



Mansfield Shire

2021 - 2025

Domestic Animal Management Plan



PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2022

Under Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) every Council is required to prepare and implement a Domestic Animal Management Plan (the Plan) every four years. The current Council endorsed Plan related to the timeframe 2017 – 2021

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1. INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

1.1 Purpose of Domestic Animal Management Plan

The purpose of the Plan is to evaluate whether the animal management services provided by Council are adequate to give effect to requirements of the Act and the Domestic Animal Regulations 2015.

A domestic animal management plan prepared by Council must -:

- ▶ Set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services it provides are adequate to give effect to the requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act* (DAA) and the regulations.
- ▶ Outline programs for the training of Authorised Officers to ensure they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of the Act.
- ▶ Outline programs, services, and strategies Council intends to pursue to:
 - Promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats.
 - Ensure that people comply with the DAA, the regulations and any associated legislation.
 - Minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals.
 - Address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats.
 - Encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats.
 - Minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance.
 - Effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs, and restricted breed dogs in the municipality and ensure that those dogs are housed in compliance with the Act.
- ▶ Provide for the review of existing orders made under the Act and the Local Law, with a view to determine whether further orders of Local Laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats are desired, or required.
- ▶ Provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in its municipality that Council thinks necessary.
- ▶ Provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the Plan.

Council is also required to review and where appropriate amend this Plan and publish an evaluation of the implementation of the Plan in Council Annual Report.

1.2 Process Applied in Developing the Plan

A Community Engagement Program and associated communication program was initiated in December 2021 to offer the opportunity to and ensure residents and other interested parties would understand how to have their say and feel confident about providing feedback to Council on how Domestic Animals should be managed in the Shire.

The engagement program was made available through Council's website in the form of a structured survey based on several key areas of control, pet ownership requirements and sharing of information, and links were provided via social media and all of Council's communication

channels - as well as a media release to print channels to engage with our communities.

Posters were provided to local Vets and were distributed in areas used frequently by pet owners, such as our off-leash parks.

The earlier Council Plan, results of this survey and Council's internal data have provided the foundation for this updated Plan.

There were 67 views of the consultation page. There were 21 responses, which is not significant when compared with the number of registered dogs and cats in the municipality however, the submissions provided an opportunity to reflect on community feedback and to ensure the plan considered the views raised.

The responses offered a variety of views from both those that own dogs or cats or those that have had some form of adverse or undesirable impact from someone else's dog or cat.

Examples of this included:

- ▶ The response time to dogs at large near children's playground areas.
- ▶ Questions on whether Council has sufficient dog off lead areas within built-up areas of the municipality and a desire for fenced exercise and socialising areas to be provided.
- ▶ Whether Council should require cats to be housed overnight (cat curfew).
- ▶ A comment was also left that not all domestic animals are dogs or cats, that there are other pets. It is acknowledged that community members may keep other animals as pets – with some constraints introduced by Council's Local Laws e.g. No roosters are permitted to be kept in residential areas (due to likely noise issues). It is also acknowledged that there is a significant number of horses within the municipality, many of which are kept as pets.

The Plan concentrates on dogs and cats to meet State Government guidelines.

1.3 Demographic and Profile of Council

Mansfield Shire is home to the dramatic landscapes of Victoria's High Country. Visitors and locals agree you can really sense the personality of the place – it's about lifestyle, farming, all things outdoors and a can-do attitude.

Less than two hours north-east of Melbourne, our municipality covers 3,843 square kilometres. Mansfield Shire is the gateway to Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resorts, the Alpine National Park, and Lake Eildon - Victoria's largest inland water storage. Five major river systems, the Delatite, Howqua, Jamieson, Big and Goulburn, have their headwaters in the Shire and all flow into Lake Eildon.

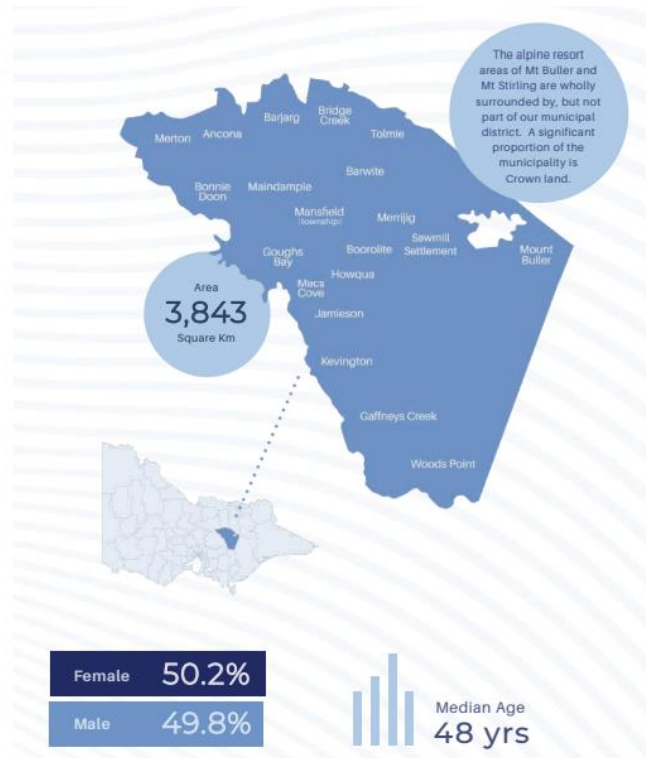
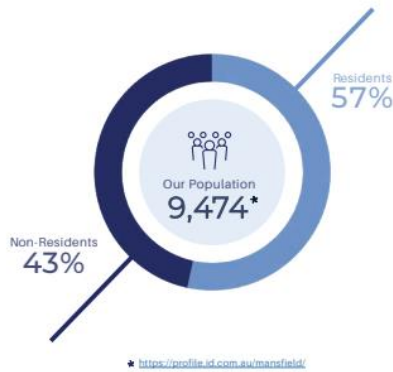
Mansfield Shire's strong economy is underpinned by agriculture, tourism, construction, and property. It is supported by a diverse range of commercial and service sectors.

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Mansfield is central to many unique towns and locations including:

- + Ancona
- + Barjarg
- + Bonnie Doon
- + Boorolite
- + Bridge Creek
- + Gaffneys Creek
- + Goughs Bay
- + Howqua
- + Kevington
- + Macs Cove
- + Maindample
- + Merrijig
- + Merton
- + Sawmill Settlement/Alpine Ridge
- + Tolmie
- + Woods Point

Estimated population change 2.1%



1.4 Context and Current Situation

Council's animal management service includes the following broad range of activities (with data where applicable):

- ▶ Initiating registration and renewal of registration processes and the issue of registration tags.
- ▶ Responding to roaming dogs with either returning to owner, or impounding.
- ▶ Responding to menacing and dangerous dogs and dog attacks against persons and stock.
- ▶ Noise complaints about barking dogs and dogs wandering at large.
- ▶ Receiving surrendered dogs and cats and rehousing wherever possible.
- ▶ Making available cat traps for capturing wandering, abandoned or 'wild' cats.

