

4. LAND ADMINISTRATION & FIELD SERVICES

4.1 CAT CONTROL, ISSUES AND LOCAL LAW OPTIONS (RS)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to identify the main issues and options for Council involvement in cat control.

BACKGROUND

In August 1993 the Western Australian Municipal Association responded to public pressure for some legislative action on cat control by setting up the Peak Advisory Committee to oversee development of a Cat Act. In the same year the City of Perth and other local governments set up cat sterilisation subsidy schemes to endeavour to address at least a part of the problem.

Despite earlier comments that a Cat Act would be developed Local Government Minister Paul Omodei stated in May 97 that a bill would not be introduced and that several local governments were in the process of introducing local laws for cats.

Currently several country shires have introduced a Cat Local Law. These laws set a number limit per household of three (3), similar collar and owner name/address tag requirements as for dogs and have infringement penalties of \$20-\$50 for failure to comply. They also have nuisance/health control aspects and a three month age limit before the identification requirements are enforced. A further seven local governments are preparing or advertising draft cat local laws.

In the Shire of Swan rangers and environmental health officers report a regular flow of cat complaints that in the absence of a Council policy are generally referred to the Cat Haven, except for infrequent offensive smell complaints dealt with under health legislation.

REPORT

It is generally accepted that the cat population can be described under three categories, namely Domestic, Stray and Feral.

- **Domestic cats** are those owned and cared for by people, are also called companion animals;
- **Stray cats** are those which wander from their human owners, or are abandoned, but still live within the urban environment;
- **Feral cats** which make their home in the natural environment and prey upon native fauna.

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Major Issues

- **Control of cat numbers**

This is perceived as the predominant problem. Thousands of unwanted cats are reportedly put down a year which suggests a clear need for suitable sterilisation strategies and public education programmes.

The Cat Sterilisation Society has sought local government support for its public education project. The pamphlet they promote is attached.

In 1993 the City of Perth subsidised a cat sterilisation scheme which enabled 591 cats to be sterilised at a cost to the City of around \$11,500.00. There is no evidence to suggest whether this was successful in the longer term.

Despite the trend towards setting a numerical limit to cats per house there may be legal difficulties in actually proving specific ownership at a Court level without the support of a State Act along similar lines to the Dog Act.

The current local laws adopted elsewhere provide no seizure or impoundment provisions in the event that fines fail to rectify a non-compliance situation.

- **Control of Movement**

Common complaints about cats are; digging up gardens and depositing faeces, tom cats fighting and spraying urine as well as both domestic and feral cats killing native wildlife. Preventing cats straying is suggested as a partial solution to these problems, however practical and enforceable controls seem unlikely. Sherbrooke in Victoria is well known for its implementation of a cat curfew to reduce cat predation on wildlife in an adjacent national park. Public support would need to be well documented before any program is developed in this area.

Trapping of wandering cats tends to target well cared for confident animals rather than the more cautious feral or stray. If trapping was utilised as a method of collecting stray or feral cats, what would ensure that humane trapping and disposal standards were applied? Impoundment, returns to owners, or other disposal could be managed by local governments or other agencies. This is another area where legislative standards should be set by a State Act.

- **Registration**

Current local laws in other Shires avoid the issue of registration but require collar identification of ownership. A similar registration system to dogs is possible but administratively expensive. Research suggests that micro-chips would provide the best once only system. Unfortunately an Australian standard for micro-chips has not yet been established. Ultimately a single central register of all micro-chipped animals may be possible. As micro-chips are generally put in place by veterinarians they also could do the registration. Local vets have indicated their interest in this area.

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CORPORATE PLAN/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Council investigation of options in this area is consistent with recent service objectives and strategies developed in relation to animal management as part of the strategic plan review.

FINANCIAL/BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Expenditure is dependant on which option Council endorses but could include:

- Salary component of staff time allocated,
- Cost of supporting a pilot sterilisation subsidy program (approx \$5000.00)
- Cost of commencing a public education program (\$2000.00)
- Cost of advertising to seek expressions of public interest and associated activities (\$1000.00)
- Public advertising requirements of a draft local law (\$1000.00)

Various costs may be part of any pound options, all of the above are based on minimal initial investigation to assess customer demand. There are no specific allocations in the current budget for the above.

CORPORATE PLAN/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Nil

FINANCIAL/BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to:

- (1) Seek public comment on cat control through Council's annual community survey to be conducted in April 1998 on issues relating to:
 - (i) Restrictions on the numbers of cats in premises
 - (ii) The requirement to identify ownership by tag on collars, or
 - (iii) Ownership identified by microchip
 - (iv) Infringement penalties for non-compliance
 - (v) Registration and other conditions for approved cat breeders which would include the ability to own more than the standard number.
- (2) Support a public education program, including stakeholders such as veterinarians, Cat Sterilisation Society and breed societies, aimed at increasing cat sterilisation and encouraging responsible ownership practices.

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- (3) Seek the support of the Western Australian Municipal Association to ensure that a Cat Act is developed which would both set appropriate standards for local laws and simplify legal issues of proof of ownership, seizure and impoundment.

MOTION that the recommendation be set aside and Council resolve to:

- (1) Seek public comment on cat control through Council's annual community survey to be conducted in April 1998 on issues relating to:
- (i) Restrictions on the numbers of cats in premises
 - (ii) The requirement to identify ownership by tag on collars, or
 - (iii) Ownership identified by microchip
 - (iv) Infringement penalties for non-compliance
 - (v) Registration and other conditions for approved cat breeders which would include the ability to own more than the standard number
 - (vi) Compulsory sterilisation of all cats but those kept by approved cat breeders.
- (2) Sponsor discussions towards a public education program, including stakeholders such as veterinarians, Cat Sterilisation Society and breed societies, aimed at increasing cat sterilisation and encouraging responsible ownership practices, and implementation of an effective strategy for dealing with stray and feral cats.
- (3) Seek the support of the Western Australian Municipal Association to ensure that a Cat Act is developed which would both set appropriate standards for local laws and simplify legal issues of proof of ownership, seizure and impoundment.
- (4) Bring a report back to Council addressing options, and their cost and other implications, for effectively dealing with domestic, stray and feral cat management

(Cr Oma-Cr Henderson)

THE MOTION WAS PUT TO THE VOTE AND CARRIED