



Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026-2029

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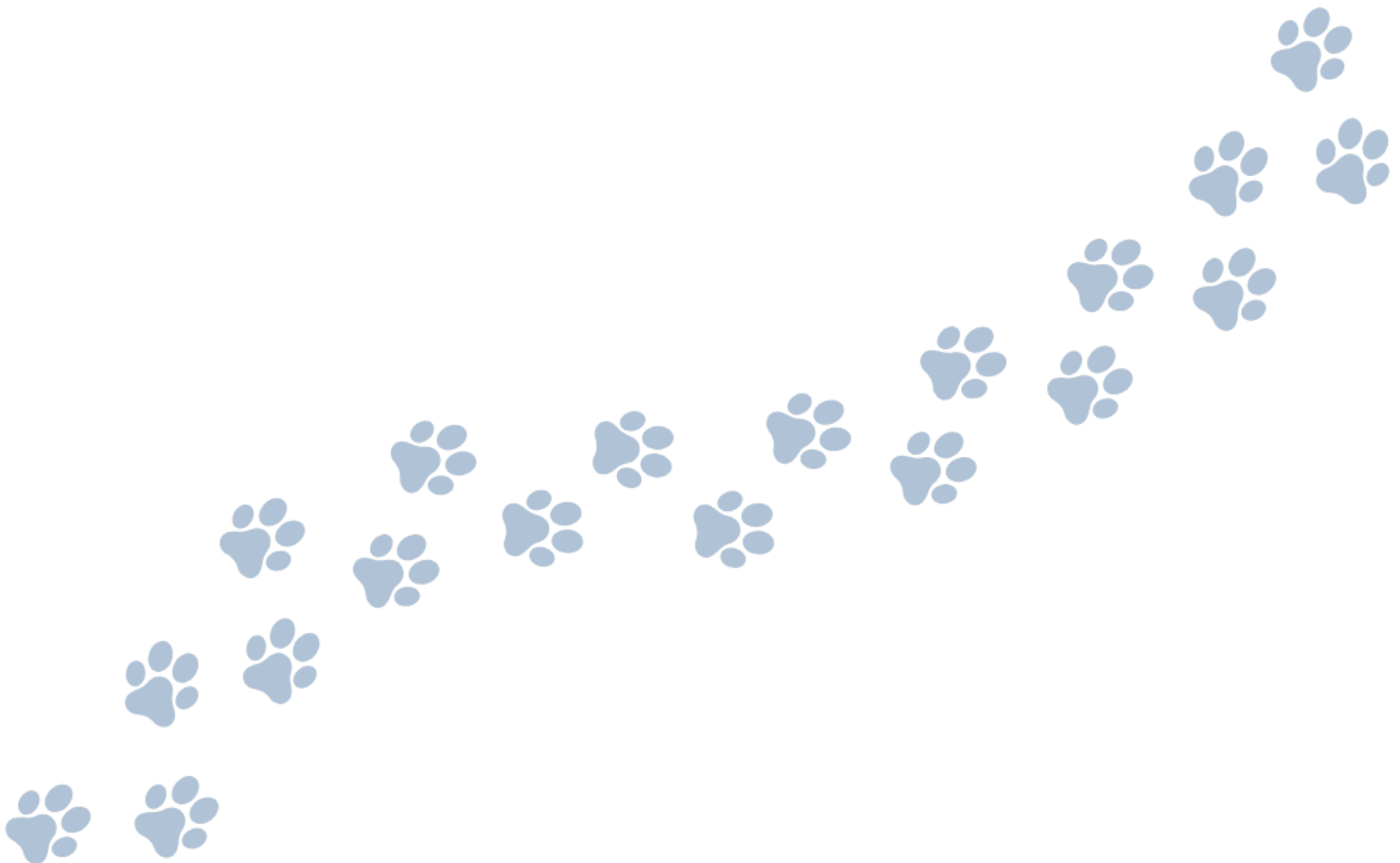
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Acknowledgement

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, and pays its respects to their elders, past and present.



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1. Introduction and context

Under Section 68A of the Domestic Animal Act 1994 (the Act) every council in Victoria is required to develop and implement a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years.

Councils are required to outline their services, programs and policies to address the administration of the Act and how they manage dog and cat issues in their communities.

The plan must:

- promote responsible pet ownership and the welfare of dogs and cats in the community,
- protect the community and the environment from nuisance dogs and cats,
- identify a method to evaluate whether the animal management services provided are adequate, and
- outline the training programs for Authorised Officers to ensure they are capable in administering and enforcing the provisions of the Act.

Domestic Animals Act 1994

68A Councils to prepare domestic animal management plans

- (1) Subject to subsection (1A), each Council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare a domestic animal management plan on 4 December 2021 and at the end of each period of 4 years after that day.
- (1A) A Council may apply to the Secretary for an extension of time within which to prepare a domestic animal management plan.
- (1B) The Secretary may grant an extension of time under subsection (1A) if the Secretary believes that special circumstances exist that warrant the granting of an extension.
- (2) A domestic animal management plan prepared by a Council must—
 - a. set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations; and
 - b. outline programs for the training of Authorised Officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council's municipal district; and
 - c. outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—
 - i. to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats; and
 - ii. to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any related legislation; and
 - iii. to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and
 - iv. to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and
 - v. to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and
 - vi. to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and
 - vii. to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulations; and
 - d. provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the Council's municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable; and
 - e. provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary; and
 - f. provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.
- (3) Every Council must—
 - a. review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and
 - b. provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and
 - c. publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.

Purpose

The overall purpose of our Domestic Animal Management Plan is to ensure the effective management of dogs and cats, and to provide a safe and harmonious environment for the community by protecting them from dangerous and nuisance animals.

Council aims to promote responsible pet ownership to create an environment where people and pets can peacefully and safely co-exist within the community and where pet owner's activities and those of their pets do not adversely affect the rest of the community or environment.

By implementing this plan Council will provide a service that meets both community expectations and addresses our statutory obligations by:

- documenting current processes and practices in relation to our animal management responsibilities,
- minimising non-compliance with the Domestic Animals Act 1994,
- increasing pet owner's knowledge of the principles of responsible pet ownership, enhancing community safety and improving awareness of the benefits of annual registration,
- increasing the number of dogs and cats that are registered,
- ensuring that Authorised Officers are adequately trained to perform their duties effectively,
- communicating to the broader community about the education and enforcement actions Council undertakes,
- reducing the harmful effects of domestic animals on the population of native birds, mammals and reptiles,
- consulting with the community and taking their views on animal management matters into account,
- complying with the relevant provisions of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

This plan will be reviewed annually and implemented over a four-year period.

