

# BREWARRINA SHIRE COUNCIL

Agenda Submission for Ordinary Meeting held on 28 October 2011

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Brewarrina Companion Animal Strategy and Procedures Strategy</b>	<b>DOC REF:</b> Item 15 A8-3
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<b>REPORT BY:</b>	Bernie Wilder Manager Environmental Health & Building	<b>DATE:</b> 11 Oct 2011
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**ATTACHMENTS:**  
Companion Animal Strategy

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This Report provides details of a Companion Animal Strategy and Procedures Manual which has been developed to meet Department of Local Government requirements and to assist with the execution of Councils responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act and Impounding Act.

The Report recommends that the information be noted by Council and that the Companion Animal Strategy set out in the Report of the Manager Environmental Health and Building dated 11 October 2011 be endorsed by Council and placed on Public Exhibition seeking submissions prior to Council adopting the Strategy.

**REPORT:**

Council has been required by the Department of local Government to develop a Companion Animal Strategy and a Procedures Manual to ensure that responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act and Impounding Act are properly and consistently applied.

The attached documents have been developed to meet Departmental requirements and to provide a Strategy and consistent working arrangements.

The Procedures Manual is an Operational Document that may change from time to time as legislation changes or better ways of control are devised.

It is proposed to place the Strategy on Public Exhibition to provide for community input prior to adoption by Council.

It is proposed to continue the Contract Ranger Services to ensure registration checks and Impounding activities are routinely undertaken. It has been found that the Contract Ranger Services activities have been successful in increasing registration of animals.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Animal control activities are in part financed by pet registration and penalty collection.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Council has Statutory responsibilities under the Companion Animals and Impounding Acts and Council must have an appropriate Strategy and Procedures to ensure proper administration of its responsibilities.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That:**

- 1. That the Brewarrina Companion Animal Strategy and Procedures Strategy report be noted by Council; and**
- 2. The Companion Animal Strategy set out in the Report of the Manager Environmental Health and Building dated 11 October 2011 be endorsed by Council and placed on Public Exhibition seeking submissions prior to Council adopting the Strategy.**

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Rod Shaw  
General Manager



# Companion Animal Strategic Plan 2011

## Introduction

Brewarrina Shire is located in outback north-western NSW and covers an area of 19,155 square kilometres. The estimated population of Brewarrina Shire in 2006 was 1944 persons.

The Town of Brewarrina is the main population centre in the Shire. The population of Brewarrina Town represents about 55% of the total population of the Brewarrina Shire Local Government Area (LGA). The population of Brewarrina Town at 2006 was 1069 persons

There are four other population centres within the Brewarrina Shire. The largest is the village of Goodooga in the north-east of the Shire with a population of approx. 265. Not far from Goodooga on the north-eastern Shire border is the village of New Angledool with an estimated population of 40. A further community of 65 persons reside at Weilmoringle in the northwest of the Shire and 10-40 persons live at the village of Gongolgon 45km south of Brewarrina Town. An estimated population of between 400-500 persons live on rural properties (Population source 2006 Census).

According to the Local Government Pet registry there are 44 Cats and 617 Dogs registered in the Shire as of September 2011.

Council in recent times has employed a Contract Ranger to address community concerns in relation to wandering dogs and the low incidence of pet registrations.

This strategy has been developed by Council as a tool to administer its responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act.

## Aims and Purpose of Strategy

- To recognise that companion animals form part of the Brewarrina community, contributing to quality of life.
- To ensure the needs of companion animals, their owner and other citizens are accommodated harmoniously.
- To achieve high levels of responsible pet ownership through consultation and integrated management with the community, contributing to quality of life.

## **Scope**

Brewarrina Shire Council's Companion Animals Strategy aims to achieve high levels of responsible pet ownership through consultation and integrated management with the community that leads to a higher quality of life for both our human and animal inhabitants.

This plan has been produced to strategically manage key companion animal issues for the attainment of identified goals.

The introduction of the Companion Animals Act in NSW has changed the way animals are managed by local authorities, and has for the first time introduced controls over domestic cats.

New legislation and changing community expectations means new approaches are now required.

Council recognises the importance of having a Strategic Companion Animal Strategy as a key Strategy in the effective management of animals in the community.

