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## Compliance audits of Local Governments by the dog and cat management board

DANIELLE SUCKLEY

*Dog and Cat Management Board, SA*

The Dog and Cat Management Board (the Board) is a statutory authority established under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* (the Act). In 2005 the Minister of Local Government requested that the Department of Environment and Heritage undertake a review of the operations of the Board. The findings of the review included a recommendation that the Board should 'undertake spot checks of all Councils with the aim of covering all Councils within a five year period'.

This finding was accepted and a five-year auditing cycle of the 69 local governments in South Australia was established. The aim of the audits is to measure the level of compliance with the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and provide assistance, advice and support where improvements are needed. The audits inform the Board so it is better able to fulfil its functions under the Section 21 of the Act which includes:

### 21—Functions of Board

- (1) The Board has the following functions:
  - (a) to plan for, promote, and provide advice about, the effective management of dogs and cats throughout South Australia;
  - (b) to oversee the administration and enforcement of the provisions of this Act relating to dogs, including—
    - (i) monitoring the administration and enforcement of this Act by councils; and
    - (ii) issuing guidelines and providing advice to councils about—
      - (A) planning for the effective management of dogs;
      - (B) training for dog management officers;
      - (C) the appropriate level of administration and enforcement in the circumstances prevailing in the area;
      - (D) the issuing of orders or related directions under this Act;
      - (E) the standard of facilities used for the detention of dogs under this Act;
      - (F) the keeping of registers under this Act and the issuing of certificates of registration and registration discs;

- (G) any other matter related to the administration or enforcement of the provisions of this Act relating to dogs;

A long-term goal of the audits is to increase compliance throughout the state and ensure that there is consistency in dog and cat management across jurisdictions. Audits are also of significant benefit to the Board as they provide 'real world' examples of how legislation is administered and identify where education and support will be most effective. An increased understanding is helpful in the development of policies and guidelines and accurate, evidence based information is also critical when providing advice to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation. The Board also responds to media and public enquiries in relation to dog and cat management issues. This requires an accurate understanding of council procedures, administration and capabilities.

The first round of audits was completed in 2006 and the second round is currently being finalised. The Board has decided to audit every three years from 2012. This will ensure that audits are sufficiently frequent to follow up on non-compliance. A three year audit cycle will also identify policy gaps that arise due to changes in legislation or emerging issues. In addition to compliance, the audit examines financial records relating to councils contributions to the dog and cat management fund. The financial section of the audit is outsourced as the expertise to assess financial information does not currently exist in-house. The compliance and financial audits are conducted at the same time so that the council only receives one visit per audit cycle. It is important that Board staff attends the council to audit so that record maintenance and operations are sighted. The audit procedure is transparent and councils have access to the assessment tool prior to the site visit.

During audits Board staff and the financial auditor use an audit checklist. The checklist is a Board approved policy document which sets out each of the areas where councils must be compliant under the Act. The checklist also has standard questions so that assessment is consistent and non-compliances can be quantified as part of the review process. The audit checklist covers the following areas of animal management:

- General (Plan for the Management of Dogs and Cats)
- Administration (registration, authorisation of officer)
- Detention and Seizure (impound, detention)
- Customer Service Provisions (out-of-hours requirements)
- Forms and Document Control (use of Board approved forms)
- Training (induction, performance management)
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Financial Audit

In assessing compliance, Board staff will ask for evidence of the required operations and administration that should be occurring. The audit checklist also includes a list of evidence. Where evidence is unavailable the auditor may ask for alternate records so compliance can still be assessed. The evidence that is requested includes councils Plan for the Management of Dogs and Cats and how key performance indicators were achieved. Board staff will also examine dog attack and barking complaint investigations and confirm that the appropriate expiations and orders have been issued.

If the council maintains its own detention facility it too is audited as the Board is required to approve all facilities used for the detention of dogs under the Act. The RSPCA and Animal Welfare League which are used by the majority of metropolitan councils are routinely audited and generally pre-approved for use. When auditing facilities staff will check that the council has the appropriate cleaning and disinfection procedures to control disease outbreaks e.g. Canine parvovirus. These procedures must be documented. Facilities should also be adequately secured so that impounded dogs cannot escape or be stolen. The facility is also assessed for welfare outcomes. Although this is not required by the Act, councils are required to adhere to the *Animal Welfare Act 1985* and dogs should not loose condition during the seventy-two hour detention period. As a facility must be audited before dogs are detained, facility audits are completed as required as well as part of the councils scheduled compliance audit.

Based on the responses provided by the council on the day of audit each section of the audit checklist is scored from three to zero and an audit report is written. A score of three represents full compliance with the Act and a score of zero indicates non-compliance. Scores of one and two relate to part compliances or compliance without sufficient evidence.

All non-compliances are listed on a Corrective Actions Report and sent to Council for agreement. The Corrective Actions Report explains the non-compliance and rates it as critical, major or minor. This rating indicates how quickly the compliance should be remedied e.g. 1, 3 or 6 months. There is

an opportunity for the council to provide comment on the Corrective Actions Report and negotiate the timeframes. Once agreed, the Corrective Actions Report and audit report are provided to the Board for approval. If the report is approved with outstanding corrective actions, staff will contact council for evidence of compliance with the corrective actions after the agreed timeframes have passed. The Board provides information and support to assist councils in redressing non-compliances.

Although the Board has only completed two audit cycles since 2006 significant improvements have been seen and critical non-compliances have significantly reduced. The response from councils has been positive with most viewing audits as an opportunity to make improvements to processes and highlight concerns. The reciprocal information exchange connects the Board and local governments and will assist both parties to meet state-wide dog and cat management goals. As the process is refined and councils continue to improve, the audits will be an invaluable tool in assessing the progress of dog and cat management in South Australia.

## References

*Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*

## About the author

Danielle has been a Policy and Compliance Officer with the Dog and Cat Management Board since early 2012. She is currently responsible for developing a policy framework for the Board and is completing the current audit cycle of local councils. Prior to commencing with the Dog and Cat Management Board, Danielle was employed as a Policy Officer with the Department Of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and as a Workplace Inspector with the Workplace Ombudsman. Danielle has a Bachelor of Science from Flinders University, a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration from the University of Canberra and a Diploma in Applied Science – Animal Technology from the Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE.

## CONTACT

**Danielle Suckley**

Email: [Danielle.Suckley@sa.gov.au](mailto:Danielle.Suckley@sa.gov.au)



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