

2. DE-SEXING AND EUTHANASIA OF DOGS

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Corporate Plan Output: Animal Control	

The purpose of this report is to consider the matter of unwanted dogs, alternative dog destruction methods and tendering for the provision of a dog neutering service, as requested by the Environment Committee at its September seminar last year.

The Committee also sought an economic analysis of the cost of dog ranging and keeping dogs in the pound. These matters have been addressed separately as part of an efficiency review project, the results of which have been reported earlier in this agenda.

This report includes consideration of:

- The current method used by Council staff when disposing of unwanted or unclaimed shelter dogs and an alternative method and cost if the current method is no longer considered desirable.
- Whether neutering and spaying of shelter dogs that are to be adopted back into the community is financially viable.

1. Current Method – Humane gun (captive bolt)

The main reason why the Council has adopted the humane gun (captive bolt) approach compared to lethal injection is simply one of cost. The humane gun is a tool that has been used for over 30 years throughout New Zealand by Animal Control Officers when destroying unwanted shelter dogs. This method is used rather than other controversial methods like gas chambers and open firearm use. Freezing works throughout New Zealand still use a combination of electrical stunning and captive bolt gun when processing large animals such as deer, pigs and cattle.

The New Zealand veterinarian Association and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry endorse the method of captive bolt use as a humane and effective way of disposing of unwanted animals. Once fired the gun sends a steel bolt 86mm into the dog's head penetrating the dog's skull and brain rendering instant death to the dog.

Investigations throughout the country confirm that the majority of rural districts dispose of dogs by shooting with a rifle, gas chamber or captive bolt. These methods are used because the techniques are supposedly more effective and efficient. The majority of larger urban cities use lethal injection rather than any other methods because it is more socially acceptable to the public than the captive bolt method.

Council staff are fully trained in the use of the captive bolt gun and follow the safe operating instructions at all times to ensure a successful and efficient outcome occurs. To date operators have had no procedural or operational problems using the captive bolt method. On the down side, however, this technique is very upsetting for staff and is unacceptable to some members of the public.

- **The cost of destroying dogs by humane gun**

The cost of destroying a dog by captive bolt is approximately \$4.80 per dog (this includes officers' time, cartridge shell, disposal gloves and disposal bag). An independent contractor disposes of the carcass.

Based on 1998/99 disposals (550 dogs) the cost of this activity is approximately \$2,640. Carcass disposal costs an additional \$7.68 per dog.

2. Alternative method – Lethal injection

The main reason why the Council has not adopted this particular method is because of the high cost. Vets dispose of sick and unwanted dogs by injecting intravenously the drug "Sodium pentobarbital" into the leg vein (cephalic vein) of the dog; this effectively is an overdose of the drug and works as a cardiac depressant causing death to the dog.

This method is a lot less stressful on the operational personnel and is more socially acceptable.

Registered veterinarians are currently the only people who may administer the drug. It has been argued that this method is slower than the captive bolt but a lot more acceptable to the public and operators.

- **The cost of destroying dogs by lethal injection**

In the past vets have quoted between \$40 and \$50 to destroy unwanted shelter dogs. When you consider the two methods the decision to use the captive bolt was a lot more affordable. Based on 1998/99 disposals (550 dogs) the cost of this activity would come to \$24,750. However, recent investigations show that vets are prepared to offer this service to the Council at considerably reduced rates to resolve this issue. Quotes received recently are as low as \$10 per dog, which equates to \$5,500 per annum, which is much more affordable than in the past.

3. Unwanted dogs

When considering methods of destruction, the obvious question which arises is, why kill dogs at all?

The matter of unwanted dogs is effectively an urban issue. Put simply, there are too many dogs in supply and not enough dog owners to home them. The reasons for this include a lack of owner awareness of dog fertility patterns and/or an unwillingness to manage their dogs' fertility. The latter can include an inability to pay the cost of de-sexing. This is compounded by the ready availability of free dogs through the newspaper, Internet and Buy, Sell and Exchange.

Staff are of the view that we should be aiming for zero kill. It is accepted that this is an idealistic aim, and that in reality a significantly reduced kill ought to be achievable if an holistic approach was applied to the issue of unwanted dogs. This would include education, increased de-sexing, affordable registration fees, less dogs ending up in the shelter and incentives to re-home unwanted dogs.

4. De-sexing of Dogs

Prior to local body amalgamation in 1989, the former Christchurch City Council was the only territorial authority in the South Island to grant a \$5 rebate for a de-sexed dog. In 1981 it was calculated that approximately 20% of the city's dog population were claimed to be either neutered or spayed. By 1989 this had risen to 30% and it is now considered that about 38% of the total recorded dog population (of about 32,500) are in this category.

When the former Christchurch City Council offered a \$40 rebate on the costs of neutering or spaying, it took two years for the amount provided for from rates to be used. Those who took up this rebate were generally those responsible owners who would have their dogs de-sexed in any case. Little was therefore seen to be additionally accomplished by this subsidisation of neutering or spaying.

An alternative the Council may wish to consider is to pay for all dogs adopted from the dog shelter to be de-sexed. Should the Council wish to make this type of service available, tenders could be sought from private veterinary clinics to undertake the work on the Council's behalf, with the Council transporting the dogs to the clinic in the morning, ensuring the procedure was completed, and collecting the dog in the afternoon for release to the new owner.

As an added incentive to adopt unwanted dogs, in addition to the neutering or spaying the new dog owner could be given a free dog registration for that current year (recognising that this new owner wouldn't gain "Responsible Dog Owner" status until year 2).

Based on the 1998/99 figures, 394 dogs were adopted to new owners, 546 dogs were destroyed, of which some may have been adopted if they had been neutered or spayed and found suitable homes. The number of dogs rehomed to new owners may increase to 500 as a result of dogs being de-sexed prior to leaving the shelter.

The Team Leader of Animal control has sourced a number of local veterinary clinics and obtained average neutering and spaying costs. Indications are that the approximate cost of neutering a male dog is \$70 and a female dog \$120.

Based on this information the maximum approximate cost of this initiative is:

- De-sexing initiative 394 rehomed dogs @ \$120.00 = \$47,280
or 500 rehomed dogs @ \$120.00 = \$60,000.

If the council provided free dog registration as an added incentive to adopt dogs from the shelter this would mean a loss of revenue of approximately:

- 394 dog registrations @ average \$35 = \$13,790
or 500 dog registrations @ \$35 = \$17,500

If the Council offered to pay half of the initial registration, the loss of revenue would be \$6895 (394 dogs) and \$8750 (500 dogs).

5. Conclusion

The Council has resolved as part of the Annual Plan process that 5% of Animal Control costs will be funded from rates. This equates to approximately \$70,000.

If the Committee accepts that we should be aiming for a significantly reduced kill, it may wish to consider using this funding to de-sex all dogs rehomed from the shelter and/or free registration for the remainder of the current year in which a dog is adopted.

If the Committee chooses to adopt the officer's recommendation below, the total cost would be approximately \$63,930 (394 dogs) - \$80,360 (500 dogs). This includes an increased cost of \$2,860 to move from captive bolt to lethal injection.

Recommendation:

1. That tenders be sought from local veterinarians to carry out euthanasia of unwanted dogs by lethal injection and to de-sex dogs, where appropriate, that are to be rehomed from the shelter.
2. That no registration fee be charged for the remainder of the current year in which a dog is adopted from the shelter.
3. That the \$25 fee to release a dog from the shelter to a new home be retained and that a voucher equivalent to the value of the release fee be provided to the new dog owner, which can be redeemed at a veterinarian clinic for dog vaccination or after-care services.