## **General Principles**

Brewarrina Shire Council has identified the need to develop a Strategic Companion Animal Strategy to improve outcomes in the area of companion animal management.

The aim of implementing a Strategic Companion Animal Strategy is to provide guidance for Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act, 1998 by determining objectives and priorities, along with a clear program of implementation.

Part 1 of the plan provides the strategic framework for key areas. It examines relevant issues and responsibilities in relation to companion animal management.

Part 2 identifies action plans and performance indicators. These outline the actions necessary for Council to reach and achieve the goals and aims outlined in the strategic framework.

These are grouped into the key areas of:

- Identification and Registration
- Animal Welfare
- Public Safety
- Nuisance Animals and excessive barking
- Impounding Animals
- Dog off leash facility

By implementing the plan, Council aims to:

- Achieve a high level of responsible pet ownership through consultation and integrated management with the community
- To ensure the needs of companion animals, their owners and other citizens are accommodated harmoniously.
- Increase the number of animals microchipped and registered to reduce the number of animals going to the pound.
- Shift the focus away from enforcement based animal control to one of education and encouragement of community responsibility
- To reduce the negative impacts by companion animals in the community and the environment.
- To ensure the resources and facilities for the control, impounding, management and care of companion animals are established and maintained.
- To ensure procedures for enforcement of the Act are educationally based and project fairness.
- Have clear, consistent and achievable goals.

### **Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership:**

Council encourages all pet owners to be responsible for their pets' actions. Owning a pet comes with responsibilities for the animal, and respect for the community.

Council aims to assist by educating and promoting responsible pet ownership, as set out by the Companion Animals Strategy.

Council aims to encourage pet owners to be responsible for their pet's actions through education and enforcement.

Being a responsible pet owner includes:

- Making sure the animal is properly identified and registered
- Provide basic needs for health and welfare for the animal
- Minimise nuisance behaviour and potential negative impacts on the environment and community
- Keeping animals out of prohibited areas
- For dogs, ensuring they are under effective control of a leash whilst in public.

## **Companion Animal Management:**

Council intend to use this Strategy in attending to councils responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act. Council employs a Ranger and operates a pound facility. Council will continue to employ a Contract ranger to assist in enforcement activities. Council will work with the Police and the RSPCA to control Dangerous dogs and ensure proper animal welfare.

## **Registration and Identification:**

### **Objectives:**

- To encourage the permanent microchip identification of companion animals
- To facilitate the prompt return of lost or stray companion animals to their owners.
- To provide an efficient service for customers updating or registering details on the NSW Companion Animal Register.

### **Background:**

There are still a large number of companion animals that are not microchipped or lifetime registered within the Brewarrina community.

Currently, there are 661 animals microchipped in Brewarrina. Of these, 282 are lifetime registered.

The management of companion animals is highly dependant on the animals being properly identified. Identification also leads to the ability to return the animals, and for the owners to be made accountable under the NSW Companion Animals Act.

### **Actions:**

Appropriate identification and registration is integral to the management of companion animals. Microchipping and registration allows lost or staying animals to be identified and returned to their owners as quickly as possible, generally avoiding the need for animals to be impounded.

Council encourages pet owners to:

- Make sure their animal is microchipped, has a collar and a tag
- Microchip their animal before 12 weeks of age and register by 6 months of age pursuant to the Companion Animal Act.
- Notify Council of certain changes and events, such as changes to registration or identification information or if the animal goes missing or dies.

Strategies to increase the number of microchipped and registered companion animals include:

- Community education programmes to promote the benefits of microchipping and greater understanding of the 2 step identification process.
- Encouraging companion animal owners to notify Council of changes of contact details.
- Continue the recent 'door-knock' registration checks.

## **Animal Welfare:**

### **Objectives:**

- Promote responsible pet ownership
- To encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their animal to improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community.

### **Background:**

Many pet problems arise from animals experiencing frustration or boredom causing reactions such as barking, chasing and jumping up. By providing environmental enrichment such as the addition of cognitive, dietary, physical, sensory and social stimuli, physiological and psychological well being can be improved.

Animal welfare is defined as providing appropriate nutrition, shelter, exercise and interaction to enhance the physical and mental well being of the animal.

