

## Conducting Council Audits

Mr Chris Button, Adelaide Hills Council, South Australia

In South Australia urban animal management is enforced via *The Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* (the Act). This Act amongst other things establishes the Dog & Cat Management Board. One of the functions of the Board is to:

*“Oversee the administration and enforcement of the provisions of this act relating to dogs, including*

- *Monitoring the administration and enforcement of the provisions of this act by councils.....”*

In 2004 to ensure compliance with the Act the Board began an audit process of councils in South Australia. This process had two components:

1. A financial audit to ensure all monies collected pursuant to the Act were managed and spent in accordance with the Act.
2. A physical audit to ensure compliance with the Act

The audit cycle was established so that each council would be audited once every five years. Typically these audits included:

- Dog registration fees
- Authorisation of officers
- Policies and procedures
- Use of forms relating to dog management
- Training and knowledge of officers
- Detention facilities

At the completion of the audit a report is provided to the Board. Following endorsement by the board a report is sent to the Chief Executive of the audited council.

The first round of audits was completed in 2009 meaning that every council in South Australia had been audited once. At that time the Board reviewed the audit process and recognising that the initial audit was strong on legislative compliance but was not as strong in the area of enforcement it was decided to broaden the scope of the audit. A new audit process was endorsed for the second audit cycle.

Examples of additions to the audit include

- Audit of council’s animal management plan
- Measurement of KPIs in dog management
- Audit of dog attack investigations
- Audit of dog barking investigations
- Audit of additional dog(s) permit processes

The expanded audit process has now been put in place and all councils in South Australia will undergo an audit between now and 2015.

### What the audit process has achieved – *Syrlu*

The audit process is not seen as a method to dictate to councils or beat them with a stick but rather to provide a positive learning experience for council management and authorized officers.

In many cases officers and councils have not intentionally “done the wrong thing” but have been ill informed or have not received the support or training they require to carry out their role to the best of their ability.

Once the first round of audits commenced it was recognized by the Board that there was little training of some officers and few or no council policies or procedures in relation to animal management. In response to this problem the Local Government Association has developed a range of Standard Operating Procedures and polices for Animal Management Officers.

The Board has also developed professional development program to ensure that all current and new Animal Management Officers receive at least base level training to assist them understand their roles and functions.

Some Animal Management Officers were also unaware that the Board Staff were available to provide advice on the Act and their role. Therefore the audit process has provided a good networking opportunity for the Board Staff and Animal Management Officers. This is of particular importance to rural officers who do not have the support of a large team as they are now aware that they can contact Board staff for advice and support in relation to their role.

Of course the main purpose of the audit process is to ensure that the Board and all councils in South Australia are meeting the requirements of the Act.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Chris has a background and qualifications in Human Resource Management. He has worked in Local Government for the past 13 years. With eight years experience managing Animal Managements Officers, Chris is currently employed as Manager Public Health and Safety at the City of Onkaparinga. This position entails the management of the General Inspectorate, Environmental Health, and Emergency Management functions of the largest Council in South Australia. In addition to the operational aspects of this position, Chris is currently focusing on performance measurement and the utilisation of technology by within the regulatory environment.