Supportive information drawn from Councils records systems relating to some of Councils past involvement and domestic animal management activities:

Comparative performance of Mansfield Shire's animal management services in 2020-21			
Performance Area	Mansfield Shire	Similar Councils	All Councils
Days taken to action animal management requests	1.03 days	1.5 days	1.81 days
Registrable animals reclaimed from Council's Pound	84.78%	36.95%	46.21%
Registrable animals rehomed*	14.13%	39.73%	34.97%
Cost of animal management service per population	\$17.90	\$17.67	\$12.60

* Of the 92 registrable animals collected, 78 were returned to their owners and 13 rehomed

Source: knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au

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Broad range of domestic animal services offered:

Program/Service:	Service Level:
Media releases, distribution of renewal notices and placement of A-frame signs to promote registration requirements in high-risk areas	Number of dogs and cats registered per year – see later table.
Monitor registration renewals and follow up enquiries for previously registered animals	Desktop audit and follow up (phone or visit) commencing in June.
Advertise lost and found animals on social media	All animals found at large are posted on Council's social media to try and identify owner and kept in Pound for 8 days if not registered or owner unable to be identified through microchip.
Enforcement activities for unregistered animals when located via complaint or impounded strays	All impounded animals must be registered prior to reclaim.
Identification & Registration – Door knock campaigns	Council undertakes regular door knock campaigns through areas deemed to be high risk.
Domestic animal requests	231 (2020-2021) logged 'request' for action.
Dangerous Dogs complaints	Response time = within 30 minutes (or as soon as practical if distance is an issue).
Routine street patrols	When required – usually after a complaint but always on the 'look-out' for wandering animals whilst undertaking other activities.
Pound	Open during business hours subject to prior arrangement and Officers have access for after-hours impounds. Officers attend to welfare needs and exercise impounded animals daily.
Micro-chipping and/or desexing programs	Council provides reduced registration fees to encourage desexing of dogs and cats.
Responsible Pet Ownership (RPO) – School information sessions	None currently undertaken – limited resources with one rostered Local Laws Officer most days. Pamphlets and posters available and distributed mainly at the Municipal Office and by engagement with Vet practices.
After hours emergency service	Available as required subject to Officer assessment
Provision of Cat traps to address wandering cats and feral cat issues	Cat traps made available and captured cat collected – returned to home or euthanised based on circumstances – microchipped / classified as feral etc
Return strayed and wandering pets to home	At the earliest opportunity – particularly where pet is microchipped. Others advertised in social media seeking to identify owner / or rehoming option.

1.5 Domestic Animal Statistics

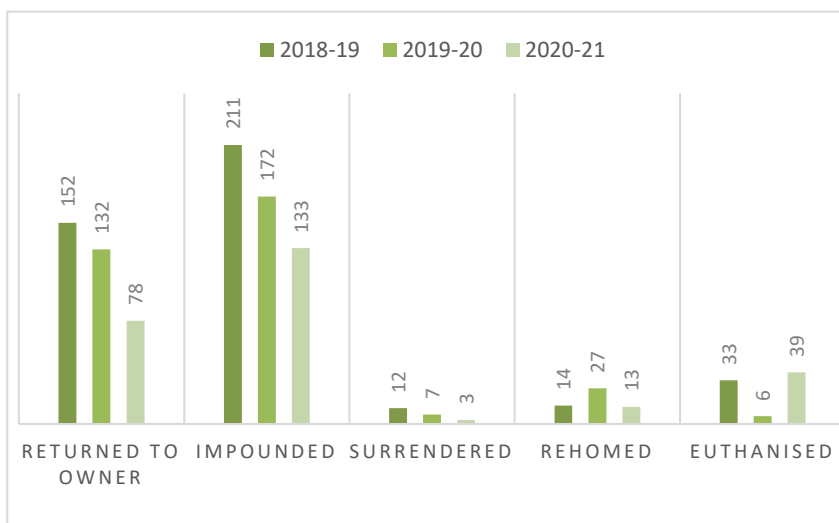
DOGS and CATS	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Number registered	2582	2506	2290
Declared dogs (dangerous & menacing)	1	0	4
Stray /wandering pet returned to owner	152	132	78
Impounded by Compliance Officers	211	172	133
Surrendered	12	7	3
Rehomed	14	27	13
Euthanised *	33	6	39

* Council currently has a feral cat eradication program to respond to community and environmental concerns about wandering cats and attacks on wildlife.

Over the previous three years 72 were cats captured and handed to Council were determined to be feral and were humanely euthanised. The lower numbers during 2019-20 were likely COVID related with Council offices closed for much of the period and service levels impacted.

All cats trapped and surrendered to Council are checked for a microchip and assessed for their behaviour by either a Local Laws Officer and/or Veterinary Surgeon before a decision is made whether they are euthanised. Of the total of six euthanised dogs over the previous three-year period, all were euthanised due to illness or aggressive behaviour (unsuitable for rehoming under the provisions of the Code of Practice for Pounds & Shelters). All other dogs were able to be returned to owners, rehomed, or surrendered onto other rehoming businesses.

Registration figures for dogs and cats have decreased slightly each year over the reporting period possibly due to the global pandemic limiting Council’s ability to follow up on registrations by door knock (to chase up the non-lodgement of renewals). There has also been a decline in the number of impounded stray dogs and cats reaching the pound and this is thought to be due to lockdown conditions where more people were at home and less people visiting the Municipality with their pets.



Returned to Owner

Owner identified, and dog or cat returned without being impounded

Impounded

Animal taken to the Council Pound

Surrendered

Animals surrendered to Council by owner for rehoming

Rehomed

Animal adopted after 8 days in the Pound (and not reclaimed) or surrendered for rehoming

Euthanised

Animal assessed as feral, suffering untreatable illness or injury

2. TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

2.1 Context and Current Situation

Council's animal management services are carried out by members of the Community Safety Unit.

This Unit has oversight of Local Laws. There are 3 Local Laws Officers performing animal management duties consisting of 1 Officer employed 4 days a week, 1 part time Officer working 2 days a week and 1 Casual/Relief Officer who assists during periods of leave and also ensuring coverage is provided over weekends. They are each authorised under legislation to respond to concerns, deliver education and enforcement objectives throughout the municipality.

The Local Laws unit responds to out of office enquiries, which are often contracted out by Councils. Council also operates its own pound facility, another service that is often contracted out. In addition to these services, the unit responds to all animal related issues, including wandering pets and agricultural stock, injured wildlife on Council roads, and investigating allegations of cruelty to animals.

