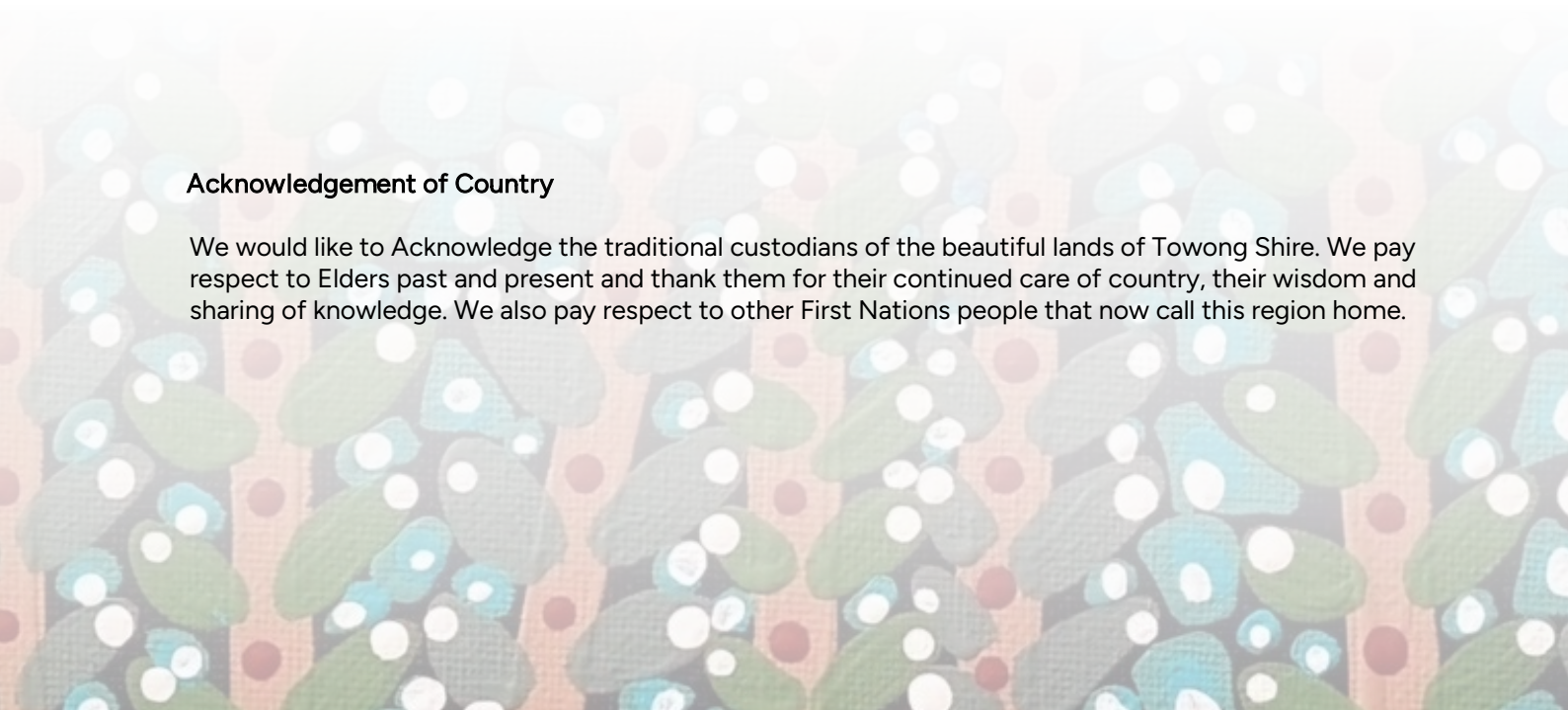


Domestic Animal Management Plan

—
2025 – 2029





Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the beautiful lands of Towong Shire. We pay respect to Elders past and present and thank them for their continued care of country, their wisdom and sharing of knowledge. We also pay respect to other First Nations people that now call this region home.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Within Victoria, councils are responsible for domestic animal management. Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the *Act*) requires all councils to prepare a domestic animal management plan every four years and to report on the plan's implementation in their annual report.

