

7th July 2023
Rockhampton Regional Council
Attention all Councillors.

RE: Review of the Animal Management Strategy 2020-2023

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association established to consult with government in advocating for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Animal Care Australia is currently recognised by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries as a key stakeholder in the review of Queensland’s Animal Care and Protection Act and its associated regulations. Animal Care Australia is directly consulting and advising during that review, including the future revision of Codes of Practice for the keeping of all pets.

Animal Care Australia encourages continued development of animal welfare standards and Codes of Practice for animal husbandry, breeding, training, sale and sporting exhibitions for a wide range of animal species, including pets, companion animals, animals used for educational or entertainment purposes or kept for conservation.

Animal Care Australia is engaged with state governments to develop more appropriate model Local Laws and model Subordinate Local Laws governing the keeping of animals in each state. Nationally, Animal Care Australia is finding Local Councils placing restrictions and permit requirements on their residents which do nothing to improve animal welfare and tend to lead to greater non-compliance.

Animal Care Australia would like to highlight the difficulty in being able to respond to this Review:

- To complete the survey a person must be registered – but to register we had to reside in your Shire OR be listed as ‘Not In Australia’. Postcodes outside of your Shire were not accepted. As an Australian based animal welfare organisation this is not acceptable. Council should be accepting input from all key stakeholders.
- The survey being the ONLY way to respond is extremely misleading, especially given the questions included:
 - (1) How often do you see a wandering animal?
 - (2) From the list below, please select which themes are most important to you:
 - (3) Do you have any other comments on animal management within the Rockhampton Region you would like to share? **(Note: there was no provision to upload a document to respond to this question)**

How do the above three questions relate to reviewing an Animal Management Strategy that is twenty-four pages long, and covers the following topics:

- Key Issue 1 – Animals not being under effective control.
- Key Issue 2 – Unregistered dogs
- Key Issue 3 – Unidentified cats and dogs
- Key Issue 4 – Unwanted cats and dogs
- Key Issue 5 – Animal Management Centre
- Key Issue 6 – Animal noise nuisance
- Key Issue 7 – Animal management local laws
- Key Issue 8 – Animal management policies and procedures
- Key Issue 9 – Community education and awareness

- Key Issue 10 – Capability of staff

In relation to the use of a survey for the purpose of consultation, Animal Care Australia recognises the ease this provides for Council, however Animal Care Australia has opted to respond in writing to ensure our views are not lost within the statistical reporting process of an extremely brief survey and in doing so providing inaccurate feedback. Surveys tend to be leading in their questioning and misleading in their statistical outcomes and this one is no exception.

Animal Care Australia would like to **commend Council** on including the following within the Strategy:

“Council understands that pets are an important part of people’s lives. They provide companionship and contribute to enhanced wellbeing in many homes and families.”

Objectives:

“Ensure animal owners are educated and aware of the principles of responsible animal ownership.”

Animal Care Australia also **commends Council** on the inclusion of education initiatives for your residents – particularly dealing with responsible pet ownership. Animal Care Australia advocates for education over regulation and it is always encouraging to see Councils that recognise the importance of pet ownership and promoting the responsibilities associated.

Responsible animal ownership is mentioned multiple times in the Strategy document, and yet what Council deems is Responsible Animal Ownership is not detailed. Where is Council sourcing its responsible animal ownership educational material?

Outcomes

“All dogs are registered, desexed and microchipped. “

“All cats are desexed and microchipped”.

Stating ALL dogs and cats in the Shire will be desexed does not align with responsible animal ownership. A large part of responsible animal ownership is choosing the right pet in the first place. A family friendly, properly raised, and well-handled pet from a reputable, and ethical breeder, will be less of a nuisance to the community in the future, than taking home a stray, or rescue pet, which has not received any retraining.

By stating that ALL dogs and cats will be desexed, Council effectively intends to ban all dog and cat breeding in their council area. This is unreasonable and unnecessary. Wording should change “All” to “Most” or have outlined exemptions for ethical/responsible breeders. Animal Care Australia can assist with definitions for this.