These Officers in the Community Safety Unit are authorised under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* and the *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994*, to undertake the following activities:

- ▶ Oversee the domestic animal registration and identification process
- ▶ Investigate dog attacks
- ▶ Investigate barking dog and other nuisance matters
- ▶ Investigate animal welfare issues
- ▶ Provide advice to pet owners and the community regarding the care of their animals
- ▶ Provide a 24-hour emergency response
- ▶ Implement Council's Amenity, Environment and Community Protection Local Law 2018 (that include some pet and animal management requirements).
- ▶ Collect and reunite wandering domestic animals with their owners
- ▶ Seize and impound wandering domestic animals and livestock
- ▶ Enforcement activities and ensuring compliance with legislation and various codes of practice relevant to domestic animals and livestock.
- ▶ Monitor compliance with Codes of Practice such as breeding, boarding and training
- ▶ Maintain Council's Pound
- ▶ Assist with wildlife complaints
- ▶ After hours animal emergencies – a Local Laws response is provided 24/7 and this links into situations where animals are impacted by other emergencies. Examples include where a pet owner is incapacitated, involved in a car accident, fires in the landscape - whenever incidents and accidents result in pets been adversely impacted.

In addition, the Local Laws Officers are also responsible for investigation and enforcement in several areas, including Council's General Environmental Local Law, EPA complaints, litter enforcement, stock and parking compliance and managing the School Crossing service.

2.2 Our Planned Training for Authorised Officers

It is a requirement that the service provided is undertaken by Local Laws Officers who are competent and care for animals. Permanent staff providing more than 2 days per week routine service complete, as a minimum, a Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation course. Further training options offered to Officers undertaking Animal Management duties are annually reviewed to ensure relevant and up to date training and material is provided.

Training topics include:

- ▶ Animal handling and behaviour
- ▶ Dog and cat management
- ▶ Conflict management
- ▶ Investigation and statement taking
- ▶ Information technology
- ▶ Annual firearms training

Officers are eligible to attend industry related seminars, conferences, and briefings from Animal Welfare Victoria (DJPR), Australian Institute of Animal Management (AIAM), RSPCA, North East Authorised Officers Association, and other relevant Associations.

Council is committed to maintaining and enhancing staff training.

Activity	When	Evaluation/Outcome
Develop a training plan that clearly identifies minimum training requirements and any additional training needs that should be undertaken by Local Laws Officers in application of the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> and the <i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986</i> to ensure they can properly administer and enforce the Acts.	Ongoing	Local Laws staff will undertake training for continuous improvement in line with legislative changes. All staff meet performance standards in annual employee performance reviews.
Local Laws Officers will have costs associated with membership of the Australian Institute of Animal Management covered by Council	2022 and ongoing	This will provide access to industry resources and webinars to expand knowledge in best practice animal management and welfare.
All Local Laws staff to attend Mental Health First Aid training or undertake a refresher course	2022 and ongoing	New staff to undergo training within 12 months of employment, and all staff to have refresher training every two years
Annual firearms training for Authorised Officers	Ongoing	Officer training register maintained. All staff to meet performance standards in annual employee performance reviews.
All new Officers will initially accompany a trained Officer to ensure accurate information and training is being provided for the job	Ongoing	Review feedback from both Officers regularly to ensure effective development
Officers to follow up complaints and provide feedback to improve skills	Ongoing	Review monthly at Team meetings

3. PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP AND COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION

By promoting and encouraging responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation, Council will support a more positive environment for all community members.

3.1 Context and Current Situation

Through community consultation, Council knows there is strong support for initiatives that aim to address pet welfare issues within Mansfield Shire. From survey responses, there is more Council can do to inform the community about the responsibilities that come with pet ownership and the work Council’s Compliance team is doing to promote responsible pet ownership in Mansfield Shire.

More than 60% of respondents to the survey agreed that more information about responsible pet ownership should be provided on Council’s website, in social media and sent out with dog and cat registration renewals.

The table outlines the planned activity to enhance community awareness in the years of this plan

Activity	When	Evaluation / Outcome
<p>Develop a communication plan to promote responsible pet ownership and raise the profile of Council’s animal management service.</p> <p>This may include regular posts via Council’s social media sites to build awareness about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The importance of registering cats and dogs - Dogs on leash and criteria that explains “having effective control” of a dog - Pick up after your dog - Keeping children safe around pets - Benefits of preventing cats from wandering - Relevant pet care/welfare information 	Year 1 and ongoing	<p>Increase in number of registrations.</p> <p>Decrease in number of complaints</p>
<p>Develop community awareness programs that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actively encourage the adoption of animals from animal shelters and - Promote adoption opportunities available to Mansfield residents. - Raise awareness about the benefits of adopting from animal shelters and to dispel any myths about animals that come from shelters (being less desirable?). 	Year 1 and ongoing	Increased numbers of adopted pets being registered in Mansfield Shire

3.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Each year Council Officers receive over 200 requests for assistance relating to domestic animals. Common animal nuisance matters that are reported to Council include wandering cats and dogs, barking dogs, lost and found dogs and cats and excessive numbers of animals being housed on properties.

The Community Engagement Survey undertaken in December 2021 - January 2022 found that many respondents had genuine issues with nuisance dogs and cats. Cats can pose a risk to wildlife and Council provides free hire of cat traps to residents who are experiencing issues with nuisance cats. This service results in many feral cats being trapped by members of the community and in turn these being surrendered to Council.

There were 55 occasions where cat traps were provided to residents from July 2019 to June 2022.

Ongoing Council Commitment:

These services are intended to be maintained and Council will continue to provide a service of

- ▶ Providing a timely 24/7 response relating to the following domestic animal nuisance issues
 - dogs wandering at large where children play
 - dogs identifiable as menacing or dangerous dogs been sighted in non-compliance with any restrictive requirements
 - responses to dog attack – involving other pets, stock and most importantly where a dog is alleged to have rushed at or bitten a person or their pet
- ▶ Providing a working day response regarding the following:
 - General dog at large / lost dog or cat
 - Dog barking complaint
- ▶ Collecting trapped cats from the property Monday – Friday (subject to Officer availability and other work commitments). We will encourage those using the traps not to set the trap when Council does not provide the collection service.
- ▶ Providing general surveillance activity relating to the following activities;
 - dog excrement not been collected – when the dog / owner can be identified
 - dogs been off lead in non-permitted ‘built-up’ areas
 - excessive dogs or cats at properties

Council’s Amenity, Environment and Community Protection Local Law 2018 provides guidance on animal ownership and aims to reduce problems arising from amenity issues created by animals:

- ▶ Restrictions on the number and type of animals permitted to be housed on residential or rural land (Clause 38)
- ▶ General housing requirements relating to the conditions under which domestic animals and livestock are kept including the requirement to provide adequate fencing to prevent animals from wandering (Clause 39)
- ▶ The responsibility of owners to remove domestic animal and livestock excrement in a public place (Clause 39)
- ▶ The requirement for dogs to be on a leash when in a public place within a township. (Clause 42). Note: There are currently two off-leash parks in Mansfield Shire – The Botanic Park in Mansfield and The Island at Jamieson. (Options for other locations are invited and can be provided at any time).

Where permit applications for additional animals are received, Council undertakes to obtain feedback from surrounding residents to ensure the issuing of permits for additional animals does not have negative impact on neighbourhood amenity.

