

Easing the burden on council - tools to support the regulatory environment

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With every legislative change the regulatory environment changes. The impact of these changes are often most strongly felt by those charged with enforcement. In the world of dog and cat management, it is animal management officers who have the burden of enforcement. To ensure proper enforcement, local government and legislators (State Government) need to work hand-in-hand to develop tools and processes for efficient enforcement.

Over the past three years Victoria has seen several major legislative changes precipitated by: a change in state government, a dog attack resulting in the death of a child followed by coroner's recommendations, and a series of election commitments targeting illegal and rogue dog and cat breeding practices. These changes have resulted in a change in enforcement activities for local council and a need for the community to take more responsibility for their animals. In response to these changes, the Bureau of Animal Welfare has developed a suite of tools for local government and the community to aid in the implementation and enforcement of this legislation.

The tools include:

- Vic BARK – the Victorian Breed Assistance Resource Kit. A smart device application that provides authorised officers with tools for identifying dogs and their likely breed; and an incident recording tool for use in all dog management incidents.
- Restricted Breed Dog Identification Models – the Bureau has had developed a family of American Pit Bull Terrier models for use in training authorised officers to correctly identify dogs that fit the Restricted Breed Standard. These models are used in a face-to-face training courses and are available for Local Council to purchase from the developer.
- Responsible Dog Ownership Course – a free on-line training course for the general public which details their legal responsibilities in owning a dog and the welfare requirements for the maintenance of that dog. The course can also be delivered in face-to-face format through community groups, local government and other interested groups.
- Introduction to Breeding Dogs and Cats – a free on-line training course for prospective and current dog and cat breeders which fulfils the mandatory minimum training requirements under the Revised Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses.
- Authorised officer audit kit for Breeding and Rearing Businesses – to assist officers in the enforcement and breeders in the application of the Revised Code of Practice; the Bureau have developed an audit kit for local government to use in the implementation and enforcement of the new Code.
- Responsible pet ownership communications campaign. In an effort to improve the welfare of pet dogs, cats, rabbits and birds in our community, the Bureau has embarked on a 18 month public communication campaign. The basis for the campaign was a significant research project examining owner attitudes and activities relating to the care of their pets.

These tools, and many more, are arming local government with the best means for enforcing legislation and ensuring responsible pet ownership in the community. But... the Bureau are not stopping there; in the next six months, Victorians will be provided with a free on-line Responsible Cat Ownership Course, and a continuation of the public communication campaign and associated research to determine real changes in community attitudes to responsible pet ownership.

The Bureau of Animal Welfare and the Victorian State Government is committed to ensuring Responsible Pet Ownership in our communities through the provision of tools and resources for authorised officers that reflect the modern environment.

About the author

Mariko Lauber has been employed by the Bureau of Animal Welfare since October 2011, but has been with the Department of Primary Industries Victoria since 2002. Mariko's role is Project Officer in the area of Domestic Animal Legislation. The role involves the management of major projects surrounding domestic animal legislation including the management of the development of tool for use by animal management officers and code reviews. Mariko has a PhD in animal welfare and a Bachelor of Agriculture Science with Honours. Her previous roles within the Department included animal welfare training, animal welfare research and communications

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