

Pause for Paws Dog and Cat Laws Review

Introduction

The Shire of Ashburton (the Shire) was invited to take part in the current review conducted on the Dog and cat Acts by submitting their suggestions to the Department of Local Government (the Department). As a stakeholder the shire has decided to submit the following suggestions after detailed discussions with the Ranger Service staff who have a combined service in this field of over 50 years.

Although the Department defined specific areas of the Acts involved, the team looked at all aspects of the Acts with the interpretation of identifying improvements for customers and stakeholders rather than limit the scope available in this brief supplied.

Dog and Cat Registration

The administrative costs and time to manage dog and cat registrations are an enormous burden placed upon all Local Governments, these cost include letters to individual owners, admin staff time input thousands of registration forms, correcting errors, follow-up letters, local advertising. Further time is then spent by Ranger services attending properties of pet owners who have not registered their animal only to find they have changed address and are un-locatable.

The cost of a cat and dog registration and infringement against a person who has failed to register their pet is not covered by the amount of work outlaid by the Local Government. Although lifetime and 3year registrations has reduced this workload it has not diminished it totally to the extent of profitable, nor has the advancements in computer technology

Further consideration should also be given to the pet owner who by law are required to have their pet microchipped, registered with the Local Government and if a cat owner sterilized also, these costs are in addition to the initial purchasing cost of the pet.

Consideration should be given to removing Local Government registration completely and the use of a microchip be recognized as the animals registration. Data base company such as Central Animal Records have the ability to record all information that the individual Councils currently use as well as recording more information such as Dangerous dogs. These data base companies would allow Rangers from across the state and interstate to have access to all details on a pet rather than relying on other councils to identify the owners from plastic dog/cat registration tags would no longer be required due to the microchip.

Tags

Although the current system allows for dog and cat to wear registration tags, a lot of dogs and cats do not have one on when collected by Rangers rendering the system of useless and Rangers relying on microchips. Tags are quite often not a priority of pet owners and therefore

are not used or lost or destroyed by other pets. The expense of purchasing registration tags also has to be taken into account especially as Councils are required to predict the amount of animals to be registered in a year and tags to cover that for a three year period, this results in hundreds of unused tags being destroyed each year. Again as mentioned above the use of microchipping as a one off registration would be the answer.

Microchipping

The lack of alignment in these two Acts with regards to the time for dogs and cats to be Microchipped needs to be adjusted to 3 months. This would allow for quick and easier tracking also detailed information on the owners to be recorded. I would strongly recommend that cat be allowed to be registered at three months in line with dogs, and a follow up process be put in place for sterilization to be completed by seven months. My reasons for this are I operate in a town where there is no vet for over 300 k and trying to get animals registered is a huge problem due to sterilization, Microchipping can be achieved through monthly vet visits but no major surgery is available.

Nuisance Dogs

This section of the Acts intent is to manage barking dogs, however the amendment in 2013 allowing one person to be able to file a complaint and pursue that complaint. This has led to an increase of complaints throughout ranger services resulting in Rangers being involved in many hours of investigation that have resulted in being nothing more than a neighbor's dispute. For this reason the amendment of 2013 should revert back to 3 complainants unless there is no other possible complainant within a reasonable distance from the alleged offending nuisance issue.

Dog attack

In line with comments from the Brief provided by the Department it is agreed to the penalty for a dog threatening to attack should be increased. There is also comments made regarding history checks on dogs prior to being placed with rehoming organizations, this can all be resolved by the detail being provided to the Microchip data base companies and it would be available across the state or any state where the dog was taken.

Greyhounds

Greyhounds have been developed in the racing industry are trained to chase a small fluffy object round a track. Although retraining may have occurred, there is no clear way to measure the full effectiveness of this training. While it is agreed retrained greyhounds should not be required to be muzzled in public due to their nature (generally good), they should be muzzled if entering a dog exercise area to prevent any possibility of a reoccurrence to their previous life and attacking any small fluffy dogs running around in these areas.

Cats

The cat Act is in need of being amended to identify and manage cats. The areas identified in the Brief "limitation to numbers wandering or nuisance cats" are areas that were left to the interpretation of different Local Governments and has the capacity to create confusion with pet owners.

As local Governments are divided by a line on a map, this line quite often runs down the center of a road in a city which can result in two councils having two totally different sets of Local laws and penalties. Therefore depending on which side of the road a cat is sitting will result in which local Law and Penalty is applied and by which council, very confusing to cat owners.

Confinement, limitation to the number of cats per household should be based along the same lines as the Dog Act and set by the state to ensure there is cohesion within the Acts and Local Governments. There should be the ability to vary cat numbers (per household) by the Local Government in certain circumstances where pet owners have extenuating situations such as a death in the family and taking on an extra pet.

Restricting cats to prohibit them within certain areas of a district should also be a responsibility of the Local Government and this can be done through a local law.

The state has the ability to set the overall requirements for the state in this Act, and a Local Law should only be developed and used in circumstances where a deficiency is found within a district and the local law used only to correct any issue within that council district.

Dangerous Dog Restricted Breed

Section 33GC refers to the transfer of dangerous dog restricted breed and limits when a dog of this type can be transferred. Unfortunately it does not cover all the situations that are presented to Councils and other compassionate grounds, therefore it would be strongly recommended that an amendment be inserted to this section allowing Council to transfer ownership on compassionate grounds after being deliberated and voted on at a council meeting.

Refund of fees

Section 19 of the Act refer to refunding fees on the cancelation of a registration and the Tag being returned to the Council, however when referring to the prescribed amount in section 19 of the Regulations the only reference made is for refunds to unsterilized dogs being sterilized. This also needs to reflect the cancellation of a registration in case of a death of a dog or Shire cancellation of a registration.

Combining the Dog Act and Cat Act

Combining the two acts together into one Act has good merit however they would need to be clearly defined within the Act Part A and B. If this was to occur then Part C for livestock which currently sits under the Local Government Act (miscellaneous Provisions) should also be incorporated into the Act and defining that Act as an Animal Act.