

Submission

***Victoria - Local Government
Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP)***

September 2021





Animal Justice Party

Animal Justice Party Limited
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The Animal Justice Party 2021

Images

Front cover: Dog walk, Dr Nadine Richings © 2016

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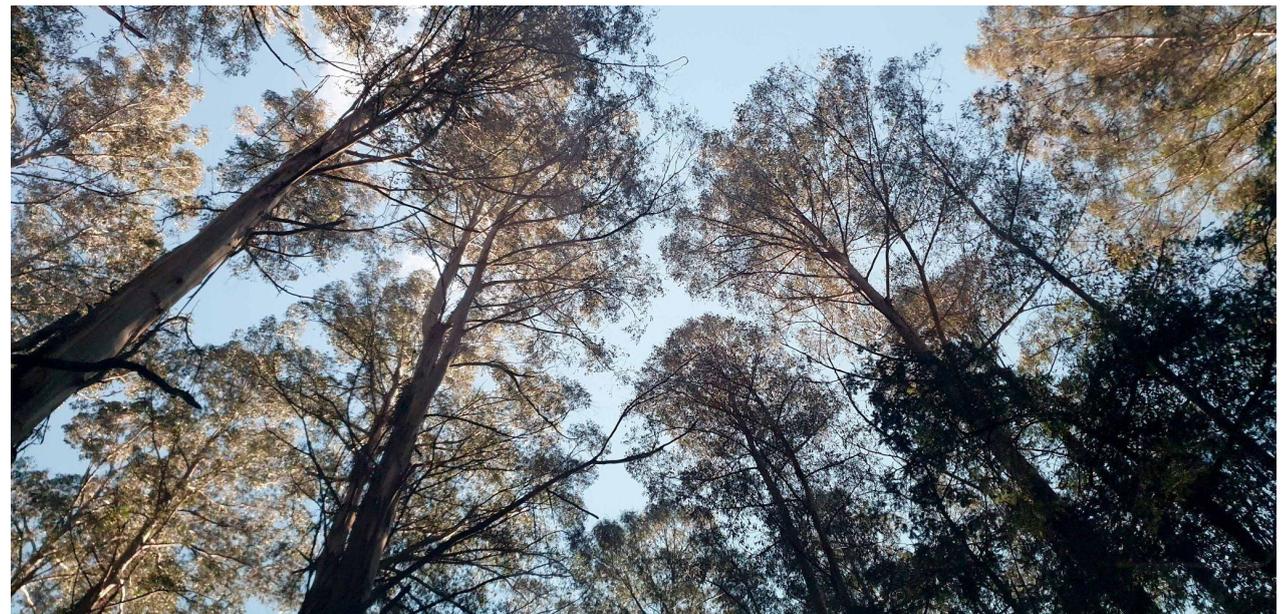
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The Animal Justice Party acknowledges the First Nations peoples as the custodians of the land on which we live and work.

About the Animal Justice Party

The Animal Justice Party (the AJP) is a political party established in 2009 to secure the interests of animals and nature through Australia's democratic institutions of government. Our vision is a planet on which animals and nature have the right to live and thrive free from negative human interference and a human society which functions with kindness and compassion within its ecological limits as a responsible member of the Earth community. The AJP seeks to foster respect, kindness, and compassion towards all species particularly in the way governments design and deliver initiatives, and the manner in which these initiatives function.

In New South Wales the AJP has two elected representatives in the Legislative Council of NSW, Mark Pearson MLC and Emma Hurst MLC. In Victoria, the AJP has an elected representative in the Legislative Council, Andy Meddick MLC, and two councillors in Local Government, Councillors Julie Sloan and Charlie Vincent.

This submission was prepared by the Victorian Submissions Working Group within the AJP. The working group makes this submission on behalf of the AJP with the approval and the endorsement of the Board of Directors.