Development

This plan has been developed by Council through consultation with the community and key stakeholders; as well as learnings from previous plans, research, benchmarking and a review of animal management data.



Community engagement

Community engagement for the development of this plan has included two rounds of consultation:

Round 1

In July 2025 Council engaged with the community to gather feedback for this Plan. This involved an online survey on Council's community engagement webpage, Let's Talk and four community information sessions.

The survey was promoted through a range of communication channels including Council's website, social media, local newspapers, and radio. Hard copies of the survey were also available at Council's service centres, local veterinary clinics and at the community information sessions. The survey was also available in multi-lingual formats.

Respondents were asked to answer a series of questions about responsible pet ownership and their knowledge of the rules for dogs and cats, nuisance issues and their views on what our priorities for the next four years should be.

Council received 157 contributions to the survey. Most respondents (66%) stated they live in a residential/urban area and 76% stated they were dog and/or cat owners. Eighty percent stated their dogs and/or cats were registered. For those that do not have their animals registered, most stated they would register their animals if it was cheaper or there were other incentives.

91%	of respondents stated they were aware of the 24-hour cat containment order	70%	of respondents stated they have experienced dog nuisance issues at their home
85%	of respondents stated they were aware dogs and cats needed to be registered with Council	55%	of respondents stated there should be more fenced off leash dog parks
92%	of respondents stated they were aware dogs must be on leash at all times unless in a designated off leash area	67%	of respondents stated there should not be other areas where dogs can be off leash
47%	of respondents stated they were not aware dogs are not allowed in children's playgrounds	69%	of respondents stated they have experienced cat nuisance issues at their home
36%	of respondents stated they were not aware Council provides a free cat trapping program	83%	of respondents stated there should be low cost desexing for dogs and cats

The survey also asked respondents what they think the main priorities for this plan should be. The highest rated were:

- Low cost desexing programs
- Cheaper registration
- Free cat trapping program
- Free microchipping program
- More dog parks
- Reducing wandering cats

Respondents also suggested there should be promotion and community education about the cat containment order, responsibilities of dog owners when walking and exercising their dogs and the importance of desexing.

This community feedback helped Council form the draft plan and the objectives for the next four years.

Round 2

The second round of community engagement involved the public exhibition of the draft plan over a four-week period in September-October 2025 and opportunity for submissions. The draft plan was also sent to key stakeholders including domestic animal businesses, local veterinarians and Animal Care Australia. There was one submission received.

Demographic of the Swan Hill municipality

Swan Hill Rural City Council is home to 21,403* people in the northwest of Victoria. From Robinvale and Boundary Bend in the north to Ultima and Lake Boga in the south, our municipality brings together communities with strong local identities and a shared sense of connection.

Our municipality welcomes people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, with around one in four residents born overseas and many speaking a language other than English at home. Our municipality has a median age of 39 and household size of 2.5 people, in line with the Victorian average. A mix of younger families, older residents and volunteers all contribute to the community's character.

The Mallee Climate Projections 2024 show that by 2050, Swan Hill is likely to be 1.5 °C warmer and have 4–8 % less annual rainfall than 1986–2005, meaning hotter summers, more very hot days, and drier conditions impacting farming, water, infrastructure, and health.

*2021 ABS data estimates the Swan Hill Rural Council residential population to be 21,403, however, due to ongoing concern that the ABS consistently underestimates the population of Robinvale, Council commissioned Geografia to undertake a population determination study. The ABS census figure of 2021 show the Robinvale population as 3,740 people. The work of Geografia has reliably demonstrated that the true Robinvale population sits at approximately 7,900 people; making the total residential population 25,367.



Current programs and services

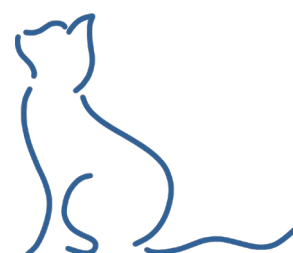
Program/Service	Service Level
Identification and registration	Average of 2310 dogs and 417 cats registered per year. Annual registration renewal notices. Thorough follow up of unpaid registration renewals – average of 340 phone calls and 30 doorknocks per year. Issue unregistered animal notifications as required. Mandatory microchipping and registration of all animals released from pound. Use of Council's website and social media to reunite lost pets with owners. Half price animal registrations from October – December.
Domestic animal complaints (i.e. wandering dogs and cats)	Attend to wandering cats or dogs as soon as possible – preferably within the hour. Other non-urgent complaints within 48 hours.
Animal nuisance complaints	Respond to complainant within 48 hours. Issue barking dog information pack within 3 days. Deliver cat traps within 14 days.
Dangerous dog complaints/dog attack	Immediate response if determined to be an emergency. Respond next business day if non-emergency.
Animal cruelty complaints	Respond within 24 hours and refer to RSPCA, if required. Investigate referrals from RSPCA, as required.
Pound facilities	Two Council pound facilities - Swan Hill and Robinvale. Visits by appointment 8:30am – 5:00pm Monday to Friday.
Microchipping program/discounted desexing	Annual microchipping program in Swan Hill and Robinvale. Free microchip and first year (pro-rata) registration. Discounted desexing, microchip, vaccination and free first year registration for animals adopted from pound. Low-cost cat desexing for vulnerable persons
Domestic Animal Business Inspections	Inspect and process new DAB applications within 10 days. Conduct annual audits and issue registration certificates. Investigate complaints within 48 hours.
Declared dogs	Registration and identification of all menacing, dangerous and restricted breed dogs. Annual property inspections to ensure compliance. Respond to complaints within 24 hours.
After hours emergency service	External contractor for after-hours service for animal emergencies, such as dog attacks and livestock on roads.

Domestic animal statistics

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
DOGS				
Registered dogs	2319	2341	2290	2292
Dogs impounded	129	146	154	164
Dogs returned to owner	64	70	57	67
Dogs rehomed/transferred to adoption agency	63	61	82	86
Dogs euthanased (sick, injured or unsuitable to be rehomed)	2	15	15	10
Dogs surrendered	22	22	34	54*
CATS				
Registered cats	426	413	426	406
Cats impounded	215	224	303	378
Cats returned to owner	14	13	22	14
Cats rehomed/transferred to adoption agency	139	109	158	175
Cats euthanased (wild, uncontrollable or poor health)	62	102	123	185
Cats surrendered	6	8	43**	41**
Domestic Animal Businesses				
	4	5	5	5

* The most common reason why dogs were surrendered in 2024/25 was because their owners were unable to care for them, followed by financial reasons.

** Increase due to cats being surrendered by animal hoarders.



2. Training for Authorised Officers

Animal management is the responsibility of Regulatory Services which forms part of the Development and Planning directorate.