Council's initial approach leans toward education before enforcement and will be maintained in its procedure for wandering dogs and cats. All dogs and cats will continue to be returned directly to their owner free of charge if registered and found wandering for the first time.

Repeat offenders for wandering dogs and cats will receive an infringement and will be required to pay impound release fees if they reach Council's pound.

An infringement will also be issued for unregistered dogs found wandering or if identified after Council has provided publicity of registration renewals and 'door knocks' being undertaken.

NB: Throughout Victoria, all dog and cat registrations expire annually in April and an 'amnesty' would routinely be given where a registration is overdue by a couple of weeks.

Council Officers will seek to assist pet owners and will work with owners to assist them find a solution to ensure their pet cannot escape their home or yard.

Council's Local Laws Officers are also authorised under S18 and S24 of *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* which allows the investigation and prosecution of matters under that legislation. This provides Council with the ability to respond efficiently to support the RSPCA in cruelty matters.

Many municipalities do not authorise officers under Prevention of Cruelty To Animals legislation (POCTA).

Council actions relating to noise complaints include:

- ▶ Documented procedure regarding the lodgement and request for Council involvement in investigating noise nuisance complaints for dogs and/or cats, s32 of the Domestic Animals Act (DAA). This is also published and available from Councils web page.
- ▶ A complainant's log of noise times to aid investigation is routinely sought
- ▶ Council complaints management 'customer charter' detailing our commitment to respond
- ▶ Procedure for the surrender of dogs and/or cats by owners, s33A of the DAA is followed where an owner is no longer able to care for their pet and is unable to make their own rehoming arrangements.

3.3 Our Plan

Council ensures compliance with Local Law and legislation relating to dogs and cats through:

- ▶ Forwarding renewal notices to animal owners to encourage compliance with registration
- ▶ Sending reminders to owners who fail to renew registrations, including face to face follow up through a visit to their property
- ▶ Sending letters to new owners who adopt pets through agencies to ensure registration
- ▶ Ensuring that impounded and unregistered animals are microchipped and registered prior to release
- ▶ Issuing notices and/or infringements for animals found unregistered

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- ▶ Prosecuting owners of unregistered animals where infringements remain unpaid, and or where animals remain unregistered
- ▶ Monitoring Domestic Animal Business activities and annual audits of businesses
- ▶ Monitoring our own compliance with our self-audits of Council Pound and pound record management
- ▶ Monitoring our performance by comparison with historic data and that available from other councils
- ▶ Providing an after-hours emergency animal service that aims to return pets to their owner as our priority. Where dogs and cats come into our possession and the owner is not readily identifiable via microchip record, collar, and tag etc, we will provide notice via social media to identify the owner. We will provide a caring environment as temporary housing for the pet till it can be returned to the owner or where necessary we will always consider rehoming options.

Council will continue to implement a range of education and consider proactive initiatives to educate the community around responsible pet ownership and ensuring compliance with Local Law and legislation. From the results of the survey undertaken in the development of the Plan, it is evident that the community want Council to be more proactive in offering community education programs for the awareness and management of nuisance animals, dog attacks and general pet ownership responsibilities.

Several initiatives are being considered – see below:

Activity Referenced by Community Survey	When	Evaluation
Raise community awareness about Council's animal services, responsible pet ownership, pet behaviour and animal welfare	2022 – ongoing	Develop and implement a dedicated pet communications plan with regular and consistent messaging using a variety of platforms and methods shown to drive behaviour change. Ensure a variety of mediums are used to enable a broad community reach.
Undertake feasibility study to determine possible location of additional 'off leash' dog parks or areas in townships	1st half 2023	Consider options and seek community feedback
Consider the introduction of a cat curfew within Residential areas	2023	Development of a Project Plan
Implement and promote community education programs regarding the importance of keeping domestic animals secured to protect wildlife and avoid nuisance complaints	2 nd half 2022	Program to be developed and implemented including "Safe Cat – Safe Wildlife" education material
Continue to provide cat traps free of charge for residents and businesses to trap nuisance cats	Ongoing	Monitor number of cats trapped and compare with historic data and records regarding stray cat complaints
Proactively monitor social media for reports of found/missing/wandering dogs to ensure officers are aware of unreported instances of wandering dogs	Ongoing	Update Operating Procedures to include response to social media reports
Maintain dog poo bags in public areas	Ongoing	Audit of location and condition of dispensers and stocking level undertaken weekly.

4. ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION, REGISTRATION OVERPOPULATION AND EUTHANASIA

4.1 Context and Current Situation

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* requires that all dogs and cats over the age of three months must be microchipped and registered with Council in which they reside. As well as being a legal requirement registration and identification gives pets that are found a much higher chance of being returned to their rightful owner in a timely manner.

Animal registration also allows Council to better understand the number of pets that reside within the community and provides valuable information to ensure that Council's animal management services are adequate and delivered appropriately – as well as providing a source of funding.

Stray and Wandering Animals

There has been a decline in the number of stray dogs and cats being reported to Council and impounded. Council data records 199 incidents reported in 2018-2019 declining to 130 in 2020-2021.

While this reduction may partly be due to the pandemic and lockdown conditions Council has listened to the initial survey responses and note that this remains an area of concern. Council will commence a targeted community wide education process for the life of this Plan to inform owners about the importance of ensuring their pets are securely contained within their premises, on a lead when out and about or under their effective control when in an off-lead area.

Pet Animal Care and Attention

Where necessary Council will impound wandering and stray animals. If, after 8 days in the Pound (as required by the Act), the rightful owner of the dog or cat cannot be ascertained, Council will continue to partner with 'no kill' welfare groups to provide shelter care and rehoming services for pets that have not been successfully reunited with owners or are unable to be rehomed locally.

Only animals that are diseased, severely injured or exhibit dangerous behaviour are euthanised. From 2018 to 2021 72 feral cats were euthanised. During the same period 1 dog that was too injured to be treated and 6 dogs surrendered following attacks or where behaviour deemed them unsuitable for rehoming were euthanised.

Subject to sought funding allocation, in the second half of 2022, Council will be promoting a Pet Support Package to assist vulnerable or disadvantaged pet owners who need to desex their dog/cat with funding from the State Animal Welfare Fund.

It is recognised that pet ownership supports mental health and wellbeing and this program recognises the importance of improving companion animal welfare. It will also aid the reduction of unwanted litters (thus reducing euthanasia of feral cats in the future), boost compliance with registration requirements and improve the care of local animals. This program will be undertaken in conjunction with local Vets.