Introduction

Companion animals are recognised and cherished by the majority of Australians for their friendship, comfort and devotion. Indeed, over 60 percent^{1,2} of Australian households include a companion animal. Companion animals can be cats and dogs, but also the birds, reptiles, horses, etc., that we care for and are frequently referred to as “pets”, although “companion” better recognises their individuality and sentience and their relationship with people. They are individuals with whom a human guardian has a symbiotic relationship and are socialised to enjoy the company of people. All these animals deserve consideration and respect – they provide us with many benefits, but also with obligations and responsibilities. A companion animal is not an accessory. Although the law considers companion animals to be property and people are therefore considered to be “owners”, the AJP prefers to focus on the relationship and therefore refers to people as guardians.

Local and state governments are responsible for overseeing the wellbeing and management of companion animals, including their breeding and sale. But there is little national consistency in these laws. Our legal system regards companion animals not as individuals, but as property, with some promise of “welfare”. Laws tend to focus on protecting people from danger and nuisance, rather than on the wellbeing of animals.

In Victoria³, the *Domestic Animals Act (1994)* requires Local Government Areas (LGAs) to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP), which is reviewed every four years and:

- promotes responsible “pet ownership” and the welfare of dogs and cats in the community;
- protects the community and the environment from “nuisance” dogs and cats;
- identifies a method to evaluate whether the animal management services provided by them are adequate; and
- outlines the training programs for their Authorised Officers to ensure these Officers are capable in administering and enforcing the provisions of the Act.

The AJP wants to see the DAMP broadened to include more than just dogs and cats, and also to be a more proactive and positive plan, rather than a negative document that deals with “nuisance” animals. The AJP recognises the challenges Council and their Animal Management Team face on a daily basis, which is accentuated by lack of adequate resources.

¹ Wilkins R, Botha F, Vera-Toscano E and Wooden M (2020) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 18. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne. https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/3537441/HILDA-Statistical-report-2020.pdf

² Animal Medicines Australia (2019) Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people.

https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf

³ Animal Welfare Victoria (2021) Domestic animal management plans. Agriculture Victoria, Victorian Government.

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animals-act/registration-legislation-and-permits/domestic-animal-management-plans>

In October 2020, the *Pound and Shelter Reform* was introduced by Animal Justice Party MP, Andy Meddick MLC and passed through Victorian Parliament⁴. This motion consisted of a number of initiatives for much-needed changes in animal management and is widely supported by both the Victorian Parliament and the greater community. Recently, there was a Victorian Government consultation into mandatory reporting of animal fate data by shelters and pounds⁵, which is part of the *Pounds and Shelter Reform*.

We have focused this submission on six key themes, including three initiatives from the *Pound and Shelter Reform* that local councils will need to comply with:

1. Broaden the scope to include all companion animals
2. Kill Counts (Initiative 1 in the *Pound and Shelter Reform*)
3. Breeding Blitz (Initiative 2 in the *Pound and Shelter Reform*)
4. Reuniting Rights (Initiative 3 in the *Pound and Shelter Reform*)
5. Helping the victims of family and domestic violence – keeping animals and people together
6. Addressing Dog guardianship challenges in our community

This submission is guided by our mission and vision and underpinned by our policies. The AJP has policies on animals, environment and human issues⁶. Our Companion Animals⁷, Puppy and Kitten Farms⁸, Family and Domestic Violence⁹, Biosecurity¹⁰ and Mental Health¹¹ policies and our position statement on Homelessness¹² are particularly relevant to this consultation. Recommendations are provided at the end of each section.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

We look forward to working with Councils to achieve the best outcome for all domestic animals.

⁴Andy Meddick (2020) Victorian government commits to Animal Justice Party's life-saving Pound and Shelter reform. Media Release. 28 Oct 2020.

<https://andymeddick.com.au/2020/10/28/victorian-government-commits-to-animal-justice-partys-life-saving-pound-and-shelter-reform/>

⁵Victorian Government (2021) Mandatory reporting of animal fate data by shelters and pounds.

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/mandatory-reporting-animal-fate-data-shelters-and-pounds>

⁶ Animal Justice Party *Policies* <https://animaljusticeparty.org/policies/>

⁷ Animal Justice Party Companion Animals Policy.