Council acknowledges the role it plays in promoting responsible pet ownership and enforcing legislation, and is committed to balancing the needs of pet owners and the benefits of pet ownership with safety and amenity considerations for the municipal community. The purpose of this *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2025-2029* (*Plan*) is to outline the programs, services and strategies in place to manage companion animals across Shire, namely dogs and cats. The *Plan* specifically addresses the following areas, as required by the *Act*:

- Training of authorised animal management officers;
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership, registration and identification;
- Minimisation of the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance;
- Minimisation of the risk of dog attacks on people and animals;
- Identification and compliance of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs;
- Mitigation of overpopulation and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats;
- Review of Council orders and local laws that relate to dogs and cats;
- Evaluation of animal control services in giving effect to the requirements of the *Act*; and
- Review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the municipality that is deemed necessary.

1.2 Development of this Plan

The development of the *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2025-2029* has been based on a review of the Council's *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2011-2025*, the current overarching strategies of the Council, contemporary animal management issues and controls as identified by peak body organisations and partnering councils, and community feedback regarding Council's animal management practices in accordance with Council's *Community Engagement Policy*. The draft *Plan* is being released for public inspection and submissions prior to any appropriate amendments and adoption.

1.3 Alignment to Council Strategy

The *Plan* is guided by Council's strategic documents, including the following:

Community Vision

Towong Shire will be the ideal place to be: welcoming, vibrant and diverse communities with quality facilities and services.

Council Mission

To provide strong leadership and to work with our communities to enhance their social, economic and environmental wellbeing.



1.4 Guiding Principles

The *Plan* is guided by the following principles:

- The belief that pets contribute to quality of life;
- A requirement to balance the needs of those who own pets and those who do not;
- Valuing responsible pet ownership;
- Proactive animal management and education within the community;
- Protection of the environment from any negative impacts of dogs and cats;
- Working in partnership with others to achieve positive outcomes for the community;
- Local Government plays a leadership role in animal management.

2. Domestic Animals and Towong Shire

2.1 About Towong Shire

Towong Shire, in far North East Victoria, enjoys some of Australia's most pristine environments. Our unique wilderness areas, lakes, rivers and streams create diverse landscapes that are enjoyed by around 6,223 residents (2021 census) and many more visitors across an area of 6,635 square kilometres.

Our municipality includes many diverse townships and localities including Bellbridge, Bullioh, Berrington, Bethanga, Biggara, Burrowye Corryong, Cudgewa, Dartmouth, Eskdale, Granya, Guys Forest, Koetong, Lucyvale, Mitta Mitta, Mt Alfred, Nariel, Old Tallangatta, Shelley, Talgarno, Tallandoon, Tallangatta, Tallangatta Valley, Thologolong, Tintaldra, Towong and Walwa.

The economy of the region revolves around a rich agricultural sector, tourism and timber production and processing. Approximately two-thirds of businesses located in the Shire are in the agriculture and forestry industries.

2.2 Pets in the community

Pets make a valuable contribution to the vibrancy and liveability of the Shire. Domestic pets may be a valued companion and family member and are often also an integral part of a wider community.

Research demonstrates that pets contribute to building a strong sense of community and developing active social capital. Pet ownership is positively associated with social interactions, community involvement and increased feelings of neighbourhood friendliness and sense of community. Such community-based interactions between people have the potential to break down the barriers and stereotypes that cause segregation, whilst also playing an important role in building trust and a deep sense of community.

Pets can also provide significant benefits to the health and wellbeing of residents within our Shire. They:

- can provide increased opportunities for individuals and families to be more active;
- provide companionship to people who may be feeling isolated, lonely or experiencing mental health issues; and
- Assist people with a disability or illness to maintain independence and participate more fully in community life.

These benefits, when aggregated across the whole community, are of significant interest to Council and others concerned with building healthier, happier neighbourhoods. In addition, these benefits create a ripple effect that extends beyond pet owners into the broader community, with pets helping to facilitate social interaction.

Council also has a significant part to play in ensuring the balance of benefits of responsible pet ownership and the amenity of our Shire. There is a strong expectation from legislative obligations and community sentiment that councils uphold laws and standards to ensure pets within its respective communities do not become disruptive, dangerous or detrimental for residents and visitors. This Plan therefore prioritises education and compliance activities to promote responsible pet ownership and address the inherent risks presented with owning pets.

2.3 Domestic animal statistics

The following table provides an overview of domestic animals and associated statistics.