There are currently five full-time Authorised Officers in the Regulatory Services team that are skilled and trained to work in a multi-disciplinary role involving domestic animal management, Local Laws, parking enforcement, fire prevention and livestock control. The Authorised Officers are supported by the Public Health and Regulatory Services Coordinator, full-time Administration Officer and part-time Compliance Officer.

2.1 Current and planned training for Authorised Officers

Due to the varied roles and activities undertaken by the Regulatory Services team, it is vital that all staff involved in animal management have the necessary skills, knowledge and equipment to perform their duties safely and effectively and have the required legislative authorisations and delegations.

Council is committed to the ongoing training and development of animal management staff. All Authorised Officers have obtained a Certificate IV Animal Control and Compliance and Certificate IV in Government (Statutory Compliance) as well as additional animal management and handling training. Each officer also completes training in customer service, workplace behaviours, occupational health and safety, first aid and firearms use and safety.

Council's Authorised Officer training and development activities are designed to ensure that all officers have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their duties. Training activities include:

- formalised training through accredited registered training organisations
- short course refresher training
- industry forums and training sessions
- on-the-job training and ongoing coaching

2.2 Our plans for training

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Ensure Authorised Officers are suitably skilled and trained to support the community and effectively perform their regulatory role.		
Identify additional training opportunities to upskill officers during annual staff performance reviews	Annually – June and as required.	Training register updated and training completed
Review and update Animal Enforcement Procedure manual and refresher training for staff	2028	Manual reviewed and updated as required, training completed
Ensure officers attend industry training and seminars.	When available	Training attended

3. Responsible Pet Ownership Programs

This section outlines Council's programs, services and strategies to promote responsible pet ownership to comply with the requirements of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

3.1 Context and current situation

Council undertakes a number of activities that promote and encourage responsible pet ownership which reduces the need for enforcement action.

Education materials are available on our website and information brochures are displayed at service centres. Responsible pet ownership is promoted via social media and there are dedicated campaigns to encourage the community to register and microchip their animals.

The municipality is culturally diverse with one quarter of the population from backgrounds where languages other than English are spoken. The most common languages other than English are Italian, Tongan and Vietnamese. Multilingual and easy English education materials are available.

In July 2025 we consulted with the community via an online survey. Respondents were asked a series of questions about responsible pet ownership and their awareness of the rules such as cat containment and dogs on leash.

91%	of respondents stated they were aware of the 24-hour cat containment order
85%	of respondents stated they were aware dogs and cats needed to be registered with Council from 3 months of age
92%	of respondents stated they were aware dogs must be on leash at all times unless in a designated off leash area
47%	of respondents stated they were not aware dogs are not allowed in children's playgrounds
36%	of respondents stated they were not aware Council provides a free cat trapping program

Respondents were also asked what the main priorities for this plan should be. The highest rated were:

- Low cost desexing programs
- Cheaper registration
- Free cat trapping program
- Free microchipping program
- More dog parks
- Reducing wandering cats

Respondents also told us they would like more online information about the cat containment order, responsibilities of dog owners when walking and exercising their dogs and the importance of desexing.

3.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Community Local Law No. 2 – Part 7 Animals	Section 71 –sets out the number of animals that may be kept without a permit. Section 72 – requires owners to ensure they have adequate fencing to prevent animals escaping. Section 74 – requires owners to ensure their animals do not create a nuisance and all animal litter must be disposed of. Section 75 – requires a person to remove and dispose of their dog's excrement. Section 76 – requires all dogs and cats to be on a leash unless in a designated off leash area. Prescribed off-leash area - Swan Hill Off-Leash Dog Park
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual
Council orders	24-hour cat containment order, requiring all cats within the municipality to be confined to their owner's property, unless the cat is appropriately restrained in a cat carrier or leashed.

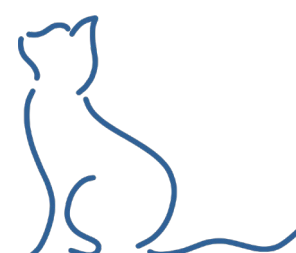
3.3 Education and promotion activities

Council has implemented a number of educational and promotional activities to promote responsible pet ownership including;

- use of media, website and social media to promote responsible pet ownership and the benefits of microchipping and desexing,
- availability of a range of information brochures and education material for the community – displayed at Council's service centres and issued to the community as required,
- education campaign via social media, Council newsletter and paid advertising in the lead up to when renewals are due on 10 April each year,
- annual registration renewal notices, reminder notices, SMS notifications, follow up phone calls and door knocking for unpaid registrations,
- providing dog waste bag dispensers and signage in parks and reserves to encourage people to clean up after their pets,
- dog on leash signage in parks and public areas,
- community education campaigns about the importance of reporting dog attacks and owner's responsibilities relating to aggressive, menacing and attacking animals,
- links on website to other organisations that encourage responsible pet ownership such as the Animal Welfare Victoria and RSPCA Victoria,
- issuance of Unregistered Animal Notifications for unregistered animals to educate and ensure compliance, and
- placement of all unclaimed animals on Council's Lost and Found webpage and local community Facebook pages.

3.4 Our plans to promote responsible pet ownership

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Increase community knowledge responsible pet ownership		
Raise community awareness about 24-hour cat confinement order by reviewing information on website and undertake social media campaign twice per year	February and August	Website reviewed and social media campaign completed annually
Share 'Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife' education material via social media annually.	November	Social media post completed annually
Raise community awareness about responsibilities of dog owners when walking and exercising their dogs by reviewing information on website and undertake social media campaign twice per year	March and September	Website reviewed and social media campaign completed annually
Review information on website about the importance of desexing and undertake social media campaign twice per year	March and October	Website reviewed and social media campaign completed annually
Conduct review of playgrounds in the municipality and ensure signage about keeping dogs out of playgrounds has been installed and is clearly visible.	April	Review completed and signage installed as required
Investigate developing a flyer to be sent with animal renewal notices to advise on dog and cat rules	2027	Flyer developed and sent with renewals
Undertake print media campaign and radio advertising on most reported issues/complaints twice per year	June and December	Newspaper and radio advertising completed



4. Overpopulation and high euthanasia rates

This section outlines Council's compliance and education programs to address overpopulation and high euthanasia rates in dogs and cats.

4.1 Context and current situation

Authorised Officers make every effort to reunite lost pets with their owners before impounding them. Current registration and up to date contact details on the pet's microchip record make this process much easier and contributes to a reduction in the numbers of animals that are impounded at facilities in Swan Hill and Robinvale.

Council conducts annual social media campaigns to remind pet owners to update their pet's microchip details. Unfortunately, owners of some microchipped animals cannot be contacted because phone numbers have been disconnected, or the microchip is still under the breeder's or last owner's name.