<https://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CompanionAnimalsRevised2021a.pdf>

⁸Animal Justice Party Puppy and Kitten Farms Policy.

https://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PUPPY_FARMS2021-1.pdf

⁹ Animal Justice Party *Family and Domestic Violence Policy*.

http://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DOMESTIC_VIOLENCE-NAT-Basic-1.pdf

¹⁰ Animal Justice Party *Biosecurity Policy*. <http://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/biosecurityA4.pdf>

¹¹ Animal Justice Party *Mental Health Policy*. <https://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/mental-healthA4.pdf>

¹² Animal Justice Party *Position on Homelessness*. <https://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Homelessness2021.pdf>

Theme 1: Broaden the scope to include all companion animals, a new community-integrated approach that recognises the value of companion animals and their families to the community.

The AJP cherishes the role of all companion animals in Australian homes and lives. Companion animals can be cats and dogs, but also rabbits, birds, reptiles, horses, etc.; in short, any animal we care for and refer to as a “pet”. All these animals deserve consideration and respect – they provide us with many benefits, but also with obligations and responsibilities. Our policy on companion animals⁵ seeks not only to broaden the definition of companion animal, but also to ensure their best interests are protected. We believe this will best be achieved through an integrated approach across all levels of government, beginning with recognising that companion animals are sentient individuals and not just commodities, and also acknowledging the value they bring to the community.

Three in five Australian households (61 percent) include companion animals, which is a total of 29 million animals who live with people¹³. Australians report that the top four benefits of sharing their lives with animals are:

1. Relational benefits (love, affection and companionship),
2. Life being better in general,
3. Happiness, joy, pleasure and fun, and
4. Improvements in mental health and wellbeing.

The 2020 HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) report confirmed that over three in five Australian households have at least one companion animal¹⁴, which aligns with other reports¹³. The HILDA report revealed that while the majority of these animals are cats or dogs, 55 percent of these households also have another type of animal, including fish, birds, or horses. This indicates an overwhelming need to extend the definition of companion animal in line with the data on companion animals. At present, Victorian legislation only requires councils to address matters relating to cats and dogs, which effectively renders the current DAMP a “Cat and Dog Management Plan”.

The AJP believes that each council can make their DAMP a more significant council document by acknowledging the importance of companion animals in the lives of people and by extending it to include other animals and more positive initiatives. We acknowledge that at present the *Domestic Animal Act 1994* only requires the DAMP to address cat and dog issues, but councils could choose to create strategic plans that cover other companion animals.

¹³ Animal Medicines Australia (2019) Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people.

https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf

¹⁴ Wilkins R, Botha F, Vera-Toscano E and Wooden M (2020) The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 18. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne.

https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/3537441/HILDA-Statistical-report-2020.pdf

Recommendations:

1. Extend the term ‘companion animal’ beyond its usual association with cats and dogs to include any animal under our care and include these animals in the DAMP.
 2. Adopt an integrated approach which includes all companion animals in the community. This will enable councils to understand and address companion animal management issues in a more effective and complete manner, and will create opportunities for innovation.
 3. Design and implement programs, policy and research based on a One Health¹⁵ approach that recognises that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.
 4. Provide species-specific education on the proper care of companion animals (including appropriate housing, exercise and stimulation), to prevent cruelty and neglect.
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Theme 2: Kill Count – Initiative 1 in the Pound and Shelter Reform

Too many healthy animals are put to death every year in pounds. On 28 October 2020 the motion to end convenience killing, put forward by Animal Justice Party MP Andy Meddick MLC, passed almost unanimously, with the government committing to huge changes in the way pounds and shelters operate across Victoria¹⁶. Pounds and shelters must report when they have killed an animal and, importantly, why each animal was killed. The petition tabled to parliament¹⁷ listed the following requirements:

- mandatory public reporting of shelter animal euthanasia statistics;
- mandatory rescue group access to all animals in pounds and shelters;
- prohibition of euthanasia of an animal in a pound or shelter where a rescue group is willing to take on its care.

The AJP would like to see local councils introduce additional measures for domestic animal management and to use the current DAMP review as an opportunity to reform some management practices. The AJP is happy to work with councils to achieve these reforms.

¹⁵One Health Commission (2021) What is One Health? https://www.onehealthcommission.org/en/why_one_health/what_is_one_health/

¹⁶Andy Meddick (2020) Victorian government commits to Animal Justice Party's life-saving Pound and Shelter reform. Media Release. 28 Oct 2020.

