

7. TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DOG MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Officer responsible Director of Policy	Authors Terence Moody, Environmental Health Policy Leader, DDI 941-8834 Mark Vincent, Team Leader Animal Control DDI 941-7041
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The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the areas it is proposed to develop a dog management strategy to support the implementation of the amended Dog Control Policy of the Council and the proposed changes to the Dog Control Act 1996.

INTRODUCTION

The Dog Control Working Party, subsequently formed as a Subcommittee of the Committee, considered a number of non-statutory matters to do with dogs in the City both at the time of formulating the amendments to the Dog Control Policy for consultation and during the consideration of submissions on the proposed changes.

These were raised, as mentioned in the report on the amendments to the Dog Control Policy, as reflecting a perception on behalf of dog owners that the Council was not particularly “dog friendly” but appeared to be almost constantly referring to legal controls on dogs. The point was made by one submitter that the position of pet dogs as “companion animals” which were treated as members of the family in many cases seemed to be missed in these processes. Another matter that became apparent was the perceived lack of information that was available to dog owners, and indeed other members of the public, on areas in which dogs may be freely exercised and those in which more controls have been placed.

The other significant area that appeared to need addressing was the apparent disassociation of activities undertaken by the Council that had some relation to dog issues undertaken in different Units. This particularly applied to the matter of programming and developing new or different dog exercise areas but also in the layout and positioning of children’s play areas within parks and reserves.

The Council at its meeting on the 23 October 2003 approved the development of a draft dog strategy outline to be presented to this Committee.

DOG STRATEGY OUTLINE

The following are matters that should be covered in discussions on the dog strategy and that require participation of the City Streets, Parks and Waterways, and the Environmental Services Units.

1. Communication

Local parks and reserves:

- Children’s play equipment.
- Dog “restrain tie down posts”.
- Doggie “poo bag” dispensers and rubbish disposal bins.
- Children’s swimming pools.
- Designated “free run” short and long leashed areas, dog swim areas.
- Sports and recreation grounds and fields.
- Remaining parts of the park.
- Future development of “dog parks”.

City beaches:

- Dog “restrain tie down posts”.
- Doggie “poo bag” dispensers and rubbish disposal bins.
- Specified prohibited areas.

City waterways, rivers and streams:

- Dog “restrain tie down posts”.
- Doggie “poo bag” dispensers and rubbish disposal bins.
- Specified prohibited areas.

What are the issues?

The Council must have;

- Clear and concise signage, with informative messages that advise dog owners of where they “can and can’t” take their dogs in parks and beaches (ie children’s play equipment, pools and sports field areas, between the 100 metre zones etc), including leash options, hygiene and safe fall areas and the fines or penalties imposed for any breaches.
- Consultation between the Parks and Waterways Unit and Animal Control for future design and creation of city parks and children’s play areas so we consider dog free run and leashed options.
- Multi functional rubbish disposal bins with “doggie poo dispenser bags” to assist dog owners, supported by the community providing old bags.
- Regular enforcement patrols by Park Rangers and/or Dog Control Officers to ensure compliance of the bylaws with continued education and ultimately infringement fines to ensure compliance.
- Development and circulation of brochures, posters and web page information that clearly depicts (in map form) designated, restrained free run or prohibited areas.
- Promotion and advertising of “dog free run areas” in parks without restrictions.

Public footpaths and roads:

- Appropriate signage and promotion that informs dog owners that “city streets” are dog leashed areas.
- Dog “restrain tie down posts”.
- Doggie “poo bag” dispensers and rubbish disposal bins.

What are the issues?

The Council must have;

- Clear, concise signage that has informative messages advising dog owners what is required and expected of them (ie “dogs on leashes welcome” while walked on the footpath) in problem areas also the fines or penalties imposed for any breaches.
- Regular enforcement patrols by rangers and/or dog control officers to ensure compliance of the bylaws, with the emphasis on continued education and the issue of infringement fines to non-complying dog owners.
- Promote the bylaw, using newspaper media, that all the “city streets” are dog leashed areas.

2. Education And Awareness

The Council needs to make provision for the following to occur on a regular basis.

- **Children** - Continue with the current schools education programme visiting primary schools on a regular basis to promote “dog bite prevention, health and hygiene around dogs, bylaws - including removing doggie doos and leash requirements” with school children.
- **Adults** - Current dog owners either aren’t aware or flout the bylaws, as they presently exist. If the consensus is that dog owners are not aware of their responsibilities then we have a huge role to ensure they are aware. Education of non dog owners on how to respond to dogs, the rights of dog owners, and the status of dog exercise areas.
- **Responsible Dog Owner status** - many dog owners who currently have this status do not fully comply with the requirements of the status either by breaching the Dog Control Act 1996 and/or the Councils Dog Control Bylaws 1997. Regular reviews of the status of existing dog owners is needed.
- New dog owners requesting that they obtain the responsible dog owner status should complete a “Responsible Dog Owner test” to ensure that they will comply in the future. This comprehensive test should cover matters pertaining to the annual dog registration, requirements to notify Council when the dog dies, moves address or changes ownership. The test should cover matters relating to bylaws - leash control; dog fouling prohibited and restrained areas.
- Only at the successful completion of this test then dog owners shall be granted RDO status with the benefits that apply to it.
- Develop and implement web page, brochure and poster information enabling dog owners to meet requirements of the Councils bylaws and the Dog Control Act.

What are the issues?

It is clear from submissions and from other means that a large number of dog owners and members of the public were, and may still be, unaware of current legal matters to do with dog control and dog safety and exercise issues. These matters need to be addressed through educational means for the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under both the Dog Control Act 1996 and the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Compliance And Enforcement

Additional resources need to be identified to undertake the following.

- Further recruit and educate park and dog rangers to assist in the enforcement of the Council bylaws.
- Target known areas where non-compliance has become a factor within the areas and assign officers accordingly to enforce the bylaws.
- Consider some radical ways of enforcing the provisions of the bylaws.
- Provide financial investment annually to support the implementation of signage on beaches, parks and roads.

CONCLUSIONS

The matters referred to above will be developed over the next few months through the appropriate staff of the business units involved. If, as expected, there may be additional funding required to implement the proposed changes to signage, to support educational and communication measures, or to develop further dog exercise areas, these will be reported back to the Committee for Councillors to consider as part of the Annual Plan process.

Staff

Recommendation: That the information be received and a draft strategy be reported back to a seminar in February 2004.

Chairman's

Recommendation: For discussion.