Council aims to work with local veterinary clinics and companion animal stakeholders to ensure animal welfare issues in the community are addressed.

### **Actions:**

Strategies for addressing animal welfare issues on the Brewarrina community include:

- Encourage animal owners to provide basic needs for the health and welfare of their pet.
- Promote desexing of non-breeding companion animals to reduce the number of unwanted pets euthanised.
- Ensure Council staff regards animal welfare as a high priority in all dealings with the community and their companion animals.

## **Impounding Animals:**

### **Objectives:**

- To reduce the number of animals impounded and increase the return to owner rate.
- To facilitate the prompt return to owners of seized animals.
- To provide appropriate pound facilities and service for the surrender of animals.

### **Background:**

A large number of companion animals are impounded each year. Council aims to reduce the number of animals impounded, and increase the number of dogs returned to their owners.

All animals collected or impounded by Council's Animal Control Officer or Ranger that are microchipped and registered and have not been impounded within the previous 2 years shall be returned to their owners free of charge.

Animals collected or impounded that are not properly microchipped or registered shall be taken to Council's pound. All injured animals shall receive veterinary care to alleviate their suffering.

Council provides a service for the surrender of animals. Council aims to encourage the surrender of animals for reasons such as aggression, but does not encourage the surrender of animals where simple behaviour modification would suffice.

Animals that are not collected or adopted are held for the statutory periods following which time elapses, animals are humanely euthanised. It is anticipated that improved management as a result of this plan will reduce the current euthanasia rate.

### **Actions:**

Strategies to address issues concerning impounding animals include:

- Ensuring identified animals are returned as quickly as possible to their owners.
- Encouraging owners to identify and microchip their animal to expedite their return should they be impounded.
- Encourage authorised identifiers and staff to record as much owner contact information as possible to facilitate their prompt return to owners.
- Ensure animals in the care of Council's pound are well cared for, and the euthanasia of animals is conducted in an ethical and humane manner.

## **Nuisance Animals and Barking Dogs:**

### **Objectives:**

- Reduce the number of complaints received due to barking dogs, and take necessary action to reduce noise pollution.
- Develop strategies of management that reduce the incidence of nuisance animals and barking dogs.

### **Background:**

Council recognises that noise created by animals can cause aggravation, discomfort and conflict. Noise complaints can be labour intensive, difficult at times to follow up, and can result in neighbour disputes.

Barking dog complaints account for a large proportion of noise complaints received by Council.

Council aims to resolve animal noise complaints efficiently and effectively, and aims to attempt to reach an amicable outcome for all parties involved.

Under Section 21 of the Companion Animals Act 1998 a dog is a nuisance if it:

- Is habitually at large
- Makes a noise by barking or otherwise, that persistently occurs or continues to such a degree or extent that it unreasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in any other premises.
- Repeatedly defecates on any other person's property,
- Repeatedly chases any other person, animal or vehicle
- Endangers any other person or animal, or
- Repeatedly causes substantial damage to anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

### **Actions:**

Strategies for addressing animal noise problems within the community include:

- Gaining a better understanding of animal noise problems.
- Provide advice and work with animal owners to reduce animal noise.
- Review the current animal complaints procedure.
- Aim to reach an amicable outcome for all parties.
- Develop education packages in relation to nuisance animals.

## **Dangerous Dogs and Restricted Breeds:**

### **Objectives:**

- Minimise the threat to public safety from dangerous dogs and restricted breeds.
- Reduce the number of dog attacks.
- Effectively monitor, manage and control the keeping of identified restricted breeds.

### **Background:**

Council received a number of complaints of dog attacks each year. Attacks range from minor to some very serious incidents. Council aims to significantly reduce the number of dog attacks.

Council recognises its obligation under the Companion Animals Act to investigate reports of aggression in dogs and use preventative powers under the Act to control and manage animal aggression.

Under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act, 1998 Council will:

- Declare a dog as dangerous under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act if it attacks with or without provocation or trespass, a person.
- Conduct annual inspections of the premises where the Restricted Breeds are kept to ensure compliance with the legislation.
- Where appropriate and suitable, legal action is to be taken to ensure the safe keeping of Restricted Breed Dogs to ensure public safety.