<https://andymeddick.com.au/2020/10/28/victorian-government-commits-to-animal-justice-partys-life-saving-pound-and-shelter-reform/>

¹⁷Parliament of Victoria (2020) Stop convenience killing of Victorian shelter animals. E-petition Number 180, Legislative Council. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/council/petitions/electronic-petitions/view-e-petitions/details/12/192>

Recommendations:

5. Ensure data collection is more detailed and specific, including separate intake/outcome data for cats, kittens, dogs and puppies; and for “owner”-surrendered, stray, impounded/seized animals and animals transferred from/to another facility.
 6. Collate and publish monthly outcome data for all animals on Council website within one month of the end of each month, in their Annual Report, and on the “Know Your Council” website, irrespective of whether the council runs its own pound or outsources this to a contractor.
 7. Express each outcome as both number and percentage of total animals.
 8. Express ‘euthanasia’ figures as a percentage of the unclaimed animals; do not include reclaimed animals as it masks and diminishes the impact of euthanasia.
 9. Increase educational training for officers in the use of correct definitions and assessment of animals.
 10. Develop and implement a scientifically-based, Best Practice Euthanasia Policy and Procedure for council-run pounds and contractors.
 11. Establish KPIs to reduce killing in all contracts with third-party providers.
 12. Include urban stray and free-living (‘feral’) cats in all statistics.
 13. Adopt recommendations from latest research into strategies to achieve zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals in shelters and pounds¹⁸.
 14. Adopt an industry-recommended management software to help with the day-to-day management of shelters.
 15. Increase revenue to assist councils to implement these changes.
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Theme 3: Breeding Blitz – Initiative 2 in the Pound and Shelter Reform

The AJP is committed to ensuring there is more free or subsidised desexing in areas with large stray cat populations and in low socio-economic communities. Mandatory desexing of cats would appear to reduce the number of stray cats, however, research and the experience of overseas governments show that this is not the case. Research has found that offering affordable and accessible desexing is more effective than making it mandatory. For example, initial data from the City of Banyule demonstrates that provision of free desexing programs for owned and semi-owned cats is very effective in reducing numbers of cats impounded (from 8 cats to 1 cat per 1,000 residents)¹⁹. Banyule City Council’s free and targeted desexing program has reduced cat

¹⁸Rand, Jacquie et al (2018). ‘Strategies to Reduce the Euthanasia of Impounded Dogs and Cats Used by Councils in Victoria, Australia’. *Animals (Basel)*, 8(7), 100. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani8070100>

¹⁹ Rand, Jacquie (2020). ‘Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia’. Submission 142 to the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, p. 29. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Environment_and_Energy/Feralanddomesticcats/Submissions

intake from 800 cats per year to 141 per year. This has reduced the number of stray cats and has saved the council nearly \$400,000²⁰.

Recommendations:

16. Replace mandatory desexing of cats with free (or at least more affordable) desexing, particularly in high cat intake/low socioeconomic areas.
 17. Provide carriers/transport to and from clinics for desexing programs in targeted, low-socioeconomic areas.
 18. Offer desexing vouchers through the MAV/AVA and widen the eligibility criteria.
 19. Collaborate with local veterinary clinics to encourage Early Age Desexing and cheaper desexing. Cats can safely be desexed at 12 weeks of age, which stops that first “surprise” litter at four months.
 20. Record all cats seized and their outcome; every cat and kitten should be recorded and reported, regardless of their age or circumstance.
 21. Work with people who care for cats, whether owned or semi-owned.
 22. Promote incentives directly to households through mail-outs or door-knocking, and not just on social media.
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Theme 4: Reuniting Rights - Initiative 3 in the Pound and Shelter Reform

One of the initiatives of the *Pound and Shelter Reform* is that veterinarians will have the legal right to directly reunite animals with their guardians, and bypass pounds and shelters. Current flaws in legislation mean that all lost animals taken into veterinary clinics must be sent to the local council’s contracted pound or shelter to be scanned for a microchip, creating unnecessary stress to animals and people, and room for error. In addition to the work already committed to this at the veterinary clinic level, there is the opportunity to implement strategies to increase animal identification and registration rates. An identified and registered animal has much less chance of entering the pound system. This has been shown not only to improve outcomes for animals, but also to lead to savings for councils and increase the wellbeing of animal management staff.