Statistic	Date(s)	Number
Registered dogs	Jun 25	945
Registered cats	Jun 25	179
Dangerous, menacing or restricted dogs	June 25	3
Registered domestic animal businesses	Jun 25	0
Barking dog complaints	Jul 24 – Jun 25	33
Wandering dog reports	Jul 24 – Jun 25	36
Dog attack reports	Jul 24 – Jun 25	11
General animal complaints	Jul 24 – Jun 25	182
Unregistered animal reports	Jul 24 – Jun 25	22
Lost dog reports	Jul 24 – Jun 25	9
Lost cat reports	Jul 24 – Jun 25	5
Surrendered domestic animals	Jul 24 – Jun 25	15
Dogs taken to animal shelter	Jul 24 – Jun 25	15
Cat taken to animal shelter	Jul 24 – Jun 25	8

3. Programs and Services

3.1 Overview

Council employs Ranger / Local Laws officer services equivalent to 1 FTE, and administers and provides a broad range of services to ensure that Council meets its legislative responsibilities relating to the management of domestic animals. These include but are not limited to:

- Maintaining a domestic animal register;
- Educating residents and promoting responsible pet ownership;
- Providing advice on domestic animal matters;
- Dealing with and investigating animal complaints;
- Impounding of wandering, unwanted/surrendered and/or feral dogs and cats;
- Investigating dog attacks;
- Administering control of Dangerous and Restricted Breed dogs;
- Inspecting and registering domestic animal businesses; and

- Developing and maintaining partnerships with veterinarians and other animal welfare organisations.

An after hours emergency service is also available through the services of a third party contractor. This will only be utilised for emergency situations and will likely be referred to the Police in most instances as the appropriate referral agency.

3.2 Officer training

Council is committed to providing appropriate learning pathways for its Ranger and Local Laws Officers through a combination of formal education, on-the-job experience, and exposure to peers at neighbouring councils. The objective is to support the officers to have the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their work. Professional development needs and opportunities are reviewed quarterly as part of the staff workplan process.

Key knowledge and skill requirements include:

- Customer service;
- Animal complaint investigation;
- Animal handling;
- Identification of dangerous dogs;
- Community education;
- Application of domestic animal legislation;
- Dealing with aggressive customers;
- Working in remote areas and off-road driving; and
- Evidence handling and prosecution.

Action Plan

No.	Activity	When	Evaluation
3.2.1	Review professional development against required skills and knowledge as part of regular work planning and in consultation with officers	Quarterly, in accordance with workplan review cycle	Officer workplans to include detailed requirements for professional development goals to effectively conduct the role in accordance with the training register and evolving needs as they arise.
3.2.2	Develop and maintain a training plan and register for existing and new officers	Bi-annual reviews	A clear and concise training plan is to be finalised that outlines the minimum training requirements Rangers and Local Laws officers must complete within a practical timeframe.
3.2.3	Develop an induction process for new officers	By June 2026	An induction process will exist that identifies key topics of learning and on the job experienced to be address theoretically and operationally, via the support of an experienced officer.

3.3 Registration and identification

Dog and cat registration assists in the return of lost animals to their owner and helps to avoid the need for the animal to be impounded. Registration of both dogs and cats is a requirement of the Act and a portion of each registration fee is paid to the Victorian State Government to fund the activities of Animal Welfare Victoria. Fees also help to fund Council's animal control services.

Registration forms are available from Council offices and on Council's website. Council mails out (electronically if residents have opted in) registration renewal notices prior to 10 April each year and reminders are provided in newspapers and on Council's Facebook page. Registrations are tracked through a computerised database.

Registration mailouts are often used as an opportunity to include educational pamphlets regarding responsible pet ownership. Registration renewals which are not paid by the due date will be addressed with the following actions:

- An initial reminder notice for failure to pay the registration renewal will be sent to the registered pet owner within two (2) weeks after the due date. This may include a phone call from an officer to ensure the pet owner has received every opportunity to pay the registration renewal.
- If the registration renewal remains outstanding, officers will issue an infringement for failure to renew cat/dog registration. This will be issued via registered mail to the pet owners primary address.
- The pet owner has an opportunity to appeal the infringement if they believe grounds exists that genuinely prevented the payment of the registration renewal, as determined by the *Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria's Internal Review Guidelines*.
- Unpaid infringements will subsequently be subject to additional penalty reminder notices and escalation to Fines Victoria as statutorily required.