### **Action:**

In order to reduce the number of animal attacks and minimise threat to public safety, Council will:

- Promptly respond to reports of animal attack.
- Declare dogs as dangerous where necessary under the Companion Animals Act.
- Ensure owners of restricted breeds comply with any specified conditions (such as keeping their dog in a childproof enclosure) as required by the Act.
- Investigate the implementation of a school education program to teach children how to behave around animals in an attempt to reduce attacks on young children.

## **Dog Off-Leash Facility:**

### **Objective:**

- Investigate an alternative dog off-leash facility.
- Patrol and enforce prohibition of dogs in public places.

### **Background:**

Brewarrina Shire Council currently has no dog “off-leash” area.

Council recognises the benefit of an off-leash facility. Dogs need to be socialised with other dogs and humans. Exercise can play a part in alleviating unwanted behaviour such as excessive barking and some forms of aggression.

It is anticipated that a designated off-leash facility would also help prevent animal owners from using public parks and recreation areas. By providing a suitable off-leash facility, Council envisages compliance with leash requirements in other areas.

### **Actions:**

Council will:

- Investigate locations suitable for an off-leash facility.
- Once in place, encourage animal owners to make use of the facility rather than using public parks and recreation areas.
- Educate the community about the benefits of using the off-leash facility

## **Cat Management:**

### **Objectives:**

- To increase the number of identified, registered and desexed cats
- To minimise the adverse impact of cats on wildlife and public amenity.

### **Background:**

Local residents have expressed concern regarding the number of stray cats and unwanted kittens having to be euthanised during breeding periods.

Council aims to educate the community about the benefits of desexing their cat, and address issues associate with straying cats.

Cats can be a nuisance to surrounding neighbours and can also threaten native wildlife.

Under Section 31 of the Companion Animals Act, a cat is a nuisance if:

- It makes a persistent noise

- Repeatedly damages anything outside the property on which it is ordinarily kept.

Council recognises cats are more difficult to confine to a property than dogs. It is envisaged that each complaint will need to be examined on a case by case basis. A distinction also needs to be made between feral and domestic cats.

New cats are now required to be identified and registered under the Companion Animals Act.

Note: under the terms of the legislation, there is no definition for a 'stray cat'.

### **Actions:**

Council aims to improve cat management by:

- Promoting the desexing of cats.
- Educate cat owners of the benefits of keeping cats confined at night to protect both the cat and wildlife.
- Increase public awareness of the need to identify and register cats, and responsible cat ownership.

### **Community Education and Enforcement:**

The benefits of an extensive education program supported by an appropriate level of law enforcement aimed at responsible community animal management are well recognised.

The best outcome for the general community, companion animals and their owners will be achieved through a well informed community supporting Council's efforts to provide the community with sound animal management.

Voluntary compliance is achievable through education, awareness programs and incentives and supported by law enforcement. The aim is to provide meaningful and lasting changes. The whole community, whether companion animal owners or not, should be involved in the process to achieve success and benefits for all.

A combination of education and law enforcement will be applied to achieve the required outcomes for responsible companion animal management. An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both are essential to maintain a well balanced approach to management that achieves the desired aims.

## **Co-ordination with Community Stakeholders:**

In forming this Companion Animal Strategy, Council sought the input of various companion animal stakeholders representing a range of organisations within the community.

Co-ordination with community stakeholders facilitates information sharing and co-operation to reach common goals.

Council will continue to consult and liaise with community stakeholders in issues relating to companion animal management. Council appreciates the input of those involved in the formation of this plan.

## **Review:**

Brewarrina Shire Council's Companion Animals Strategy will be reviewed every 5 years and as required when legislation amendments occur.

This 5 yearly review will include consultation with the following community stakeholders:

- Local Government regulatory control officers
- Veterinary personnel
- Representatives from special interest groups
- Animal welfare stakeholders

The Plan shall be placed on display for public submission.