²⁰Rand, Jacquie et al (2018). ‘Strategies to Reduce the Euthanasia of Impounded Dogs and Cats Used by Councils in Victoria, Australia’. *Animals (Basel)*, 8(7), 100. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani8070100>

Recommendations:

23. Adopt a research-based, best practice approach to microchipping and registration. Such practice reduces impoundments and euthanasia rates²¹.
24. Increase identification and reuniting rates through free microchipping days; proper training of animal management staff, particularly to become certified, microchip implanters; online registration for entering and updating information; no release fee for microchipped animals; and incentives to encourage registration and microchipping.
25. Lobby for a single industry-integrated microchip and registration database.
26. Implement initiatives aimed at increasing animal registrations based on research and analysis.
27. Identify obstacles that hinder animal registration such as fees, mandatory desexing, mandatory curfew/containment, limit of animals per household.
28. Construct a 24-hour holding area, if one does not already exist, to increase time for animals to be collected when they have been readily identified. Consider using volunteers to help run it.
29. Instal Geographic Information System (GIS) software to record, map and analyse animal incident data.
30. Publish all impounded animals on social media or the council website. Provide clear photographs, found location, and other information, on social media or websites (see, for example, <https://www.facebook.com/centralgoldfields.rehoming/>).
31. Develop section 84Y agreements²² with all interested veterinary clinics and registered animal rescue organisations and ensure the application process is simple. Allow veterinary clinics and rescue groups/organisations with an s84Y to reunite animals with their guardians directly.
32. Provide every ranger with a microchip scanner and access to databases in their vehicle.
33. Reunite any microchipped/registered animal without fee at least three times per year with appropriate scaled penalties for repeat offenders beyond this.

²¹ Rand, Jacque (2020). 'Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia'. Submission 142 to the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, p. 32.

https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Environment_and_Energy/Feralanddomesticcats/Submissions

²² 84Y agreements allow certain people and organisations other than local councils to receive and manage lost and/or stray animals. Councils can tailor agreements to suit their operational and local community needs. See: <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/domestic-animal-businesses/shelters-and-pounds/animal-re-scue#h2-5>

Theme 5: Helping the victims of family and domestic violence – keeping animals and people together.

The AJP believes that policies addressing family and domestic violence (FDV) should be well-resourced and evidence-based²³. This should include addressing intersections between family and domestic violence and animal justice issues.

It is estimated that companion animals are present in 70 percent of domestic violence cases in Australia²⁴, with substantial evidence indicating a strong connection between animal abuse and domestic violence²⁵. Studies indicate that in up to 71 percent of domestic violence situations, women with companion animals report threatened or actual animal abuse²⁶. Perpetrators of domestic and family violence often threaten, hurt or kill family companion animals as a means of coercing and controlling female partners²⁷. One in three women delay leaving their violent relationship because of concerns for the welfare of their family animals²¹.

While the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service (EDVOS) includes “pets and other animals” in its list of victims and victim survivors of family and domestic violence, animals are in general notably absent in government and community sector approaches dealing with family and domestic violence.

In March 2021, Victorian Parliament unanimously passed a motion introduced by Animal Justice Party MP, Andy Meddick MLC, to recognise animals as victims of family and domestic violence²⁸. Companion animals will be redefined as “family members” under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and a new system will see “ownership of pets” being removed from perpetrators and defaulting to the victim survivors of family violence. Also, there will be more funding for animal-friendly crisis accommodation, one-off government payments to help remove animals from violent homes, and greater scope to family violence leave provisions, which will allow women to access family violence leave to help their animals.

²³ Animal Justice Party Family and Domestic Violence Policy.

http://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/DOMESTIC_VIOLENCE-NAT-Basic-1.pdf

²⁴ Medhora S (2018) When animals are abused, humans are too: The link between pets and DV. Triple J Hack

<https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/link-between-domestic-violence-and-pets/10263328>

²⁵ Diemer K and Humphreys C (2021) In Victoria, animal abuse may soon be considered a form of family violence. Here's why that matters. The Conversation. March 3, 2021.