Unidentified animals are impounded and advertised on Council's website for eight days. Animals that are claimed by owners are required to be registered and microchipped before they can be released from the pound. If animals are not claimed after eight days, and are suitable to be rehomed, they are either adopted locally or transferred to a rehoming organisation via a section 84Y agreement. Effective June 2025, Council has 72 agreements in place with approved animal rescue organisations.

Stray and feral cats continue to be an issue in the municipality. These cats create a serious problem of uncontrolled breeding, attacks on wildlife and causing a nuisance. Council assists property owners with cat trapping to remove unwanted and unowned cats. Of the 378 cats impounded in 2024/25, 72% were caught in a trap.

The highest rating priority from the online survey was low cost desexing programs, followed by cheaper registration and the free cat trapping program. Only 64% of survey respondents stated they were aware of the free cat trapping program so a bi-annual social media campaign will be implemented.

It is important that community members are educated and take responsibility for their cats by registering, microchipping, desexing and securely confining them to their property. 96% of cats impounded in 2024/25 were not desexed and 99% were not microchipped.

In 2021 the State Government contributed \$5000 towards Council's low-cost cat desexing program. Over the last four years Council has contributed \$14,000 which has resulted in 102 being desexed, 74 females and 28 males (as of July 2025). A barrier to the program was the 1-hour distance to the only participating vet. In August 2025, a local veterinarian started offering their services, which will hopefully make the program more accessible.

Council recognises the importance of offering affordable and accessible low-cost desexing programs for our community and will continue campaigning for local veterinarians to support the program. We will also research and seek funding for visiting vet clinics. The aim of this will be to remove some of the barriers vulnerable people experience when trying to access vet care, as well as reducing the overpopulation of cats.

The following table outlines the statistics for impounded cats and dogs over the last four years.

Impounded animal statistics				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
DOGS IMPOUNDED	129	146	154	164
Impounding outcome - Dogs				
Dogs returned to owner	64 (50%)	70 (48%)	57 (37%)	67 (41%)
Dogs rehomed/transferred to adoption agency	63 (49%)	61 (42%)	82 (53%)	86 (53%)
Dogs euthanased (sick, injured or unsuitable to be rehomed)	2 (1%)	15 (10%)	15 (10%)	10 (6%)
Dogs other pound outcome (stolen, died in pound, escaped)	0	0	0	1
CATS IMPOUNDED	215	224	303	378
Impounding outcome - Cats				
Cats returned to owner	14 (6%)	13 (6%)	22 (7%)	14 (4%)
Cats rehomed/transferred to adoption agency	139 (65%)	109 (49%)	158 (52%)	175 (46%)
Cats euthanased (wild, uncontrollable or poor health)	62 (29%)	102 (45%)	123 (41%)	185 (49%)
Cats other pound outcome (stolen, died in pound, escaped)	0	0	0	4 (1%)



4.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Community Local Law No. 2 – Part 7 Animals	Section 71 –sets out the number of animals that may be kept without a permit. Section 72 – requires owners to ensure they have adequate fencing to prevent animals escaping.
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual
Council orders	24-hour cat containment order, requiring all cats within the municipality to be confined to their owner's property, unless the cat is appropriately restrained in a cat carrier or leashed.

4.3 Our plans to address overpopulation and euthanasia

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Increase cat desexing rates through low-cost program by 10%		
Continue to fund low cost desexing program for cats	Annually	Number of cats desexed
Campaign local veterinarians to support the low-cost cat desexing program	Annually	Number of cats desexed
Research and apply for additional funding (when available) for a travelling vet program to offer low-cost cat desexing to the community	When available	Research completed and funding applied for
Objective 2: Improve reclaim rates by 10%		
Conduct research and benchmarking with other councils for lower pound release fees for vulnerable people	2026	Research completed and report for Council
Investigate options for accepting pound release fees and registration via payment plans for vulnerable people	2026	Investigation completed and payment plan system in place
Expand free microchipping program to biannually and include free registration for the first year	2026	Increase in animal registration received

5. Registration and identification

This section outlines Council's programs, services and strategies to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats.

5.1 Context and current situation

Registration and identification of dogs and cats is the foundation of responsible pet ownership as it enables lost and found animals to be reunited with their owners as quickly as possible, reducing the stress on both owners and pets.

Animal registration fees help fund animal management services provided by Council, as well as State Government projects such as the Responsible Pet Ownership Program.

Registration statistics				
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Dogs registered	2319	2341	2290	2292
Cats registered	426	413	426	406

Overall registration figures for dogs and cats in the municipality have remained fairly consistent over the last four years. Currently there are 406 cats and 2292 dogs registered within the municipality.

During consultation for this plan, 85% of survey respondents stated they were aware dogs and cats are required to be registered with Council from three months of age.

35% of survey respondents stated they would more likely register their dogs and cats if it was cheaper and 20% stated they would if there were other incentives offered.

5.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Community Local Law No. 2 – Part 7 Animals	Section 71 – sets out the number of animals that may be kept without a permit.
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual

5.3 Our current activities for registration and identification

- Issuing annual animal registration renewal notices via mail or email each year.
- Thorough follow up of owners who fail to renew animal registrations including reminder notices, SMS reminders, phone calls, door knocking and enforcement action.
- Mandatory microchipping and registration for all animals released from the pound.
- Use of Council's website and social media to reunite lost pets with their owners.
- Registration and identification of menacing, dangerous and restricted breed dogs.
- Annual free microchipping program in Swan Hill and Robinvale.

- Half price animal registrations from 1 October to 31 December each year.
- Up to three months' free registration for new animal registrations received between 1 January and 10 April each year.
- Use of Council's website and social media to promote responsible pet ownership.
- Ensuring registration is checked as part of the process of dealing with animal complaints.
- Issuing of Unregistered Animal Notifications for unregistered animals to ensure compliance and enforcement action, if required.
- Annual audits of Council's animal registration database to ensure data is accurate i.e. dogs no longer living in the municipality are made departed.
- Managing agreements with adoption agencies (a requirement of section 84Y of the Domestic Animals Act) to ensure all animals adopted from the pound are desexed and microchipped and relevant paperwork is returned to Council.
- Sending notifications to relevant Council when animals are adopted from one of our pounds into a new local government area.
- Ensuring animals adopted through other agencies such as the RSPCA and Lost Dogs Home into our municipality have been registered.
- Regular patrols of public places, such as streets, reserves and parks.
- Issuing official warnings and infringement notices for non-compliance with the Act.