## ACTION PLANS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

### Identification and Registration:

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of companion animals lifetime registered and microchipped.</li> <li>• Increased community awareness of the benefits of microchipping and registering their animal</li> </ul>	<p>HIGH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement education programs to advise residents of the process (and benefit) of microchipping and lifetime registering their animal.</li> <li>• Ensure all information concerning identification and registration of animals is efficiently flowing to and from Brewarrina Shire Council</li> <li>• All fees obtained through the companion animal's registration system shall be solely dedicated to the control and management of companion animals</li> <li>• Education programs to remind companion animal owners to notify of changes of ownership, address or other details.</li> <li>• Liaise with and assist local veterinary clinics in raising community awareness about identification and registration.</li> <li>• Continue recent 'door-knock' community registration checks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in number of microchipped and lifetime registered animals in the community</li> <li>• Decrease in the number of animals impounded.</li> <li>• Prompt return of identified animals to their owners.</li> </ul>

## Animal Welfare:

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of desexed companion animals</li> <li>• Encourage owners to be actively responsible for their animals' welfare.</li> <li>• Reduced numbers of companion animals euthanised or going to Council's pound.</li> </ul>	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement education programs that promote the benefits of desexing companion animals</li> <li>• Investigate and liaise with local veterinary clinics about holding discounted desexing days.</li> <li>• Encourage and educate companion animal owners to appropriately house and care for their animals.</li> <li>• Encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their animal to improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of desexed companion animals in the community.</li> <li>• Increased community awareness about the benefits of desexing their animals.</li> <li>• Decrease the number of companion animals euthanised or taken to Council's pound.</li> </ul>

## Public Safety:

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the potential threat to public safety by management of aggressive animals.</li> <li>• Reduced incidence of dog attacks.</li> </ul>	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure an efficient and effective response to reported dog attacks.</li> <li>• Investigate reports of animal aggression .</li> <li>• Implement a school education campaign to teach children how to behave around animals.</li> <li>• Effectively monitor, manage and control the keeping of identified restricted breeds of dogs.</li> <li>• Declare dogs as dangerous where necessary under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act.</li> <li>• Conduct annual inspections of the premises where restricted breeds of dogs are kept to ensure compliance with the legislation.</li> <li>• Gain a better understanding of the status of dog aggression and causes for attacks in the Brewarrina community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced incidence of dog attacks.</li> <li>• Increase community compliance with dangerous dog control requirements.</li> <li>• Efficient response to reported dog attack.</li> </ul>

## Nuisance Animals and Barking Dogs:

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To minimise the adverse affects of animal noise on the community.</li> <li>• Gain a better understanding of animal noise problems.</li> </ul>	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review procedures for dealing with animal noise and nuisance complaints.</li> <li>• Respond to animal complaints efficiently.</li> <li>• Provide advice to owners about ways they can try and stop dogs from barking.</li> <li>• Encourage companion animal owners to provide appropriate mental and physical challenges for their animal to improve animal welfare and reduce adverse impact on the general community.</li> <li>• Intermittently vary Animal Control Officer's working hours in an attempt to deal more effectively with after hours noise from barking dogs.</li> <li>• Remind owners that it is their responsibility to adequately confine their animal to their property</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced number of complaints received due to barking dogs and nuisance animals.</li> </ul>

## Impounding Animals:

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the number of animals impounded.</li> <li>• Ensure the prompt return of identified animals to their owners.</li> </ul>	HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the community to lifetime register and microchip their animals.</li> <li>• Encourage companion animal owners to notify of changes of address and details that help facilitate the prompt return of animals.</li> <li>• Provide appropriate facilities for the surrender of animals.</li> <li>• Investigate an alternative pound facility.</li> <li>• Maintain a patrol and collection service for stray animals.</li> <li>• To deal with the euthanasia of animals in a sensitive and ethical manner.</li> <li>• Attempt to ensure the safe and responsible adoption of animals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of animals returned to their owners.</li> <li>• Reduce the current euthanasia rate.</li> <li>• Increase the number of microchipped and registered animals.</li> </ul>

## Dog Off Leash Facility

Outcome Sought	Priority	Action	Indication of success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of a new leash free facility</li>   <li>• Once implemented, ensure dog owners use the off leash facility appropriately.</li> </ul>	MEDIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate sites for a new leash free facility.</li>   <li>• Educate the community about the benefits of using leash free areas.</li>   <li>• Educate the community about the correct use and their responsibilities whilst using the leash free facility.</li>   <li>• Patrol of leash free area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the number of dog owners using public parks and recreation areas as off leash areas.</li>   <li>• Dog owners using the new facility in a responsible manner.</li> </ul>