<https://theconversation.com/in-victoria-animal-abuse-may-soon-be-considered-a-form-of-family-violence-heres-why-that-matters-156284>

²⁶ Volant AM, Johnson JA, Gullone E, Coleman GL (2008) The relationship between domestic violence and animal abuse: an Australian study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23(9):1277-95.

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260508314309?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%20pubmed

²⁷ Faver CA & Strand EB (2003) Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty, *Journal of Social Work Education*, 39:2, 237-253, DOI: 10.1080/10437797.2003.10779134

²⁸ Andy Meddick (2021) Victorian Parliament votes for animals to be considered victims of family violence. Media release. 03 March 2021. <https://andymeddick.com.au/2021/03/03/victorian-parliament-votes-for-animals-to-be-considered-victims-of-family-violence/>

Recommendations:

34. Recognise animals as victims of family and domestic violence.
 35. Educate and train council officers to be aware that animals are victims of family and domestic violence, and to be alert and empathetic to this possibility; social and support workers and animal management teams should complete the Animal-3Rs training developed by EDVOS and the University of Melbourne²⁹.
 36. Increase coverage of family and domestic violence refuges, especially those that also shelter dependent children and animals, and provide secure funding.
 37. Provide crisis shelter/accommodation and/or veterinary treatment for animals who have been in a FDV situation and who cannot be accommodated with their family.
 38. Offer assistance with transport of animals (*e.g.*, carriers, drivers), including larger animals like horses.
 39. Be empathetic in cases of FDV and help to facilitate the transfer of registration away from perpetrators of violence to those who have the animal's best interests in mind; *e.g.*, animals are often registered in the name of an abuser and many councils will not transfer "ownership" without the permission of the current "owner". Councils could waive this requirement in FDV cases.
 40. Improve resources on council websites so that people can explore their options to support their companion animals as part of a plan to leave a situation of family or domestic violence.
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Theme 6: Addressing Dog guardianship challenges in our community.

The requirements of companion animals are inadequately understood by many animal guardians. This can lead to behavioural problems in animals and ultimately end in them being surrendered. The AJP supports people living with companion animals and promotes reform to protect the needs and best interests of companion animals³⁰.

Research shows that inadequate levels of socialisation and inactivity are major sources of behavioural problems for dogs living in urban areas^{31,32}. Thus an integrated approach to "dog

²⁹EDVOS (2021) Animal-3Rs: Family violence awareness training teaching those who work with animals how to Recognise, Respond and Refer. <https://www.facebook.com/animal3rs/>

³⁰ Animal Justice Party Companion Animals Policy.

<https://animaljusticeparty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CompanionAnimalsRevised2021a.pdf>

³¹ Puurunen, J., Hakanen, E., Salonen, M.K. et al. (2020). 'Inadequate socialisation, inactivity, and urban living environment are associated with social fearfulness in pet dogs'. *Sci Rep* 10, 3527.

³² Howell, T. J., King, T., & Bennett, P. C. (2015). 'Puppy parties and beyond: the role of early age socialization practices on adult dog behavior.' *Veterinary medicine (Auckland, N.Z.)*, 6, 143–153.

training” is needed, particularly in urban areas; one that focuses on educating people about the needs of dogs, including basic dog behaviour, socialisation, activity and strengthening guardian-dog relationships.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reported there were almost 4,000 dog-related injuries that required hospitalisation in 2014-2015, and 92 percent of these injuries were dog bites³³. Some reports (30 percent) stated where the incident occurred and of these reports, 74 percent occurred "in the home", which indicates that the dog involved was known to various people at the home. Clearly, the many behavioural signs and signals that our canine companions are sending us are being ignored or misunderstood by people and there is an urgent need for community education about dogs, dog behaviour and the way dogs communicate.

In the USA, there is an initiative to tackle this very problem: *StopThe77*³⁴. The number "77" refers to the 77% of dog bites that involve dogs that are known to the people who are bitten: family dogs or dogs of family members or friends. There is a comprehensive and user-friendly website³⁴ with videos aimed at children and adults. At the very least, councils could promote this website as a great community education initiative. Alternatively, Australian-based resources could be developed.

