

TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL

# DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

2021 - 2025



*Towong Shire... the ideal place to be*

Front cover image: High Country Rail Trail, Towong Shire.

From Wodonga to Tallangatta and onto Shelley in Towong Shire, the High Country Rail Trail meanders along the foreshore of Lake Hume, through pine plantations and State forests, past old timber trestle bridges and Shelley Station, one of the highest railway stations in the country.

The original railway line was built in 1887 and was used to transport material for the Snowy Mountain Scheme. The last train headed out along the track in 1978.

No two days, or two seasons are the same. The diverse birdlife of the Kiewa River woodlands contrasts with the crystal clear reflections from Lake Hume.

There are regular parking and rest areas along the trail so you can explore sections at your leisure. The architecturally designed, stunning Sandy Creek makes for a spectacular traverse across the Sandy Creek inlet to Lake Hume.

# Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
1.1 Purpose .....	4
1.2 Development of this Plan.....	4
1.3 Alignment to Council Strategy .....	4
1.4 Guiding Principles .....	5
2. Domestic Animals and Towong Shire.....	5
2.1 About Towong Shire.....	5
1.6 Pets in the community .....	5
1.7 Domestic animal statistics .....	6
3. Programs and Services.....	6
3.1 Overview .....	6
3.2 Officer training .....	7
3.3 Registration and identification.....	7
3.4 Animal nuisance complaints .....	8
3.5 Dog attacks.....	8
3.6 Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs.....	9
3.7 Over-population and euthanasia .....	9
3.8 Domestic animal businesses .....	10
3.9 Service Levels .....	10
4. Council Orders and Local Laws.....	10
5. Four Year Action Plan.....	11
6. Evaluation .....	13

# 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 2021-2025* (the "*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 of dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs;
- Mitigation of over population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats;
- Review of Council orders and local laws that relate to dogs and cats; and
- Evaluation of animal control services in giving effect to the requirements of the *Act*.

## 1.2 Development of this Plan

The development of the *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-2025* has been based on a review of the Council's *Domestic Animal Management Plan 2017-2021*, the current overarching strategy of the Council, contemporary animal management issues and controls, and community feedback regarding Council's animal management practices. 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 overarching Council strategy 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.

### Council Plan Objective: Community Wellbeing

Encourage and support all people in our Shire to be healthy, happy, connected and resilient.

## Council Plan Objective: Environmental Sustainability

Integrate sustainable environmental management practices into all of our activities.

### 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 6,046 residents (2016 census) and many more visitors across an area of 6,635 square kilometres.

Our municipality includes many diverse townships and localities including Bellbridge, Bullioh, Berringama, 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.

### 1.6 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.

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 smooth the way for social interaction and general 'out and aboutness'.

Both anecdote and research suggest that pets are well recognised icebreakers. Dogs, for example, can stimulate conversation and contact between strangers and trigger positive social interaction. Studies undertaken by the School of Population Health at the University of Western Australia showed that half of all dog owners surveyed indicated that they had come to know locals in their suburb as a result of their dog.

Residents chatting to each other as a result of a pet is not just a social nicety. Such community-based interactions between people have the very real potential to break down the barriers and stereotypes that separate us from 'others' while playing an important role in building trust and a deep sense of community at the neighbourhood level.

Pets provide increased opportunities for families to be more active; companionship to those who may be feeling isolated or lonely; and assist people with a disability or illness to maintain independence and participate more fully in community life.

## 1.7 Domestic animal statistics

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

Statistic	Date(s)	Number
Registered dogs	Oct 21	994
Registered cats	Oct 21	183
Dangerous, menacing or restricted dogs	Oct 21	0
Registered domestic animal businesses	Oct 21	0
Total domestic animal management requests	Mar 21-Aug 21	82
Barking dog complaints	Mar 21-Aug 21	24
Wandering dog reports	Mar 21-Aug 21	21
Dog attack reports	Mar 21-Aug 21	11
General animal complaints	Mar 21-Aug 21	10
Unregistered animal reports	Mar 21-Aug 21	7
Lost dog reports	Mar 21-Aug 21	7
Lost cat reports	Mar 21-Aug 21	1
Surrendered domestic animals	Mar 21-Aug 21	1

## 3. Programs and Services

### 3.1 Overview

Council employs two part-time Ranger and Local Laws Officers totalling 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;
- Undertaking registration door knocks;
- 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.