4.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Amenity, Environment and Community Protection Local Law No. 1 2018

Part E Clause 38 of Council Local law details restrictions on the number of animals that may be kept on Residential Land. Clause 38.1 provides that the owner or occupier of any land must not, unless they hold a local law permit, keep or allow to be kept, or remain on any land any more than 2 dogs and 2 cats on any small residential allotment:

- ▶ Note. Clause 38.1 does not apply where a planning permit has been obtained for land used for the purpose of animal boarding or breeding.
- ▶ To calculating the maximum number of dogs or cats kept on any land, any progeny may be lawfully kept, without a permit, for 12 weeks after birth. (After 3 months of age, puppies and kittens are also required to be individually registered)
- ▶ An owner or occupier of land exceeding 4000m² (in a residential area) can keep up to 4 dogs and 4 cats without the Local Law permit.

Excess Animal Permits

A person who wants to keep more than the permitted number of animals on a property must apply for an excess animal permit under the Local Law. On lodgement of the application form and payment of the fee, the application will be assessed on its merits and on the ability of the owner to keep and care for the pets without causing nuisance or amenity issue. A permit remains valid for twelve months subject to compliance with conditions and can be renewed yearly.

Cats Wandering

There is no general offence of “at large” for domestic cats, unless Council determines to pass an order under Section 25 of the Act to declare a “cat curfew” for specific areas. Survey responders have asked Council to consider introducing such an order and this is intended to be further considered for the Municipality or specified areas during the life of this Plan.

At this time, to address cats wandering, residents and occupiers may hire (at no cost) a cat trap from Council to trap cats trespassing on their property. Officers may conduct trapping programs on behalf of residents or business owners if circumstances dictate a problem area has been identified and is not able to be resolved by an owner.

All cats trapped or seized on private property and provided to Council are checked by an Officer for a Council tag and scanned for microchip details. If an owner is identified and the cat is registered, it will be returned to the owner who will be advised to keep the cat contained and not allow it to trespass onto another person’s property. If the cat is not registered or has no microchip details to allow its return to an owner, it is impounded and taken to Council Pound. If the cat is unwell or injured, it is taken to a vet for assessment. Obvious feral cats will be subject to a formal documented assessment before considering whether they should be euthanised. This decision is not taken lightly and is always documented.

All un-identified cats not considered to be feral are photographed and the photo posted onto Council’s social media (with the location and date of their seizure/capture) to try and identify their owner. This same approach applies with dogs.

Unregistered cats must be microchipped and registered before being returned to their owner.

Semi Owned Cats

The high euthanasia rates of feral cats referenced earlier is directly related to the number of cats that remain fertile and are feral and/or semi-owned. These types of cats are not specifically owned, are not registered or microchipped and therefore are unidentifiable, but their survival and growth rely heavily on residents feeding them. As a result, when caught, these cats are unlikely to be claimed and due to their poor temperament resulting from limited socialisation and handling, their likelihood of being rehomed is limited.

4.3 Our Plan

Objective 1: To provide readily accessible information to the public in relation to overpopulation and high euthanasia rates

Activity	When	Evaluation
Promote confinement of animals to owner's premises to prevent stray cats and dogs	2023 and ongoing	Promotes compliance and the importance of registration
Circulate Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife* education material.	Ongoing	Less reports of wandering / nuisance cats over life of Plan.

**Safe Cat Safe Wildlife is a campaign run by Zoos Victoria and RSPCA Victoria that provides cat owners with resources to help give their cat the safest and happiest life. The website safecat.org.au contains information, articles and short tips and tricks for an indoor lifestyle, as well as helping highlight the benefits to cats staying at home (welfare and safety for the cat and a safer neighbourhood for local wildlife).*

Objective 2: Reduce the size of the semi-owned cat population

Activity	When	Evaluation
Raise awareness about semi-owned cat population and encourage the community to not feed stray cats	2023	Media campaign to educate our community on the semi-owned cat population and discourage feeding. Promote cat trap availability.

Objective 3: Reduce the number of cats and dogs euthanised

Activity	When	Evaluation
Review and renew section 84Y agreements with animal welfare, re-housing and adoption groups.	2 nd half 2022	This can be evaluated against figures for euthanasia and number of animals rehomed

Objective 4: Apply for government grant funding to support delivery of a low-cost (or free) desexing and microchipping program.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Seek funding to participate in a low-cost microchipping and desexing pets - aimed to support disadvantaged families in the municipality.	1 year from funding receipt	Additional number of cats and dogs desexed by the end of the program.

5. REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

5.1 Context and Current Situation

Council plays a central role in promoting responsible pet ownership.

While a significant part of this role relates to the enforcement of laws and regulations requiring animals to be properly managed, Council is also involved in promoting animal welfare and educating pet owners and other community members to encourage more positive and rewarding relationships with dogs and cats.

All dogs and cats over the age of three months must be registered with Mansfield Shire Council as per Section 10(1) of the Act; newly registered animals must also be microchipped before registration can be accepted. Microchipping and registering pets increases the chance of being re-united with their owners should they become lost.

Number of domestic animals registered in Mansfield Shire:

	2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021	
	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats
Entire	141		115	8	129	
Desexed	1713	418	1412	360	1241	345
Reduced Fee*	231	11	213	14	180	18
Working Dog	470	-	280	-	336	-
Dangerous/Menacing	3		1		5	

- ▶ Desexed
- ▶ Reduced Fee applied to those:
 - over 10 years
 - kept for breeding at a Registered Domestic Animal Business
 - dog that has undergone obedience training with an approved organisation
 - microchipped hunting dog registered with Game Management Authority
- ▶ Our data shows there were a total of 324 new registrations during 2020-2021. During this time a total of 187 cats and dogs were removed from the database due to leaving the municipality or passing away.

5.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

There are no additional Council local laws for pet registration in Mansfield Shire. The Domestic Animals Act requires that all dogs and cats over the age of three months be microchipped and registered with Council within which they reside.

Council currently issues registration renewals for all registered dogs and cats on an approved form by email or where no e-mail address to recorded by mail. A media campaign is used alongside the renewal notices to alert owners that registrations are due, and this is followed up by posts on social media and random door knocks throughout the municipality. Signage is also displayed as this time approached (a standard time for all Municipalities in Victoria). This advertising is also supplemented at other times of the year – particularly when Officer time allows confirming property visits to be undertaken

5.3 Our Plan to Increase Registration and Reduce Overpopulation

Activity – Current and ongoing	When	Evaluation
Educate residents of the animal registration renewal period by means of advertising/media releases, mailing of renewal notices and by placing A-Frame signs in areas where high levels of unregistered animals are kept	March/May each year	Increase or decrease in number of pets registered with Council following annual registration and renewal period.
Ensure each property is audited and issued with infringements where animals are found to be unregistered	July-August annually	Infringements issued.
Raise awareness about semi-owned cat population	Year 1	Media campaign to educate the community on the semi-owned cat population.
Promote half price (pro rata) animal registration for new animals from 1 January each year to encourage registration.	Ongoing	Number of new registrations.
Monitor local media for animal sale advertisements	Ongoing	Action non-compliant advertisements
Manage animal registration renewal compliance program. Follow up properties where animal registration has lapsed	Ongoing	Report on the number of properties inspected. Increase in animal registrations as a direct result of the campaign.
Ensure that all impounded animals are registered to their owner prior to release.	Ongoing	Officer guidelines to be reviewed
Random door knocking properties in the municipality each year to check for unregistered and unidentified dogs and cats	Annually	Report on the number of random properties inspected and non-compliances resulting in the issue of infringement notices.