Many council complaints about dogs and cats are labelled as "creating a nuisance", which is such a subjective term. Community education about dogs and cats may help to modify what some people define as a "nuisance" and therefore reduce the number of "nuisance complaints". Dogs bark for many and varied reasons³⁵; there is not one single dog bark. If a dog is identified as a repeat/regular barker, the most effective management is to determine why the dog is barking. If you can manage the trigger, you improve your chance of managing the barking. Community and animal guardian education about the different types of dog barking is imperative and would allow people to ask important questions when they hear any dog barking, such as:

- Is there a problem that needs some attention? e.g. burglar, harassment (kids playing against a fence), dog trapped and in need of assistance
- Is there a public area adjacent to the dog's property, where other dogs walk by or people may be playing?
- Is the dog suffering from separation anxiety?
- Is the dog bored and in need of some exercise, activity and/or enrichment?
- Is the dog a senior and possibly going deaf or undergoing cognitive changes? These changes that occur with ageing can cause increased barking in senior dogs.

There are many ways to minimise dog-related incidents, including education programs for all community members, prospective dog guardians and dog guardians and handlers, and better planning of council facilities and areas.

³³ AIHW 2017. Dog-related injuries. Cat. no. INJCAT 186. Canberra: AIHW. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129559171>

³⁴The Family Dog (2021) Stop the 77. <https://www.thefamilydog.com/stop-the-77>

³⁵RSPCA (2019) What causes dogs to bark excessively? 30 April 2019 <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-causes-dogs-to-bark-excessively/>

Recommendations:

41. Balance the needs of dogs and their companion people with those in the community who may not like dogs, by providing areas where dogs are welcome, including shopping precincts, such as Chapel St in South Yarra³⁶, and areas where dogs are not permitted.
42. Advocate for more off-lead areas (with dogs under effective control) so that dogs are not concentrated in small areas.
43. Plan and develop council areas with dogs in mind and to be dog-friendly; provide appropriate access to water, and adequate facilities to dispose of dog waste, including dog poo bags and rubbish bins.
44. Provide resources on being a responsible dog guardian, *e.g.* brochures, webpage, videos.
45. Provide an interactive website or app (along the lines of apps like Playground Finder) for locating dog-friendly and/or off-lead areas.
46. Consult with dog guardians and experts in the community to develop appropriate off-lead areas.
47. Avoid being too restrictive about dogs on lead. For example, residents should be able to exercise a degree of common sense about letting their dog off lead on beaches or in parks during times when no one is around.
48. Respond swiftly to reports of dog-related incidents, such as aggression or attacks.
49. Promote the socialisation of puppies during their critical socialisation period of 3 to 14 weeks of age.
50. Advise residents to attend a qualified dog trainer or puppy pre-school that uses positive reinforcement training techniques after eight weeks of age, to provide education about training on health issues, feeding, and how to live with dogs safely. This should include how to meet other dogs both on and off lead.
51. Provide incentives for residents to undertake training, such as reduced registration fees in the first year.
52. Encourage ongoing socialisation of dogs and exposure to all types of dogs, situations and people.
53. Encourage the organisation of social groups such as ‘puppy parties’ for young dogs.
54. Provide education sessions for people before they decide to share their life with a dog so that they can make an informed decision, have realistic expectations and begin to understand dogs.

³⁶ Beers LM (2019) Chapel Street becomes permanent dog-friendly shopping strip. 7 news Online. 4 October 2019. <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/pets/chapel-street-becomes-permanent-dog-friendly-shopping-strip-c-487385>

Conclusion

The DAMP is a critical strategy to manage domestic animals within local government areas. The AJP wants to see the DAMP be a more proactive and positive plan, rather than a negative document that deals with “nuisance” animals.

We want to see DAMPs broadened to include more than just dogs and cats, kill counts drastically decreased, animals reunited more easily with their companion people, affordable and subsidised desexing programs, animals supported and acknowledged as victims of family and domestic violence, and dog guardians supported to be better guardians through robust education programs.

The AJP is committed to advocating for improvements for animals and will work with Local Councils to see these changes.