An after hours emergency service is also available through the services of a third party contractor.

### 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.

### 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 registration renewal notices prior to 10 April each year and reminders are provided in newspapers and on Council's Facebook page. Targeted door knocks are conducted to remind community members of their animal registration requirements. Registrations are tracked through a computerised database.

Renewal notices which are not paid by the due date are followed up with a reminder and infringement notices may be issued for failure to register where appropriate. Reports of unregistered animals are investigated in a timely manner.

Registration mailouts are often used as an opportunity to include educational pamphlets regarding responsible pet ownership.

### **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.

Complainants may be asked to keep noise logs (records of dates, times and duration of barking) should the matter continue and further intervention be required. Noise logs form part of the Barking Dog Complaint Form and are available from Council offices.

#### Stray cats

Council offers residents cat cages to assist in safely containing offending animals 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.

### **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.

### **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.

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

#### 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.

### **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.

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
Door knock campaigns	Annually
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	Daily
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.

## 5. Four Year Action Plan

The following plan sets out the actions that will be undertaken to continually improve the effectiveness of animal management outcomes across the Shire.

No.	Area	Action	Measure	Outcome	Frequency
1	Officer training	Review professional development against required skills and knowledge as part of regular work planning and in consultation with officers	Work plans completed	Skilled and knowledgeable officers, confident and clear as to how to handle animal management issues	Quarterly
2	Officer training	Maintain a training register	Register developed and maintained	Clear management oversight of officer skills and knowledge	As training is completed
3	Animal registration	Cross-check microchip registries to identify animals within Towong Shire that are not registered	No. animals registered	Improved compliance to animal registration requirements	Annually

4	Animal registration	Issue registration reminder notices to pet owners who fail to register by 10 April	No. reminder notices issued	Improved compliance to animal registration requirements	Annually
5	Animal registration	Ensure that seized and impounded animals are registered prior to release to their owner	No. animals registered	Improved compliance to animal registration requirements	Ongoing
6	Animal registration	Undertake targeted registration door-knocks and calling campaigns	No. animals registered	Improved compliance to animal registration requirements	Annually
7	Animal nuisance complaints	Provide educational material to pet owners	Reach of educational material, no. of animal complaints	More responsible pet ownership, less animal complaints	Ongoing
8	Animal nuisance complaints	Maintain cat cages for hire to meet community demand	Waiting period for cat cages	Reduction in feral cat population and complaints	Ongoing
9	Animal nuisance complaints	Maintain dedicated animal management page including how to make a complaint	No. of animal complaints	More responsible pet ownership, less animal complaints, clarity of access to Council services	Bi-annually
10	Animal nuisance complaints	Update and distribute dog barking information packs to assist in timely resolution of complaints	Timeliness of barking dog complaint resolution	More responsible pet ownership, more timely resolution of barking dog complaints	As required
11	Dog attacks	Investigate dog attacks and provide an appropriate compliance response	Reduction in repeat dog attacks	Responsible pet ownership, reduction in repeat dog attacks	As required
12	Dog attacks	Maintain accurate information on Council's webpage about how to report a dog attack	Reduction in repeat dog attacks	More responsible pet ownership, reduction in repeat dog attacks	Bi-annually
13	Dog attacks	Provide education regarding the consequences for dogs and their owners should the dog rush at or attack a person or animal	Reduction in dog attacks	More responsible pet ownership, reduction in dog attacks	Ongoing
14	Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs	Provide education regarding dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs and how to report them	No dangerous, or restricted breed dogs in the Shire	Rapid identification and appropriate response to dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs	Ongoing
15	Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs	Enter all declared dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs into the Victorian Declared Dog Registry within seven days of registration	All dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs identified in	Compliance with registration requirements for declared dogs	Ongoing

			the Shire are registered		
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## 6. 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](mailto:info@towong.vic.gov.au), or by mail to Towong Shire Council, PO Box 55, Tallangatta VIC 3700.