Banning breeders and forcing all animal lovers to source only rescue pets that come with unknown breeding, and unknown health and behavioural issues, then telling them that its “their animal and their responsibility” is setting the community up for failure. Not all pet owners have the knowledge, experience or resources to safely rehabilitate a rescue pet. Pet owners deserve the right to choose a suitable pet for their family, housing and circumstances. Taking this choice away limits pet owners’ ability to be responsible owners.

The high demand for pets during the pandemic was an excellent example of the problem this creates. As families took on any pet they could get, and many surrenders today are blamed on behavioural issues. It is not the animal’s fault, but it is a predictable outcome of what happens when suitable pets are not available to the community. New pet owners learn how to be responsible owners from their first pets, and the more positive the experience, the better owners they will be to future pets. To set up this structure deliberately is irresponsible and doomed to fail. Will the community be blamed for these failings, when they inevitably happen, or will Council accept its role in creating the problem in the first place?

Strategic Responses 1.1

“dogs surrendered as a result of attack will be euthanised after a 24-hour cooling off period,”

Will the surrendering of the dog be voluntary? What happens if the owner refuses?

Is 24 hours really sufficient time to determine the attack claim is genuine? How will Council ensure that this mandatory euthanasia period is not abused in vexatious neighbourhood disputes?

First offence:

“▪ return free of charge non-aggressive dogs found wandering to their owner on the first offence prior to being impounded when the dog is registered and microchipped and where the owner is able to be contacted and available to secure the dog immediately,”

Animal Care Australia again **commends Council** on this point.

3.2 USE INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE MICROCHIPPING

“Council will: ▪ consider offering a fee based microchipping service and investigate the training and qualifications needed by staff for this implementation, ▪ implement compulsory microchipping of impounded cats and dogs at the Animal Management Centre in line with the requirement of the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 and local law “

It is unclear where or what is the “incentive” to pet owners?

Unwanted Cats and Dogs

“The principal cause of the growth in numbers of unwanted animals is the failure of owners to desex cats and dogs. 97% of impounded cats and 80% of impounded dogs are entire.”

The introduction of this issue is overly simplistic and suggests that Council has become blinded by confirmation bias, as Council primarily deals with the problem animals and irresponsible owners, without acknowledging the many more RESPONSIBLE owners and breeders that do not cause problems. The Strategy document does NOT tell us what % of animals owned in the Council are impounded, or how many animals are registered with Council. This lack of detail is significant to making realistic and practical decisions to manage animals in the area.

Animal Care Australia supports the desexing of animals owned by pet owners. However, ethical breeders will not have their valuable animals roaming the streets and being a nuisance to the community. These breeders should be supported by Council and held up as the positive example of responsible animal ownership, and source of animal keeping knowledge. Ethical breeders raise family friendly, healthy, well-handled and trained animals, for which there is high demand from the community. By highlighting the many hours and expenses put into preparing their young animals for success the rest of their lives, it educates the community of what to look for when choosing a pet, and the difference between ethical breeders and puppy farms. Ignoring ethical breeders is detrimental to the pet keeping community.

4.2 USE INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE DESEXING”

Animal Care Australia recommends reduced registration for desexed animals as a positive incentive.

Community Education and awareness

Animal Care Australia commends Council’s intentions to provide community education however self-promotion of Councils services is “Marketing” and not really “community education”.

Animal Care Australia support school education – but the Strategy document does not describe whether the education focus is on compliance or animal welfare, where the education resources will be sourced from, or who will provide the education. Animal Care Australia can assist with the development of these tools, and sourcing of responsible pet owner resources.

Reporting

This section fails to mention any community feedback into the reporting process.

Additional points:

Animal Care Australia **commends Council** for providing discount desexing vouchers. Council should also be running FREE microchipping, registration and desexing campaigns – particularly for low-income families, seniors, concession holders and during financial hardship.

Since the Cost-of-Living Crisis began, surrender rates across the country have skyrocketed. Council could ASSIST community to keep their animals, by offering free basic services to those who need it. This would progress Council's goals and help improve community impressions of the council – who are often seen as the “enforcers”.

Animal Care Australia **commends Council** for introducing an annual review and not ignoring the Strategy's for years on end.

Animal Care Australia is unsure as to whether the Local Laws referred to within the Animal Management Strategy are also a part of this Review or not? Local Law No2 (Animal Management) 2011 and Subordinate Local Law No2 (Animal Management) 2011.