5.4 Our plans for registration and identification

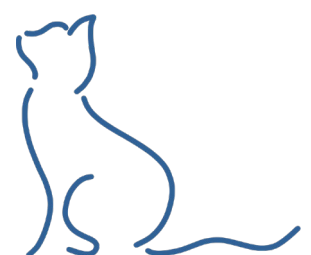
Our main priority is to increase the number of animal registrations across the municipality by promoting the benefits of registering animals with Council and educating the community about the difference between microchipping and registration.

To further increase registration and renewals Council will use social media platforms, print media and radio advertising to inform the community about registration discounts for pets that are desexed, obedience trained, over ten years old and working dogs. We will also undertake research into the viability of reducing registration fees even further. We will continue cross-checking all microchip databases to ensure pets are also registered with Council.

Council will continue the 'free ride home' incentive for registered animals that are found at large for the first time. We will also explore other incentives for first time registrations and ways to reward those who have invested in their pets, such as having their animal desexed, to receive a lower registration fee.

Council currently has an authorised microchip implanter who conducts a free microchipping program annually. On average, 30 dogs and cats receive free microchipping and registration each year.

In 2026 the program will be expanded to biannually. In 2027 a second Authorised Officer will undertake training to become an authorised microchip implanter. In 2028-29 we will investigate options and costs for a Council to provide an ongoing microchipping service for Robinvale residents as there is currently no veterinarian available.



Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Increase the amount of dog and cat registrations by 5%		
Improve the accuracy of Council's pet registration database by contacting all microchip registries every 6 months to obtain details of new dogs and cats microchipped in the municipality. Check that all animals are listed on Council's pet registration database and follow up non-compliance.	June and December	Increased animal registrations
Continue with 'A free ride home' incentive Authorised Officers adopt a free ride home approach to registered and microchipped animals found wandering for the first time that have not caused a nuisance.	Ongoing	Number recorded
Ensure all impounded animals are microchipped and registered prior to release	Ongoing	Increase in animal registration received
Expand free microchipping program to biannually and include free registration for the first year	2026	Increase in animal registration received
Seek funding for incentives to include in a registration drive	2027	Funding acquired and registration drive completed
Complete a feasibility study into lowering animal registration fees and prepare report	2027	Study and report to Council completed
Issue registration reminders via SMS annually	April and May	Increase in renewals received
Use social media platforms and multilingual fact sheets to promote the importance of registration and the difference between registration and microchipping annually	June	Increase in animal registration received
Use print and social media platforms to promote registration fee discounts annually	January	Increase in animal registration received
Authorised Officer to complete training to become an Authorised Microchip Planter	2027	Training completed and authorisation obtained
Investigate options/costs for Council Authorised Microchip Planter to provide an ongoing microchipping service for Robinvale residents	2029	Investigation completed

6. Nuisance

This section outlines Council's programs, services and strategies to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance.

6.1 Context and current situation

The most common complaints received by Council relate to roaming and/or stray dogs and cats.

Stray and feral cats continue to be an issue in the municipality. These cats create a serious problem of uncontrolled breeding, attacks on wildlife and causing a nuisance. Council assists property owners with cat trapping to remove unwanted and unowned cats. In 2024/25, 72% of the 378 cats impounded were caught in a trap.

During the community consultation for this plan, 64% of survey respondents stated they were aware of the free cat trapping program so a bi-annual social media campaign will be implemented.

It is important that community members are educated and take responsibility for their cats by registering, microchipping, desexing and securely confining them to their property. In 2024/25 96% of cats impounded in were not desexed and 99% were not microchipped.

Council has been funding a low-cost cat desexing program for cats since 2021. We will continue to fund this program and investigate funding opportunities to expand the program to dogs, as 83% of survey respondents stated Council should offer a low-cost desexing program for both dogs and cats.

Nuisance cats are a concern with 69% of survey respondents stating they have experienced a nuisance issue at home. These include cats wandering around their homes, cats fighting and cats spraying or defecating on their property. In 2024/25 Council received 120 cat trap requests, 59 requests to collect stray cats (not caught in a cat trap) and 19 other cat nuisance complaints.

Wandering dogs and dogs being walked off leash are a nuisance to the community and hazard to motorists and people exercising. In August 2021 Council opened a new off leash dog park in Swan Hill. The fully fenced park provides the opportunity for owners to exercise and socialise their dogs and practice training techniques. 55% of survey respondents stated there should be more fenced off leash dog parks. Council will investigate options of establishing off leash dog parks in other areas of the municipality. There was little support for other areas (that are not a specific dog park) where dogs can be off leash.

Dogs causing nuisance is also a concern with 70% of survey respondents stating they have experienced a nuisance issue at home. These include dogs wandering, barking and defecating on their property. In 2024/25, Council received 267 requests to collect stray dogs/reports of dogs being at large, 35 barking dog complaints and 20 other dog nuisance complaints.

The survey also asked respondents to list areas where they have witnessed dogs being walked off leash, dogs in playgrounds and where dog excrement is left. Signage in these areas will be reviewed and new signage will be installed if required.

Animal nuisance complaints	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Dog nuisance complaints	29	22	29
Barking dog complaints	34	36	35
Requests to collect stray dogs/ reports of dogs at large	260	220	267
Cat trap requests	141	135	120
Cat nuisance complaints	8	6	19
Requests to collect stray cats (not caught in a trap)	37	55	59
Excess animal complaints	0	1	5

6.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Community Local Law No. 2 – Part 7 Animals	Section 71 – sets out the number of animals that may be kept without a permit. Section 72 – requires owners to ensure they have adequate fencing to prevent animals escaping. Section 74 – requires owners to ensure their animals do not create a nuisance and all animal litter must be disposed of. Section 75 – requires a person to remove and dispose of their dog's excrement. Section 76 – requires all dogs and cats to be on a leash unless in a designated off leash area. Prescribed off-leash area Swan Hill Off-Leash Dog Park
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual
Council orders	24-hour cat containment order, requiring all cats within the municipality to be confined to their owner's property, unless the cat is appropriately restrained in a cat carrier or leashed.

6.3 Our current compliance and educational activities

- Free cat trap hire service.
- Barking dog information booklets for owners and complainants.
- Impounding stray dogs and cats and mandatory microchipping and registration prior to release.
- Providing dog waste bag dispensers and relevant signage in parks and reserves. Locations are advertised in brochures and Council's website.
- Issuing Local Law notices to comply, infringement notices and prosecutions, where applicable.
- Signage in dog on-leash areas.
- Availability of brochures and educational material.
- Timely and thorough follow up of nuisance complaints.
- Random patrols of parks and other public areas.
- 24-hour cat confinement requirement.



