. These allow hands-off management of cats and is desirable to reduce the risk of toxoplasmosis infection to staff. They are fitted with a slide out tray for easy cleaning and maintenance, double access doors and a retreat shelf for the cat. By being singular rather than in banks gives greater flexibility in their management but increases the need for manual lifting aids.

All work areas are under cover as are passageways that are enclosed in the dog area to allow movement of animals with hands-off management, again for dealing with aggressive animals and risk management.

In addition to stock animals we shall have areas for other species such as birds, rabbits and other similar domestic pets, including fish. The pound will also act as a drop off centre for native species which will all be relocated to the Western Plains Zoo wildlife rehabilitation clinic.

Dedicated storage is provided for:

- tools and maintenance,
- chemicals animal laundry,
- dog food,
- cat food,
- traps and animal capture/handling equipment,
- hay and stock feeds,
- abandoned articles,
- abandoned shopping trolleys,
- abandoned motor vehicles,
- environmental clean up and repair equipment,
- promotional materials,
- internal secure storage.

The office building contains room for expansion and holds:

- office space for 6 Rangers,
- clerical reception area,
- volunteers office and shop,
- training and meal room,
- kitchen, laundry and toilet facilities,
- outdoor recreation area and retreat.

Communication aspects include:

- dedicated PABX system,
- EFTPOS,
- internet access on all PC's,
- dual screen for the receptionist computer to improve information displayed on the reception counter,
- council radio network,
- internal extensions,
- volunteer UHF walkie talkies.

Sewerage disposal is via a trade waste agreement to the town sewerage system via a masticator pump and oxygenated pre-treatment. All the drains are closed and a flush system is fitted at the head of the drain to clean it after the animal areas have been cleaned.

Water supply is from the town's water supply system. Storm water is captured and stored in a ground tank for stock water and we have access to treated effluent from the sewerage farm for irrigation of the paddocks and gardens.

Landscaping will be with native species attractive to local bird populations and designed to give an open frontal appearance with increasing height and density of foliage towards the rear, resulting in a leafy environment with visual blockage of the treatment ponds to the rear and attracting the eye to the front buildings.

Security includes a monitored alarm system, and surveillance cameras over the site with after hours access to cameras via our security monitoring firm and a continual record system over our reception and financial transaction areas. A floor safe will be fitted with a security firm making periodical collections of the acquired funds. Additional safes for drugs, firearms and other such items are also provided. Visitors will not be permitted access to any areas other than adoption areas unless escorted by a volunteer or staff member when looking for a particular lost pet.

Parking is provided for 4 Rangers and 12 volunteers. Customer parking for 12 customer cars, including 2 disabled parking spaces is also provided along with truck access and parking.

CONCLUSION

This financial year we shall have a state of the art Rangers facility and animal shelter that has been designed from the conglomeration of ideas and experiences of hundreds of animal control and care workers. It will not be perfect and I'm sure we'll find problems but they will be relatively minor and manageable in comparison to what we are facing at the moment. If I had any advice to give from my experience with this project it would be to be patient, persistent and objective, be realistic and do your homework and you improve your chances of success greatly.

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Rob has worked in the field of urban animal management since 1981 with Dubbo City Council in the capacity of Ranger and Senior Ranger. He is now the Officer in charge of Ranger Services in Dubbo and in 1999, initiated Dubbo's first Companion Animals Advisory Committee of which he is a member. During his time with Dubbo City Council he has undertaken additional training and obtained several qualifications including an Associate Degree in Parks, Recreation and Heritage Management and TAFE Certificates in Agricultural Skills and Zookeeping. He is also currently studying for, and nearly completed, a Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Ecology.

He has a strong interest in the environment and community interactions as well as his second job as a retained Fire Fighter for the New South Wales Fire Brigades. His efforts have received several awards including:

- National Service Medal
- Australia Day Awards Recipient, Community Events Award
- Commendation for 20 years service, Dubbo City Council
- Certificate of Appreciation, Mayor, Dubbo City Council
- Dubbo Tidy Towns Champion of the Environment
- Australian Local Government Law Enforcement Officer, Service Medal.
- NSW Tidy Towns Outstanding Achievement Award Nominee
- Certificate of Recognition, Keep Australia Beautiful Council
- Award of Excellence, Dubbo Tidy Towns
- New South Wales Fire Brigades commendation for Service, Nyngan Floods Disaster
- Certificate of Appreciation, NSW Bicentenary Council