6. NUISANCES

6.1 Context and Current Situation

Council's current procedures regarding nuisance animals encourage a community-based resolution before involving enforcement. Council offers a 24/7 call out service for the collection of lost and wandering dogs and will return registered dogs and cats to their owners without penalty on the first occasion, to encourage prompt and ongoing registration and renewal

6.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies and Procedures

Council recognises the physical, mental, and social benefits that pets bring and the importance to find the right balance in resolving nuisance issues.

Education remains a high priority to encourage responsible pet ownership and help community members solve nuisance issues early without the need for Council intervention.

Current Local Laws:

Part E of the Amenity, Environment and Community Protection Local Law No. 1 provides the following guidance:

39. Conditions Under Which Animals are Kept

- 39.1 The owner or occupier of any land on which any animal is kept must ensure that:
 - 39.1.1 The place where the animal is kept is maintained in a clean, inoffensive, and sanitary condition.
 - 39.1.2 The place where the animal is kept is maintained to not cause any nuisance to any other person or create a condition which is offensive or injurious to health.
 - 39.1.3 The place where the animal is kept is adequately fenced to prevent the animal from being at large or escaping.
 - 39.1.4 The animal is always provided with adequate clean drinking water; and,
 - 39.1.5 The animal is provided with adequate sustenance.

40. Noise and Smell

- 40.1 The occupier, or owner, of any land on which any animal is kept must not allow any noise or smell to emanate from the animal which interferes with the reasonable comfort or convenience of any person.

41. Dog Litter

- 41.1 Whenever a dog is outside the land at which it is normally kept, the person who has the care or control of the animal must:
 - 41.1.1 Not allow any faeces from the animal to remain on a road, public place or land owned or occupied by any other person.
 - 41.1.2 Carry a litter device and must use it for the purposes of removing any faeces of the animal; and,
 - 41.1.3 Dispose of any faeces of the animal in a manner which does not cause any nuisance or health hazard to any person or detriment to the environment.

42. Dogs to be on Leads

- 42.1 A person who owns, or is in apparent control of, a dog in a public place within a township (defined as containing land zoned in any Residential, Business or Industrial Zone under the

Planning Scheme), must keep the dog under control by a leash, chain or cord connecting that person to the dog unless the public place is designated by Council signage to be an 'off leash' area.

42.2 Dogs that are unleashed in a Rural Zone, as defined in the Planning Scheme, must always remain under effective control.

42.3 Any dog that has been classified a dangerous or menacing dog or is of a restricted breed must be muzzled and kept on a lead, chain, or chord at all times and under the control of a person aged over 17 years of age across the municipal district when in a public place.

43. Wandering Animals

43.1 The owner or person in charge of any animal must not, without a permit, allow that animal to wander from the land where it is normally kept.

43.2 The owner or person in charge of any animal must ensure that the land in which the animal is normally kept is adequately fenced to prevent the animal or bird from being at large or escaping.

Barking Complaints

Council has a standard operating procedure to ensure all complaints regarding barking dogs are dealt with in a consistent manner. The procedure outlines the processes involved to investigate the complains, including neighbourhood mediation, noise logs, and statements all with an aim to encourage compliance at the earliest stage possible.

Where the nuisance continues, Council will take enforcement action that may include negotiation, warnings, infringements, notice to comply and prosecution as a last resort.

Cats and Dogs At Large

The procedure for dealing with domestic animals found at large are designed to allow owners to retrieve their impounded animals with a minimal amount of stress to the animal.

All dogs and cats found at large are checked for microchip and registration details. If the owner can be identified, and the animal is currently registered with Council, the officer will attempt to contact the owner and have them collect the animal. Registered pets found wandering are returned home free of charge on the first occasion. Upon return of the pet, Officers will educate the pet owner on ways to avoid dogs and cats wandering, like ensuring that the fencing is adequate to confine their pet. Further infractions will result in penalties being applied.

If the dog or cat is not registered, or the owner is unable to be identified, the animal will be taken to the Council Pound in Lakins Road Mansfield while attempts are made to locate an owner. This will be done via Council's social media. Once an owner is located, the animal will need to be registered (and microchipped) before returning home.

If an owner is initially unable to be located or contacted, the animal will be held for 8 days or until the animal is claimed by an owner. If no owner comes forward, the animal will either be put up for adoption or will be sent out to one of the animal rehoming groups with whom Council has Section 84Y agreements.

6.3 Our Plan

Objective 1 – Reduce cat nuisance complaints

Activity	When	Evaluation/Outcome
Raise public awareness about the benefits of containing cats for their welfare and protecting native animals	Ongoing	Impounded cats
Provide education material about cat enclosures	2022 – ongoing	Impounded cats
Circulate Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife education material throughout the municipality (safecat.org.au)	Ongoing	Reduction in number of impounded cats

Objective 2 – Improve Community awareness of Council services

Activity	When	Evaluation/Outcome
Develop a communication plan for responsible pet ownership to raise the profile and awareness of the scope of Council's animal management service.	2022	Communication/media developed

7. DOG ATTACKS

7.1 Context and Current Situation

Although relatively uncommon, dog attacks do occur from time to time throughout the municipality. When they do occur, they can be highly traumatising for all involved. Attacks on livestock and wildlife in rural areas are much more prevalent than attacks on people. Having a large non-resident population, it is not uncommon for property owners to bring their pets with them when visiting their homes in the Shire. It is often the first time some of these dogs have seen wildlife and/or stock and can result in unfortunate situations occurring.

There is a clear link between dogs that are not adequately secured to the owner's property and dog attacks. Most attacks occur when a dog is outside its property and, in most cases, owners often indicate their dog had never shown aggression before.

7.2 Current Policies and Procedures

A report of a dog attack is regarded as a priority job and receives an immediate response with an officer attending at the scene to assess, take details and seize the attacking dog if warranted. Dog attacks are entered onto Council's record system by the officer.

Upon arrival, officers take details of all persons involved, including dog owners, victims, and witnesses, including best contact numbers. If possible, a basic statement is taken from the victim and/or witnesses at the time, or at least a brief description of the incident, where, and when it took place. Photographs are taken of the scene, any injuries and dogs involved.

When deciding if the offending dog should be seized, an officer considers the following:

- ▶ The seriousness of the attack. Were there serious injuries (as defined in the Act) involved or an element of intentionally setting the dog to attack or reckless indifference
- ▶ Is the dog still at the scene and acting aggressively or not under control?
- ▶ Is the dog registered? Does it have a history of attacks or aggressive behaviour?
- ▶ Is the dog able to be securely contained at the owner's residence and is the owner responsible to keep the dog securely contained?
- ▶ Any other details relevant to public safety or community expectations.