6.4 Our plans for nuisance animals

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Reduce cat nuisance complaints		
Raise community awareness about 24-hour cat confinement order by reviewing information on website and undertake social media campaign twice per year	February and August	Website reviewed and social media campaign completed annually
Review information on website about the cat trapping program and conduct social media campaign twice per year	February and August	Website reviewed and social media campaign completed annually
Continue to fund low cost desexing program for cats	Annually	Number of cats desexed
Campaign local veterinarians to support the low-cost cat desexing program	Annually	Number of cats desexed
Research and apply for additional funding (when available) for a travelling vet program to offer low-cost cat desexing to the community	When available	Research completed and funding applied for, number of cats desexed
Objective 2: Reduce dog nuisance complaints		
Review and update educational material on website about dog nuisance issues annually	April	Education materials reviewed and updated
Review signage in areas where dogs are reported of being off-leash and in playgrounds, and where dog excrement is left.	April	Signage reviewed installed as required
Review and update educational material on website about Local Law requirement that dogs must be on a leash unless in a designated off leash area annually	April	Reduction of complaints in relation to dogs being off-leash
Investigate options of establishing off leash dog parks in other areas of the municipality	2026	Community consultation completed
Refer owners of nuisance dogs to RSPCA Free Pet Behaviour Hotline	When required	Reduction in dog nuisance complaints
Apply for funding (when available) to expand low cost desexing program to dogs	When available	Funding applied, number of dogs desexed

7. Dog attacks

This section outlines Council's programs, services and strategies to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals.

7.1 Context and current situation

Council is committed to reducing the number of dog attacks in our community. Council provides a 24-hour service to immediately respond to dog attacks, and our first priority is to protect the community by taking steps to prevent future attacks by the same dog. In most circumstances Authorised Officers seize and impound the alleged attacking dog until a thorough investigation is completed.

Dog attacks remain an issue for Council, in particular in rural areas where dogs attack sheep and poultry. Dog attacks are taken very seriously, and officers will continue to respond to all dog attack reports promptly and take the necessary actions to protect the community.

In 2024 there were 31 dog attack reports received, but only 19 were proven to be actual attacks by Authorised Officers. There has been a significant decrease in injuries to other dogs, but unfortunately an increase in livestock being killed. In 2024, one dog was declared as menacing, one dog was euthanased and there were seven infringement notices issued for minor dog attacks. There were no prosecutions.

Council will continue to educate the community on ways to reduce the risk of dog attacks and the importance of reporting all dog attacks in a timely manner. For many of the dog attacks reported in 2024, enforcement action was unable to be undertaken due to lack of evidence and/or significant time lapses from when the attack occurred to when the attack was reported to Council so the offending dog could not be located.

Education is required to encourage the community to report all dog attacks regardless of the nature of the attack and level of injuries sustained. When investigating dog attacks Authorised Officers often find that the alleged attacking dog had attacked previously but it wasn't reported to Council, this is most likely due to the minor nature of some attacks or because the victim is known to the animal owner. Had the initial attack(s) been reported to Council, the subsequent, often more serious, attack may have been avoided.

In 2024 there was an increase in reports received in January and July so community education campaigns will be implemented during these months.

Dog attack statistics			
	2022	2023	2024
Injured person	2	7	8
Livestock (including poultry) – injured	0	0	0
Livestock (including poultry) – killed	4	3	6
Other dog – injured	5	7	2
Other dog – killed	1	2	1
Cat – injured	1	0	0
Cat – killed	2	1	1
Attacks on wildlife	0	0	1
TOTAL	15	20	19
Dog rushing/being aggressive	13	20	24

7.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Community Local Law No. 2 – Part 7 Animals	Section 71 – sets out the number of animals that may be kept without a permit. Section 72 – requires owners to ensure they have adequate fencing to prevent animals escaping. Section 76 – requires all dogs and cats to be on a leash unless in a designated off leash area. Prescribed off-leash area Swan Hill Off-Leash Dog Park
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual

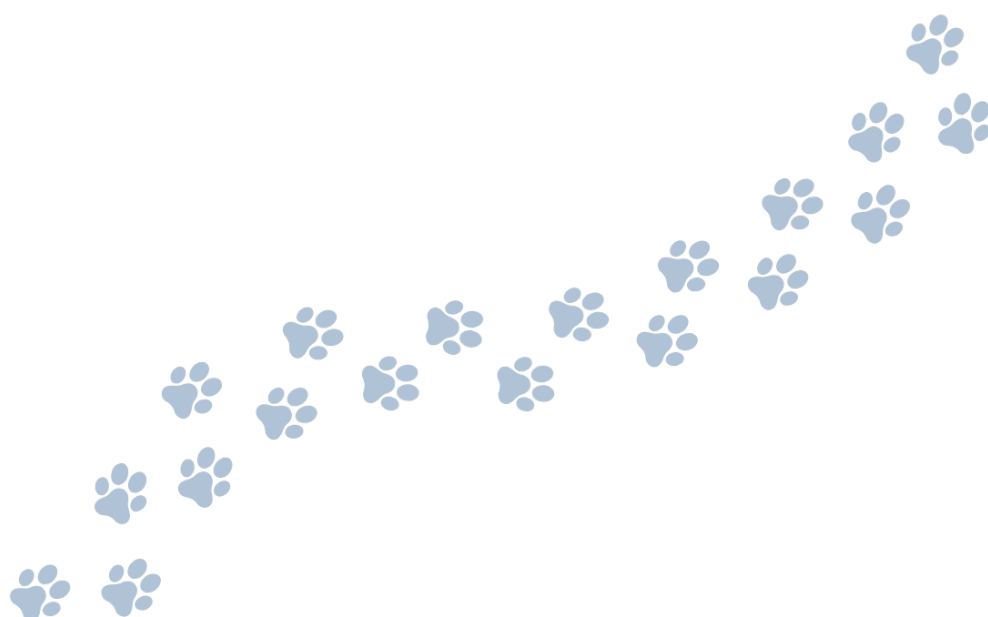
7.3 Our current compliance and education activities

- Immediate 24-hour response for reported dog attacks.
- Seizing and impounding alleged attacking dogs until an investigation is complete.
- Timely and thorough investigations of all reported dog attacks.
- Issuing notices to comply, infringement notices and official warnings where relevant.
- Declaring dogs determined to be dangerous, menacing or of a restricted breed, updating the Victorian Declared Dog Register and random property checks to ensure compliance with regulations.
- Prosecuting matters pursuant to the Act.
- Encourage local vet clinics to report dog attacks to Council.
- Community education about the importance of reporting dog attacks and responsible pet ownership.
- Promote and encourage the desexing of dogs to reduce incidents of wandering dogs.
- Timely response to all reports of dogs at large, uncontained dogs, aggressive and rushing dogs.
- Regular patrols of the municipality to collect dogs at large to reduce the potential for dog attacks.