If these are included in this Review, then Council's website and consultation is extremely misleading. In the event they are included, Animal Care Australia provides the following species-specific feedback:

Birds – Aviary, Fowl and others

Animal Care Australia does not support the current restrictions for bird numbers or permits and strongly cautions against specifying bird restrictions for properties with an area exceeding 1000 square metres (0.1 ha).

Restrictions based on numbers alone are not in the best interest of animal welfare, in particular birds that come in a range of sizes, temperaments and varying requirements. Many are flock species that require a broad range of alternative and legitimate management and housing systems and numerous other factors.

Animal Care Australia also strongly recommends Council excludes all regulation of birds where the resident is keeping their birds in compliance with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Science (DAS) Code of Practice—Aviculture under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 s.174A.

https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0032/89690/cp-wm-aviculture.pdf

Council should be referring residents to the DAS Code of Practice—Aviculture rather than introducing the proposed amendments.

Council may like to consider Logan City Council's approach, which is based on the DAS code -

<https://www.logan.qld.gov.au/aviary-birds>

Dogs and Cats:

Animal Care Australia is astounded at Council restricting the number of dogs or cats allowed without council approval to just 2 animals. There is no logical animal welfare basis for this decision.

This policy is blatantly on animal rights ideology and has not no substantive animal welfare grounds. “

In relation to:

“Circumstances in which keeping of animal or animals requires approval:

(d) A dog kept on residential premises—

(i) temporarily; but

(ii) for longer than 1 month

This is unacceptable. Animal Care Australia does not support the fostering of dogs being limited to just 4 weeks. Responsible and registered breeders would require longer in order to take a dog that is being surrendered back to the breeder due to the inability of the purchaser (new owner) to continue to keep it.

It takes more than 4 weeks to assess it, rehabilitate and then rehome the dog. Council MUST reconsider this time limit for both foster carers and breeders.

Keeping of Animals

Approval application fees are exorbitant, and the requirement to be renewed annually is blatant profiteering! If Council truly supported the keeping of pets, then these rates would be decreased, and bulk year options would be provided – especially in these current times of a cost-of-living crisis. These costs simply lead to a greater rate of non-compliance and/or animal dumping.

Application for Approval

- Keeping 3 to 10 cats and dogs (animal registration not included) \$345.00 per application
- Keeping 3 to 10 cats and dogs - Pensioner (animal registration not included) \$235.00 per application
- Keeping more than 10 cats and dogs (animal registration not included) \$415.00 per application
- Keeping over 10 cats and dogs Pensioner (animal registration not included) \$335.00 per application
- Guard Dog \$235.00 per application
- All other animals or combination of animals (excluding cats and dogs) \$230.00 per application
- Application to Amend Conditions (excludes new animals) \$210.00 per application
- Application for Renewal \$210.00 per application

Note: Approvals are not transferrable to other owners or properties

The fee document indicates that no approval fee refunds will be applicable once a decision has been made. Animal Care Australia assumes this applies regardless of the decision? There is a sliding scale of 50% or 75% refund if the application is withdrawn before a decision is made before or after 30 days. The fact that the fee schedule actually has these time limits is concerning as approvals should be processed as punctually/efficiently as possible.

ACA does not agree with imposing blanket limits on numbers of animals that can be kept especially when based solely on ideological theories as these theories are animal rights based. Animal restrictions for many species actually creates animal welfare concerns.

Animal welfare is NOT about numbers – it is about the conditions, behaviour, cleanliness, housing and husbandry that each animal is kept under by the owners – your residents.

Policies that restrict the keeping of animals on the basis of preventing noise, odour or other issues for neighbours are strongly discouraged. Restrictions including permit requirements inflict an unnecessary compliance burden on residents and staff which only discourages animal keeping needlessly. Laws are already in place to deal with neighbourhood nuisance issues including matters due to poor animal keeping practices.

Animal Care Australia welcomes the opportunity to meeting with Council representatives to further discuss any concerns Council may wish to clarify.

Kind regards,



Michael Donnelly

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References: <https://www.rockhamptonregion.qld.gov.au/CouncilServices/Local-Laws/Local-Law-2-Animal-Management-2011>