If the dog is to be seized, the officer will impound, and a Notice of Seizure issued to the dog owner within 4 days after the dog is seized. The officer will offer the owner or person in charge of the offending dog, the opportunity to take part in a recorded formal interview. The officer may decide to proceed with prosecution or take no further action. Non serious attacks or rush offences may be dealt with by way of infringement or prosecution, depending on the circumstances as per Section 85 of the DAA.

If an attack involving serious injury or death is to be prosecuted, it must be heard and determined by a Magistrate and is not able to be dealt with by infringement.

7.3 Current Compliance Activities

- ▶ Investigating dog attacks promptly upon report
- ▶ Seizing and holding dogs responsible for serious injury attack
- ▶ Providing an afterhours service to respond to reports of aggressive or attacking dogs
- ▶ Issuing infringements for wandering dogs (waived for 1st offence only if dog is registered)
- ▶ Issuing infringements for rush and attacks where non serious injury sustained
- ▶ Declarations for Menacing or Dangerous Dogs
- ▶ Seeking destruction orders from the Magistrates Court where necessary
- ▶ Seeking confinement Orders from Magistrates' Court for dogs continually found wandering or not confined to property
- ▶ Proactive patrols of parks and streets for wandering dogs
- ▶ Recording data of reported dog attacks in the municipality

7.4 Our Plan

More than 50% of surveyed respondents highlighted the need for additional enforcement and penalties in relation to dogs not under effective control in public places.

While education is key to reducing the incidence of dog attacks, it is also important for Council to thoroughly investigate all reports of dog attacks and to take appropriate enforcement action. Council plans to take the following action over the next four years to minimise the risk of dog attacks.

Objective 1 Raise Community Awareness of Dog Attacks

Action	Measure	Timeframe
Review the data collected relating to dog attacks to identify if there are any patterns/trends that could be addressed	Data reviewed, and additional data collected if required	Annually
Investigate the benefits of promoting the outcomes of dog attack investigations as a way of raising awareness to prevent dog attacks	Number of media stories released	Ongoing
Timely and thorough investigation of all dog attacks and dog rushes and appropriate enforcement action taken	Number of investigations / numbers of successful outcomes	Ongoing

Objective 2 – Minimise the incidence of dog attacks in the community

Activity	When	Action
Visiting local schools to educate the next generation of pet owners of the importance of responsible pet ownership	Annually	Increase in the number of registered pets number of dog attacks decreased
Authorised officers will work directly with owners of higher risk dog breeds to reduce escalation of dog bites/attacks	2023 and ongoing	Direct mail out to owners of dogs more likely to be involved in unsocial activity

8. DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

8.1 Context and Current Situation

Council has one declared menacing dog, and four declared dangerous dogs registered. There are no restricted breed dogs registered.

Dogs declared menacing are those that have been declared by Council due to inflicting a non-serious bit to a person or animal or having rushed up to a person or chased a person in an aggressive manner.

Declared dangerous dogs are those that have been declared by Council due to biting or attacking and causing serious injury to an animal or person, or a dog that was declared menacing and its owner did not comply with the imposed requirements on two or more occasions. A dog that is kept for guarding non-residential premises is also defined as a dangerous dog. Registration fees for dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs are considerable higher than non-declared dogs.

Owners of dogs that are proposed to be declared menacing or dangerous are afforded the opportunity to be heard by an independent panel of Council officers. Terms of reference are in place to establish consistency and procedural fairness in how declaration hearings are conducted.

Current Education and Promotion Activities

- ▶ Information provided on Council website
- ▶ Liaise with dog owners relating to legislation requirements and any changes or updates.

Current Compliance Activities

- ▶ Investigate and respond promptly to complaints about menacing or dangerous dogs
- ▶ Ensure all declared dogs are registered on the Victorian Dangerous Dog Registry
- ▶ Conduct, at least, an annual inspection on premises housing declared dogs to ensure compliance
- ▶ Dog declarations are made where applicable
- ▶ Infringements/Prosecution for any determined breach

What the Community has told us

While there wasn't a specific question in the recent community engagement survey regarding dangerous dogs, there was significant feedback regarding owners not being in control of their dogs, allowing them to wander and annoy other dogs or stock.

Action	Timeframe	Outcome
Review, update and enhance education material for dog owners to ensure there is a clear understanding as to dog behaviour that may lead to their dog being declared as a dangerous or menacing dog.	2 nd half 2022 and ongoing	Information reviewed and promoted widely throughout the Shire
Complete annual audit of all premises where dangerous or menacing dogs are kept ensuring compliance with the Regulations	2 nd half 2022 and annually	Compliance with the Regulations regarding the keeping of dangerous or menacing dogs

9. DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESS

9.1 Context and current situation

As well as Council's Pound, there are five other Domestic Animal Businesses registered in Mansfield Shire – three dog breeding businesses, two boarding businesses and two pet shops (cats only). The boarding businesses and pet shops are run by local vets. Council pound located in Lakins Road is also registered as a Domestic Animal Business.

Council has a responsibility to audit these businesses annually to ensure with the Act, regulations and related legislation is met by to these activities.

Council is committed to a high standard of animal welfare and aims to ensure that all domestic animal businesses comply with relevant standards and codes. Council is also committed to identifying unregistered domestic animal businesses operating within the Shire and takes appropriate action to ensure compliance is achieved.

The introduction of the Victorian Pet Exchange Register (PER) provides greater transparency for breeders operating in the shire. Council is responsible for regulating breeding activities to ensure they are operating lawfully and reports to the Victorian Government about domestic animal businesses on an annual basis.

9.2 Our Policies and Procedures

Current Policies and Procedures:

In accordance with the provisions under Part 4 of the DAA, domestic animal business must be registered with Council. Currently there are five types of domestic animal businesses that must be registered, which are:

- ▶ Pet shops
- ▶ Boarding establishment
- ▶ Breeding and rearing establishments
- ▶ Dog training establishments
- ▶ Dog and cat shelters and pounds

Council must refuse to register renew or revoke a Domestic Animal Business registration if any of the conditions under Part 4, Division 3 of the Act aren't met. Domestic Animal Businesses are subject to Council inspection prior to registration, and at least annually thereafter, to ensure they are complying with the Code of Practice applicable to that Business. Current Codes of Practice are available on the Agriculture Victoria website or via Animal Welfare Victoria, along with audit checklists and factsheets to assist DAB operators to remain compliant.

Codes of Practice for the operation of various DAB are made under the provisions of Section 59 of Division 4 of the DAA. The purpose of the Codes is to specify the minimum standards of accommodation, management, breeding and care that are appropriate to the physical and behavioural needs of dogs and cats affected by businesses operating as domestic animal businesses. Council is responsible for inspection, audit and ensuring compliance with the Code.

Where an inspection has revealed that the domestic animal business is not operating in

accordance with the Code of Practice, the officer must notify the proprietor of the breaches and issue a Notice to Comply directing the proprietor to undertake all work necessary to meet compliance of the Code within a given time.