7.4 Our plans to minimise dog attacks

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Improve reporting of dog attacks in a timely manner		
Raise community awareness through media releases, social media and website of what a dog attack is and how to report it to Council.	January and July annually	Number of dog attacks that can be investigated and proven
Objective 2: Reduce number of dog attacks		
Publicise key dog attack prevention messages such as laws regarding registration, confinement of dogs to property, on leash in public areas through website, social media and community newsletter.	January and July annually	Reduction in dog attacks
Improve community awareness of dog attacks and the consequences for owners if their dog attacks another animal or person.	January and July annually	Reduction in dog attacks
Increase patrols of high-risk locations	Ongoing	Reduction in dog attacks
Objective 3: Provide support for victims of dog attacks		
Develop a post-incident checklist to ensure support is provided to victims of dog attacks	2026	Checklist developed



8. Dangerous, menacing and restricted breeds

This section outlines Councils programs, services and strategies to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in the municipality and ensure that those dogs are kept in accordance with the Domestic Animals Act and regulations.

8.1 Context and current situation

Council has a number of declared dogs which have been determined to be either 'dangerous' or 'menacing'. Owners of declared dogs must comply with a range of requirements for their dogs relating to housing, microchipping, desexing, identification and Council registration. Where non-compliance is determined Council undertakes enforcement action as per the provisions of the Act.

Dogs on Victorian Declared Dog Registry	
Dangerous dogs (attack)	1
Dangerous dogs (Guard Dog)	0
Dangerous dogs (attack trained)	0
Menacing dogs	5
Restricted breed dogs	0
TOTAL	6

Restricted breed dogs

Restricted breed dogs are considered a higher risk to community safety than other breeds of dogs. The Act defines restricted breed dogs as any one of the following breeds (pure or cross breed):

- American Pit Bull Terriers (or Pit Bull Terriers)
- Perro de Presa Canarios (or Presa Canario)
- Dogo Argentinos
- Japanese Tosas
- Fila Brasileiros

Council's Authorised Officers are trained to identify and declare restricted breed dogs. Effective June 2025, there are no known restricted breed dogs in the municipality.

Menacing dogs

Under the Act, Council may declare a dog to be a menacing dog if the dog causes a non-serious bite injury to a person or animal, or if it rushes at or chases a person.

'Rush at' means that the dog has approached a person within 3 metres, displaying aggressive behaviour such as snarling, growling, barking or raising the hackles.

The owner of a declared menacing dog must comply with requirements to prevent the dog from attacking (or causing serious injury) in future. A menacing dog declaration can be upgraded to a dangerous dog declaration if the owner has been issued with two infringement notices for failing to comply with requirements such as leashing or muzzling their dog in public.

Effective August 2025, there are five dogs living in the municipality that have been declared as menacing. Two of these dogs attacked and injured other dogs, two rushed at a person, one attacked and killed chickens.

Dangerous dogs

A dangerous dog is one that Council has declared to be dangerous if;

- the dog has caused serious injury or death to a person or animal; or
- the dog is a menacing dog and its owner has received at least two infringement notices for failing to comply with restraint requirements; or
- the dog has been declared dangerous under corresponding legislation in another state or territory; or
- for any other reason prescribed.

Owners of dangerous dogs have a series of obligations imposed on them to prevent their dog from reattacking and to keep members of the community and other animals safe. These include warning signage where the dog is kept, wearing a prescribed dog collar, being muzzled when it is being walked, mandatory desexing and requirement for the dog to being kept in an outdoor enclosure or indoors.

Effective June 2025, there is one dog living in the municipality that has been declared as dangerous.

8.2 Our orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

Type	Description
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual

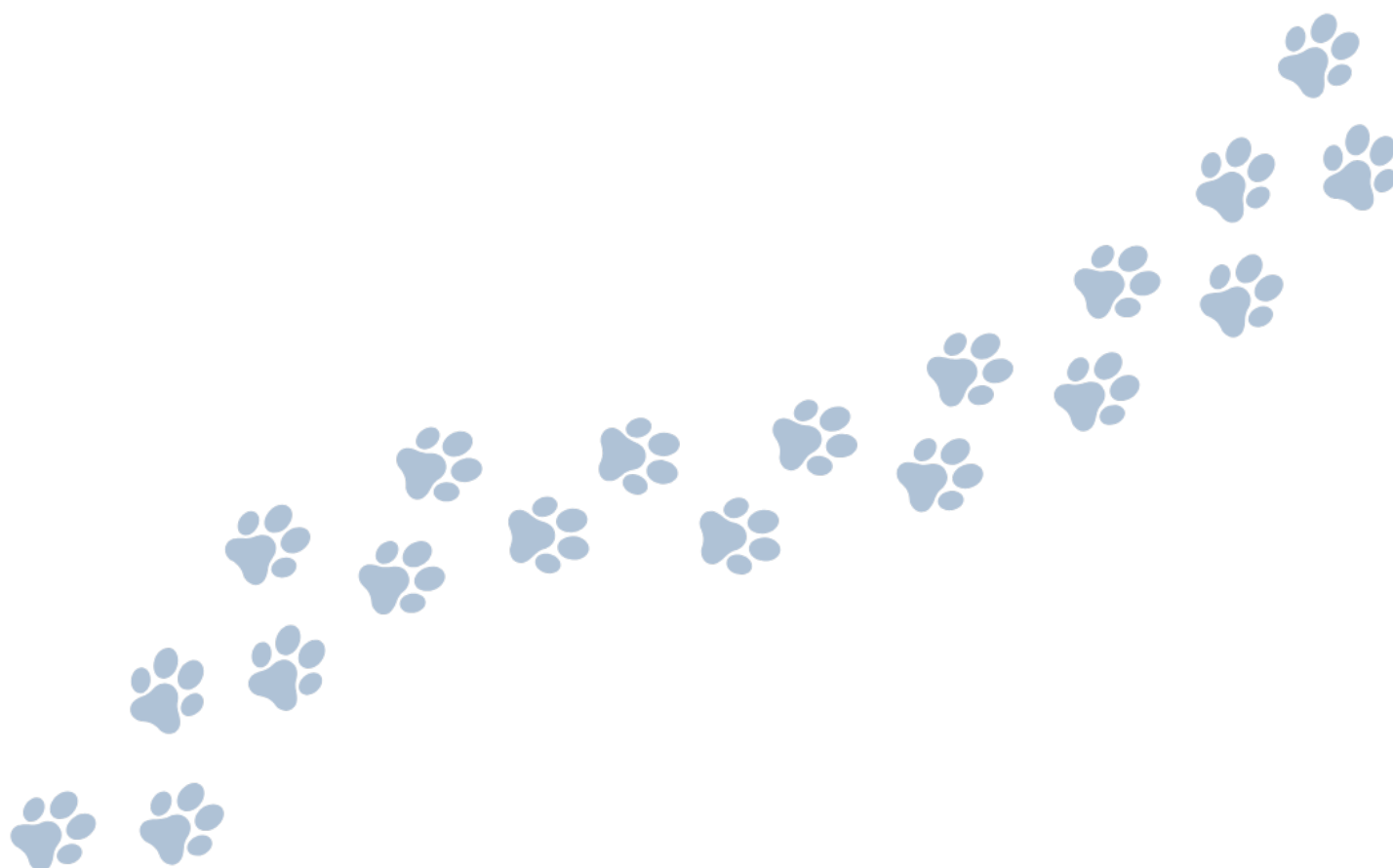
8.3 Our current education and compliance activities