Action Plan

No.	Activity	When	Evaluation
3.3.1	Issue registration renewal reminder notices to pet owners prior to 10 April	Early March each year	Physical and electronic renewal notices will be issued to every current pet owner in the Shire. Social media posts will be published with additional registration renewal reminders for the wider communities awareness.
3.3.2	Issue overdue registration reminder notices to pet owners who fail to register by 10 April	Late April each year	Physical and electronic renewal notices will be issued to every current pet owner in the Shire who did not register their pet with Council prior to the due date.
3.3.3	Ensure that seized and impounded animals are registered prior to release to their owner	Ad hoc	Via co-operation with the AlburyCity Animal Shelter, dogs and cats will not be released from the shelter unless they are registered with Council.

3.3.4 Facilitate accessibility to registering animals within the Shire	By December 2026	An online registration payment system will be made available via Council's website to facilitate the making of payments.
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3.4 Animal nuisance complaints

All animal complaints are investigated in a timely manner to minimise the potential for escalation. Every effort is made to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of both parties. Many animal nuisance complaints relate to barking dogs or stray cats.

Barking dogs

Barking dog complaints can cause considerable frustration and distress for both parties. Officers are committed to balancing the interests and rights of both the dog owner and the complainant.

Dog owners can become desensitised to the sound of their own dog barking and may be unaware it is a nuisance to neighbours. An effective resolution is often achieved by alerting the dog owner to the fact their dogs barking is becoming a nuisance. Neighbours who are unable, or find it difficult, to speak to their neighbours regarding this matter should contact Council for assistance.

The officer will first work with the dog owner to support them in identifying the cause of the barking and discuss possible solutions. The majority of cases involve dogs that are bored or responding to visual stimulation. Both causes are often easily resolved with training, toys, blocking a view or exercising the dog more frequently. The owner will generally given two (2) weeks to resolve the nuisance.

If the barking persists, officers will conduct the following process:

- Any subsequent complaints after the two (2) week resolution period will initiate the barking dog log procedure. This will commence with a barking dog diary being issued to the complainant to complete over the preceding two (2) weeks (records of dates, times and duration of barking).
- If the barking dog diary is not returned within 3 weeks, it will be taken that the complainant wishes not to proceed.
- If the barking dog diary is returned complete, officers will conduct enforcement options as necessary, including infringements and court proceedings if required.

It should be noted that the above procedure has been accepted as the common law procedure to formally address barking dog complaints. This means officers are reliant on the complainant's co-operation to effectively address the issue through enforcement options.

Stray cats

Council offers residents cat cages to assist in safely containing offending cats trespassing on their property or wandering during the curfew period. Officers will then attend during normal business hours and impound any contained cats. These cages are available on payment of a fully refundable deposit.

Compliance and education activities

All nuisance complaints are recorded and animals found at large are impounded or returned to their owners, and infringements may be issued. Officers may attend properties unannounced to conduct on-the-spot inspections where there have been ongoing or serious complaints.

Educational pamphlets are provided at Council offices and libraries and on Council's website. Periodic education is also provided via other channels such as social media and newspaper as relevant to contemporary animal nuisance issues.

Action Plan

No.	Activity	When	Evaluation
3.4.1	Provide educational material and advice to pet owners where complaints are received	Ad hoc	Officers are trained in understanding mitigating nuisance behaviours and understand where education fits into the complaint process.
3.4.2	Maintain cat cages for hire to meet community demand	Ad hoc	The quantity of cat cages required will be determined by the availability. Funding will be allocated for additional cages if supply ceases to meet demand.
3.4.3	Maintain dedicated animal management page including how to make a complaint	Reviewed annually	Content on the website will include best practice contemporary information to empower community members to manage their animals effectively and know when to contact Council for assistance.
3.4.4	Update and distribute dog barking information packs to assist in timely resolution of complaints	Ad hoc	Dog barking diaries will be issued within two (2) working days to the complainant to ensure logs can commence immediately.
3.4.5	Review the current cat curfew order	Commence by January 2026	Officers will commence community and councillor consultation, along with contemporary professional advice, on whether a 24/7 cat curfew order should be implemented.