In the event the proprietor does not comply with the Notice to Comply, the Compliance Officer shall prepare a report for consideration by the Coordinator who will determine if Council should take legal or further action.

Planning requirements may exist for an animal business. These are in addition to the requirements of the DAA and Mansfield Planning Scheme. The application should be forwarded to the Planning Department for comment prior to proceeding.

9.3 Our Plan

1. Ensure Domestic Animal Businesses are compliant with relevant legislation and codes of practice.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Identify all businesses that should be registered DABs in the municipality, including businesses selling pets / pet products / services in the municipality. Follow up to determine whether they are and should be registered with Council.	Ongoing	Compare number of registered DABs before and after activity.
Monitor Councils registration database for owners with more than 3 fertile females	Annually	Enforcement
Search for unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses via social media, newspapers and internet	Ongoing	Enforcement

2. Annually inspect and audit all registered DAB's

Activity	When	Evaluation
Audit Domestic Animal Businesses randomly to ensure compliance	Annually	Compliance with all relevant codes
Investigate advertisements for pets for sale	Ongoing	Compliance and number of complaints received

10. ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Councils Local Law Community Safety Officers are authorised under S18 and S24 of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, allowing the investigation and prosecution of matters under such legislation. A large portion of municipalities do not authorise officers under POCTA, therefore Council's ability to respond efficiently and support RSPCA in cruelty matters is exemplary.

Council officers work closely with the RSPCA to respond to and undertake primary investigation into reports of animal cruelty.

Mansfield Shire Council has a relatively low rate of neglected animal reports and animal neglect is investigated and dealt with promptly.

Across Victoria the RSPCA advise it received 10,745 animal cruelty reports during the 2020-2021 financial year (RSPCA Australian National Statistics 2020-2021). Further education for the community of minimum standards of care and housing for all animals is necessary to ensure this figure reduces over the coming years.

Action	Timeframe	Evaluation
Review Mansfield Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan	Ongoing	Completed review of Mansfield Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan
Ensure all Domestic Animal Businesses are compliant with relevant Codes	Annually	Annual audits undertaken and documented
Collaborate with RSPCA to effectively and efficiently resolve animal welfare matters	Ongoing	Maintain POCTA authorisation for Council Officers
Participate in the RSPCA Million Paws Walk	Annually	Evidence of attendance and participation

11. OTHER MATTERS – SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY IN EMERGENCIES

11.1 Context and Current Situation

Council recognises the physical, mental, and social benefits that pets bring and the link between enabling pet owners to keep their pets close to them and knowing that they are safe when confronted with a crisis. These situations include emergency incidents such as a house fire or bushfire, family violence or health issues. Council is committed to supporting community members through these situations by thorough emergency management planning, partnering with relevant agencies to prevent family violence and working with established networks to enable community members to remain living independently in their homes.

Council can support community members in times of crisis by working with our partners to coordinate the transport of animals, temporary boarding of animals and veterinary care if required. We know that by doing this, residents can focus on other important issues knowing that their pet is safe.

11.2 Our Policies and Procedures

Council has an Emergency Animal Welfare Plan that will be enacted in larger emergencies that helps residents and emergency personnel manage pets and livestock.

Council can temporarily accommodate pets at Emergency Relief Centres, and Local Laws officers are trained to assist residents and their pets at these centres. In addition, Council has programs in place to assist vulnerable members of the community with their pets when experiencing family violence or other personal crises.

The Plan describes local arrangements for domestic animals, stock and wildlife welfare emergency management and addresses the following risk areas:

- ▶ Bushfire
- ▶ Animal disease
- ▶ Wind/Storm damage
- ▶ Flood events
- ▶ Transport accidents involving livestock (e.g., livestock truck rollover)
- ▶ Any event requiring emergency evacuation of residents with their animals

The Victorian Bushfire's Royal Commission (VBRC) noted that the bonds people had with their pets and stock directly impacted upon their decision making and as a direct result their safety during emergencies.

The VBRC stated:

“There were also a small number of cases in which people died after refusing to leave without their pets and animals or delaying their departure for too long because of concern for their animals. Evidence demonstrates that the strong ties people have with their homes and their animals have a big impact on their decision making.” (Extract from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission: Fire Preparation, Response and Recovery, Final Report Volume II)

Further, the Commission noted *"There does not appear to be a coordinated approach to animal welfare during relief operations. Improving agency coordination would help to provide more effective relief to all animals regardless of whether they are wildlife, stock, domestic animals or pets. There is a good argument to address the welfare of all animals holistically in the Emergency Management Manual Victoria". (Bushfires Royal Commission- final report - Vol 2, Ch 8 pp 345).*

Animal owners, animal welfare agencies and the Mansfield Shire Council have a "duty of care" to plan and provide for the needs of animals, particularly in an emergency. The Plan looks at the roles, responsibilities and arrangements between the various stakeholders within Mansfield Shire for the delivery of all emergency response, relief and recovery activities in relation to animal welfare.

12. OTHER MATTERS - PROMOTING COUNCIL'S ANIMAL SERVICES

12.1 Context and Current Situation

Council does not currently have any policies or communication plans specifically promoting responsible animal ownership and Council's animal services to the community. The Community Engagement Program undertaken to support the formation of the Plan, showed that the community is not aware of the scope of activities undertaken by Council's Animal Services.

Education and promotion about responsible animal ownership and services are done on an ad-hoc basis without an overarching communications plan to drive behaviour change. Communications are currently done through the local paper, Council's website and social media. Local Laws Officers also do direct education with residents and pet owners through personal interaction. However, feedback received from Community Engagement indicates that there is a lack of information available through Council, leading to a lack of knowledge or, in some cases, a misunderstanding about animal services provided.

Through improved communications to the community, Council has an opportunity to increase transparency about its animal services, enhance Council's reputation in leading good animal welfare and management practices, and improve responsible pet ownership outcomes.

12.2 Our Plan

To improve Council's public education and communications about responsible animal ownership and animal services.

Action	Timeframe	Evaluation
Raise community awareness about Council's animal services, responsible pet ownership, pet behaviour and animal welfare.	2022-2025	Develop and implement a dedicated pet communications plan with regular and consistent messaging using a variety of platforms and methods shown to drive behaviour change. Ensure a variety of mediums to enable broad community reach.

13. ANNUAL REVIEW OF PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORTING

Under section 68A (3) of the DA Act, Council must review its DAMP annually and, if appropriate, amend the Plan. Council must provide the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions Secretary with a copy of the Plan, including any amendments, and publish an evaluation of the Plan’s implementation in its annual report.

13.1 Evaluation of Implementation of the Domestic Animals Management Plan

Complete for each activity	
Was each activity completed?	Yes/No
Describe any changes you will make if you do that activity again.	
Was an activity not done or is now not planned to be done?	If so, why?
If an activity was unsuccessful and you don’t plan to do it again, outline insights you have into why it didn’t work.	
Complete for each objective	
Did you meet your objective by carrying out the planned activities?	Yes/No
Describe your level of success/progress in meeting the objective.	