- Declaration of dogs where appropriate.
- Prompt response to complaints about suspected declared dogs.
- Annual and random audits of properties housing declared dogs.
- Ensure compliance with requirements of keeping dangerous dogs.
- Seizure of dogs suspected of being a restricted breed.
- Educating owners of dogs in relation to the laws about keeping declared dogs.
- Ensure all declared dogs are listed on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry.
- Information regarding restricted breed dogs and declared dogs on Council website.
- Brochures displayed at Council service centres.



8.4 Our plans for Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted breed dogs

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Ensure declared dogs are compliant with relevant legislation and regulations		
Conduct random property inspections of declared dogs to ensure compliance.	Annually	Record number of inspections. Compliance with requirements.
Enforcement action for non-compliance of declared dog requirements	When required	Prosecutions undertaken as required.
Continue to declare dogs as Restricted Breed, Dangerous or Menacing in accordance with legislation.	Ongoing	Number of dogs declared.
Investigate complaints about Menacing, Dangerous or Restricted Breed Dogs	Ongoing	Number of complaints investigated.



9. Domestic Animal Businesses

This section outlines programs, services and strategies which Council intends to pursue in its municipal district to ensure that Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs) comply with the Act, regulations, and any related legislation.

9.1 Context and current situation

There are currently seven Domestic Animal Businesses registered with Swan Hill Rural Council. These consist of three boarding establishments, two pet shops and two Council pound facilities. There is one pound located in Swan Hill, and the other one is in Robinvale. There are no breeding or dog training establishments currently registered.

9.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedures

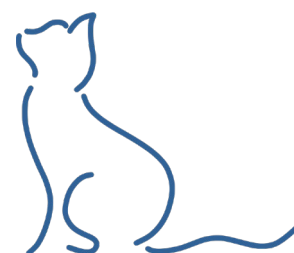
Activity	Activity
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual Health Management Plan for Swan Hill and Robinvale Pounds

9.3 Current activities for Domestic Animal Businesses

- Annual registration and renewal of DABs.
- Regular audits of DABs to ensure compliance with regulations and relevant Codes of Practice.
- Provide information and guidance to registered DABs.
- Investigations of complaints lodged regarding the operation of a DABs and/or properties identified with excess animals.
- Liaison with Council's Planning Department over suspected illegal DABs.

9.4 Our plans for Domestic Animal Businesses

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Identify unregistered Domestic Animal Business operators		
Improve public awareness of what a Domestic Animal Business is via social media and website annually.	February	Social media post completed and website updated.
Follow up possible Domestic Animal Businesses identified during property inspections and/or notifications from public.	Ongoing	Investigations completed.
Liaise with Planning Department to ensure all new planning enquires for animal related businesses are flagged with Regulatory Services.	Ongoing	Number of businesses referred.
Objective 2: Ensure all Domestic Animal Businesses are registered and compliant with legislation		
Conduct annual audits of Domestic Animal Businesses to ensure compliance with legislation and relevant Code of Practice.	March	Audits completed and compliance achieved.
Review Health Management Plan for Swan Hill and Robinvale animal pounds.	Annually	Review plan and update as required.



10. Other matters

This section provides for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in our municipal district.

10.1 Emergency Management

Over the years the Swan Hill municipality has experienced a relatively low number of emergencies of consequence. Those with the most widespread impact have been either wind / hailstorms or flood. The impact has primarily involved property damage and not loss of life.

Animal Welfare Victoria is the lead agency in relation to animal welfare during an emergency. Councils are responsible for the emergency confinement of stray animals within the council area. Council pound facilities in Swan Hill and Robinvale are available to house displaced, lost or stray dogs and cats, if required.

The most recent event was Murray River flooding in October 2022. Council's Regulatory Services staff aided 17 displaced cats and dogs whose owners had to evacuate their homes. The animals were from the neighbouring Gannawarra Shire and the owners were staying at the Swan Hill Relief Centre.

This event highlighted the need for a plan that outlines how animal animals are managed at emergency relief centres. A Municipal Emergency Animal Welfare Plan will be developed and will:

- include the locations suitable for the emergency shelter of evacuated animals;
- list the animal management resources and equipment council currently has available that may be utilised at an emergency relief centre or shelter;
- list providers of animal management services and resources that may be required, or may assist in an emergency;
- define the roles, responsibilities of staff that will be required to process and care for animals that will arrive at emergency relief centres and shelters.

10.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, policies and procedure

Type	Description
Council policies and procedures	Animal Management Procedure Manual
	Health Management Plan for Swan Hill and Robinvale Pounds

10.3 Our plans for Emergency Management

Activity	Activity	Evaluation
Objective 1: Ensure consideration is given to the management of domestic animals in an emergency		
Develop a Municipal Emergency Animal Welfare plan	2027	Draft plan developed and submitted to Emergency Management Planning Committee to be considered for MEMP
Prepare information for website and social media to assist pet owners in an emergency that can be easily uploaded when an emergency is declared	2027	Information prepared

11. Annual review of plan

Under section 68A(3) of the Domestic Animals Act, every Council will review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan.

Council will review our Domestic Animal Management Plan annually. Any changes to our plan will be provided to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) Secretary. Council will publish an evaluation of the plan in its annual report.

11.1 Evaluation of implementation of the Domestic Animal Management Plan

The monitoring of the performance of the plan will be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Act. In addition, Council will continue to conduct its monthly monitoring of the performance of the animal management team.

The key performance measures within this plan are to be monitored on a monthly basis by the Public Health and Regulatory Services Coordinator, in conjunction with the Regulatory Services team.

The results of this monthly monitoring will enable Council to adjust the plan ahead of the annual review.

A review of performance under the plan is required to be included in Council's annual report. Measurements should relate to activities and targets in this plan and should include educational programs, increased registration of domestic animals, reduction of dogs and cats at large, decreased numbers of dog attacks, and increases in compliance and levels of community satisfaction as a measure of success.

It should be noted that if performance under the plan is not sufficient, further revision of the action plan and its methods may be required and should be recommended.