3.5 Dog attacks

All reported dog attacks are attended to with the highest priority and an officer is dispatched as soon as possible to investigate and action as appropriate. An after-hours emergency service is available where needed. Dogs are easier to capture if they can be contained at the site until the officer arrives.

Compliance and education activities

All dog attack complaints are thoroughly investigated with findings and evidence accurately recorded and maintained. Dogs involved in serious attacks will be seized where possible. Council Does not allow dangerous dogs to remain within the boundaries of Towong Shire and officers are proactive in declaring dogs as dangerous or menacing. Unclaimed dogs at the pound are temperament tested to determine whether they are suitable for re-housing.

Educational pamphlets are provided at Council offices and libraries and on Council's website, promoting correct pet selection and the benefits of dog training, socialisation and frequent exercise. Periodic education is also provided via other channels such as social media and newspaper as relevant to contemporary dog attack issues.

Officers promote the need for dogs to be effectively controlled at all times, including the need to ensure that dogs are effectively contained or fenced on their own property to ensure that they cannot escape.

Registration discounts are provided for desexed dogs, and desexing is promoted to reduce aggressive tendencies and wandering at large.

Action Plan

No.	Activity	When	Evaluation
3.5.1	Investigate dog attacks and provide an appropriate compliance response	Ad Hoc	Officers to attend dog attack reports as soon as practicable and as a priority over all other activities.
3.5.2	Maintain accurate information on Council's webpage about how to report a dog attack	Review annually	Officers will review content and procedures to ensure all dog attack reports can be facilitated.
3.5.3	Provide education regarding the consequences for dogs and their owners should the dog rush at or attack a person or animal	Ad Hoc	Opportunities will be sought to provide materials and advice on early signs of dangerous dog behaviour to increase community awareness and prevent attacks from occurring.

3.5.4 Proactively identify menacing dog behaviour	Ad Hoc	Officers to proactively consider menacing dog measures for reports unable to be confirmed as dangerous dog behaviour
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3.6 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

All complaints regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are attended to with priority. Officers use the gazetted standard for restricted breed dogs to identify restricted breeds. Dangerous and restricted breed dogs are not permitted to remain within the boundaries of Towong Shire. This was unanimously resolved at a Council meeting 20 April 2024.

Reports of suspected undeclared restricted breed dogs are rare within the Shire.

A dog is legislatively defined as dangerous primarily if any of the following occur:

- if the dog has caused the death of or serious injury to a person or animal by biting or attacking that person or animal; or
- if the dog is a menacing dog and its owner has received at least 2 infringement notices in respect restraint requirements; or
- if the dog has been declared a dangerous dog under a law of another State or a Territory of the Commonwealth.

A dog is legislatively defined as menacing if any of the following occur:

- the dog has rushed at or chased a person; or
- the dog bites any person or animal causing injury to that person or animal that is not in the nature of a serious injury; or
- the dog has been declared a menacing dog under a law of another State or a Territory of the Commonwealth.

It is important to note that Council may be unable to identify a dog as dangerous or menacing if during the incident:

- The dog was teased, abused or assaulted; or
- A person who was attacked was trespassing on the premises in which the dog was kept; or
- An animal who was attacked was trespassing on the premises in which the dog was kept; or
- Another person known to the dog was being attacked in front of the dog.

Compliance and education activities

Any declared dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are registered with the Victorian Declared Dog registry. Officers may attend properties unannounced to conduct on-the-spot inspections where there are relevant complaints and suspected restricted breed dogs may be seized. All dog attack cases are reviewed to determine if it is appropriate to declare the dog dangerous or menacing.

Periodic education may be released through social media and / or local newspapers as relevant, and educational pamphlets are available at Council offices and libraries.

Action Plan

No.	Activity	When	Evaluation
3.6.1	Provide education regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs and how to report them	Ad Hoc	Officers will provide relevant education on dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs when prompted by community requests, as well as make information proactively available on the website.
3.6.2	Enter all declared dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs into the Victorian Declared Dog Registry within seven days of registration	Ad Hoc	Officers will ensure reports on all identified dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs are submitted to the registry within seven days of registration.
3.4.3	Create a policy for identifying and dealing with dangerous and menacing dogs in the Shire	By July 2026	A policy and/or subsequent procedures will be made established available to officers, outlining the expectation in dealing with dangerous and menacing dogs in the Shire.

