

1. **PROPOSED DOG REGISTRATION AND RELATED FEES
FOR THE 1999/2000 DOG LICENSING YEAR**

RR 9512

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Corporate Plan Output: Animal Control	

The purpose of this report is to consider the setting of dog registration and other related fees for the 1999/2000 dog-licensing year, which commences 1 July 1999.

INTRODUCTION

The Dog Control Act 1996 requires that:

1. All dogs of greater age than three months be registered by 1 July each year with the authority in whose district the dog is normally domiciled and, in the case of a young dog reaching registerable age after 1 July, on or before it attains the age of three months.
2. The fees for dog registration set by an authority be publicly notified in a newspaper circulated within its district at least once in the month prior to the commencement of the registration year.

It has been the common practice of territorial authorities to send to each known dog owner in their area, an application form for registration. In Christchurch these forms are pre-printed with the dog and owner details, and also show the schedule of dog registration fees and information required by the Dog Control Act 1996.

While the responsibility to register a dog rests with its owner, and the Council is not required to post applications, it is considered an advantage to do so in the effort to have dogs registered in a timely manner, by 1 July.

In order that the application forms are printed and ready for posting by early May it is necessary that the fees be set by the Council no later than its March meeting, as it is intended that the dog control fees continue to be printed on the registration application form. A brochure containing further dog registration information and a return envelope will also be included with the registration forms, to encourage prompt registration by dog owners.

DOG REGISTRATION POLICY

The Council at its meeting on 23 April 1997 adopted the following recommendations of the Environmental Committee in regard to fees:

1. That the Responsible Dog Ownership category be continued with a suitable concessionary fee as resolved by Council from time to time.
2. That a considerable concessional neutering or spaying fee be considered annually by the Council, this fee to be less than the standard registration fee, but greater than the Responsible Dog Owner fee. This fee also to be a sufficiently large concession on the standard registration fee to give a strong incentive to neuter or spay, with the concession to be provided from the Dog Control Account.
3. Where a dog is released from the Council's dog shelter to a new owner, the new owner is no longer required to pay a standard release fee, but must pay the cost of registration.
4. Where a dog is claimed by its owner from the Council's dog shelter, the dog will not be released from the shelter until all fees and charges have been paid or appropriate arrangements for payment made.

DOG REGISTRATION AND ASSOCIATED FEES RECOMMENDED

At its meeting on 4 February 1999 the Environment Committee was provided with three options to consider to offset the perceived 1999/2000 Dog Control account deficit. These three options were:

- (Option 1) - a registration fee increase of \$3.00 across the board on currently registered dogs, which it was expected would allow the budget to break even.
- (Option 2) - reduce the current level of service (the budget already excludes any overtime except for high priority situations where human safety is involved).
- (Option3) - amend the funding policy so that 75% of the cost of dog ranging in prohibited areas, parks and after hours (\$67,720), and 5% of the cost of general dog ranging (\$39,490), be funded from capital value rating. This was expected to allow the Dog Control account to retain a balance of \$27,680 at the end of the 1999/2000 financial year.

The Environment Committee approved the adoption of Option 3 and this option is supported by the Committee. The fee schedule is attached (Appendix 1).

This proposal was also considered at the Strategy and Resources Annual Plan Working Party meeting on 4 March 1999 and Option 3 was rejected, the Working Party instead recommending that Option 1 be considered and be approved by Council at its meeting on 25 March 1999.

Accordingly, this option is attached (Appendix 2). The Environment Committee was asked to recommend these fees to the March Council meeting to enable the team to meet printing date deadlines.

Provision has again been made to allow for a concessionary fee for those persons having been granted Responsible Dog Owner Status, in accordance with the criteria previously adopted by the Council (Appendix 3).

The fee structure suggested rewards those granted the above status with a generous financial concession, with the second and subsequent dogs registered by the same owner receiving a greater concession than the first. To claim the concessionary fees, owners are required to register their dogs by 30 June each year.

The recommended fee structure increase of \$3.00 across the board would have a less negative reaction from most dog owners, than an alternative increase of around \$10.00 only to non-holders of Responsible Dog Owner Status.

The basic fee structure initiated in 1998/99 has been retained for the 1999/2000 year. The fee structure of 1998/99 sought to ensure that throughout the registration period, the fees for concessionary categories of dogs would retain some fee advantage, and also sought to limit the effect of the expected drop in revenue as a result of the Council's decision to provide a concession for registration of spayed or neutered dogs. The number of spayed or neutered dogs on record has risen considerably in the last 12 months. This is considered more a consequence of owners advising the Council of dogs already neutered than owners having their dog/s neutered in order to claim the concession. The encouragement to spay or neuter is expected to have taken some effect since the 1998/99 registration.

Notwithstanding the fee advantage they may receive, however, a dog owner holding the Responsible Dog Owner status who does not register their dog by the date required, has breached a status condition and stands to lose their status for up to two years.

There is a requirement under the Council's dog control bylaw for the occupier of any premises where more than one dog is kept for more than 14 days in any 12 month period to obtain a licence from the Council.

A 'one off' fee of \$65.00 is required to be paid for appropriate consultation, inspection and issue of the licence. A licence is not transferable between either owners or properties.

A \$30.00 reinspection fee is charged where the licensed property requires a further inspection. This may be where the holder of the licence wishes to change the number or types of dogs kept; or vary any of the conditions under

which the original licence was issued. A reinspection may also be required where the Council has received a bone fide complaint arising from the keeping of dogs on the property.

For the 1999/2000 year it is proposed to apply by way of a penalty an additional charge for the registration of any dog, being a dog that should have been registered by 1 July, but is not registered until after 1 August. A penalty fee is to be set for each category of dog and the recommended amounts range from \$25.00 to \$30.00.

The Dog Control Act 1996 requires that the fee for a dog certified as "Dangerous" under section 31 of the Act shall be 150% of the fee that would apply if the dog were not classified as a dangerous dog. The Council currently has 48 dogs on its records which are classified as dangerous.

STOCK CONTROL

The cost of undertaking stock ranging and stock pound activities are required to be paid from rates and the net cost is estimated to increase from \$22,938.00 in the 1998/99 year to \$25,883.00 for the 1999/2000 year.

Costs associated with stock ranging and the stock pound cannot be charged to the Dog Control Account.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the dog registration base fee for 1999/00 not be increased (refer to Appendix 1).
 2. That the penalties and fees for late payment be increased in accordance with the attached schedule (Appendix 1).
 3. That any shortfall in the dog control account be met by way of the Council's dog control funding policy (7.3.funding.text26 – the balance not met by user charges shall be funded by capital value rating, on the grounds it is often not possible to identify the owners of impounded animals).