3.7 Over-population and euthanasia

Council has an agreement with the Albury Animal Management Facility to re-house suitable dogs and cats that have been impounded, and also promotes Wodonga Dog Rescue for community members to adopt dogs that need new homes.

Compliance and education activities

Complaints of excessive animals are investigated and officers work with owners to reduce animals to permitted numbers. Unauthorised 'backyard breeders' may be investigated to determine whether they should be registered as domestic animal businesses. Cat trapping programs may be facilitated where appropriate and cat cages are generally provided to residents for containing trespassing cats as required.

State and Federal Government grants will be sought where available that promote the control of over-population and euthanasia of domestic animals. Animal Welfare Victoria often issue funding opportunities for desexing programs, in which Council has previously been successful in securing to promote activities throughout the Shire.

Responsible pet ownership is promoted through Council offices, libraries and social media. A registration discount is available for desexed animals.

3.8 Domestic animal businesses

There are currently no Domestic Animal Businesses within Towong Shire. In the instance of such a business being present, they will be registered and inspected annually in relation to their compliance with relevant legislation and codes of practise.

Compliance and education activities

Periodic online searches may be conducted to ascertain whether there are any unregistered domestic animal businesses within the municipality. In the case that any are identified they will be required to register and on-the-spot inspections may be conducted to determine compliance with relevant legislation and codes of practise. Registration may be suspended or cancelled in the case of serious non-compliance.

A Domestic Animal Business kit may be offered to community members who wish to set up such a business.

3.9 Service Levels

The following service levels are provided in relation to animal management services:

Program or Service	Service Level
Domestic animal complaint	Response according to urgency within 2 days. Dangerous dog and attack complaints are attended to as soon as possible and may be directed to the after hours emergency response service where relevant.
Routine street patrols	Weekly or where resources are available.
After hours emergency response	24 hours a day, 365 days a year
Domestic animal businesses	Annual inspection and registration

Services and service levels are continually adapted to contemporary animal management issues and community feedback. Customer service surveys may be issued to pet owners and / or the general public to help to inform and priorities the focus of officer work.

4. Council Orders and Local Laws

Council has the following orders in place to assist in the effective management of dogs, cats and livestock:

- Compulsory micro chipping of all new dogs and cats registered.
- Cat curfew 9pm to 6am, seven days a week.
- Dogs declared dangerous must not reside within Towong Shire's boundaries.

The *Amenity Local Law 2021* was adopted in August 2021 and was based on a comprehensive review of the prior *Local Law No. 2 Community Amenity and Municipal Places*. Part 4 deals with animals, and relevant clauses include:

Clause 43 – Keeping animals

This clause addresses potential overpopulation and animal related nuisances by limiting the number of animals which may be kept on a property without a permit, depending on the size of the property.

Clause 44 – Animal housing

This clause promotes responsible pet ownership by requiring that animal housing is clean, inoffensive and sanitary, and is maintained so as not to cause any nuisance.

Clause 45 – Noise and smell

This clause addresses potential animal related nuisances by requiring any person in charge of an animal not to allow any noise or smell to emanate from the land on which the animal is kept which unreasonably interferes with the comfort or convenience of another person.

Clause 46 – Removal of animal excrement

This clause addresses potential animal related nuisances by requiring pet owners not to allow their animal's excrement to remain on land outside where it is normally kept, and to ensure that it is appropriately disposed of.

Clause 47 – Wandering animals

This clause addresses potential animal related nuisances by requiring animal owners not to allow their animal(s) to wander from the land where it is normally kept, and to ensure that the land is properly fenced to prevent the animal from escaping.

Council's *Amenity Local Law 2021* contains a sunset provision which revokes the local laws ten (10) years after the local laws were adopted (28 July 2031). Local law provision, including laws relevant to the management of animals, will be reviewed leading up to the adoption of a new amenity local law.

5. Evaluation

The *Plan* will be reviewed annually and amended if appropriate. An evaluation of the implementation of the *Plan* including an assessment of service levels and desired outcomes will be published in Council's Annual Report.

Any questions or feedback relating to this *Plan* should be directed to the Ranger and Local Laws Officer by phone on (02) 6071 5100, by email to info@towong.vic.gov.au, or by mail to Towong Shire Council, PO Box 55, Tallangatta VIC 3700.