

# DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2026-29





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# 1.0: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Executive Summary

Wellington Shire Council (Council) recognises that pet ownership has positive benefits for the community. Responsible pet ownership makes a valuable contribution towards our community's wellbeing and adds to social connectivity. This is more pronounced with children and the elderly where pets play a more prominent part in their lives. They provide opportunities for active pursuits, companionship to those who may feel lonely or isolated and independence for those with a disability or illness.

Following a boom in pet ownership at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia's pet ownership rate has stabilised, however we have one of the highest rates of pet ownership per household in the world. Approximately 48% of households own dogs and 33% own cats.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of balancing pet ownership and the rights of the individual to enjoy the environment is a challenge. The adequate control of animals can often be a source of conflict between neighbours, particularly in urban areas.

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) regulates domestic animal management within Victoria. It is a requirement that every Council develops and implements a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAM Plan).

## 1.2 Purpose and Primary Objective of the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAM Plan)

Balancing the benefits of pet ownership and the rights of individuals to enjoy their environment without disruption remains an ongoing challenge. Consideration has been given to both pet owners and those who do not own pets when developing this plan.

The primary objective is to provide a strategic plan to guide the community towards the goal of responsible pet ownership and to assist Wellington Shire to achieve a professional, consistent and proactive approach to domestic animal management practices.

The DAM Plan identifies current activities and future actions to address the following issues as required by s68A of the Act:

- Set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by Council are adequate;
- Promote and encourage responsible pet ownership;
- Ensure compliance with the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and relevant regulations;
- Outline programs for the training of authorised officers;
- Outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue;
- Minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals;
- Address over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats;
- Encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats;
- Minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance;
- Effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs;
- Review of existing orders and local laws that relate to cats and dogs;
- Ensure compliance by all registered Domestic Animal Businesses;

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<sup>1</sup> Animal Medicines Australia 2022

- Provide periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.

### 1.3 Process applied in Developing the DAM Plan

The DAM plan was developed by Wellington Shire Council's Local Laws team, following a series of structured activities undertaken throughout its planning and implementation phases.

Action	Actioned By	Date
Review effectiveness of 2021-2025 Plan using available data.	Coordinator Local Laws	March 2025
Draft 2026-2029 Plan incorporating results from 2021-2025 Plan review.	Coordinator Local Laws	April-May 2025
Release document for public comment.	Council	August 2025
Engage with the Community by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking submissions to draft document.</li> <li>• Engaging with internal and external agencies, such as RSPCA, Animal Welfare Victoria, Victorian Animal Aid Trust, Animal Care Australia and Committees of Management, seeking feedback.</li> </ul>	Coordinator Local Laws	August 2025
Compile results of community engagement.	Coordinator Local Laws	September 2025
Update Plan to reflect and incorporate feedback	Coordinator Local Laws	September 2025
Review Final document	Manager Governance	October 2025
Present final document to Council for adoption	Coordinator Local Laws	November 2025
Forward to Animal Welfare Victoria and place on Council's website	Coordinator Local Laws	December 2025

### 1.4 Wellington Shire Demographic Snapshot

Wellington Shire is the third largest shire in Victoria by land area (10,811 square kilometres). The shire is a mixture of rural and urban areas, with an estimated population of 46,124<sup>2</sup>.

Wellington Shire is a unique environment, which encompasses coastal areas, the Gippsland Lakes, agricultural land, areas of cultural and environmental significance, undeveloped land and urban areas. The largest towns in the area are Sale, Maffra, Yarram, Stratford, Rosedale and Heyfield.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics ERP 2023



### Wellington Shire

With 18,890 households in the Shire<sup>3</sup> it is estimated that approximately 48% households own one or more dogs at an average of 1.3 dogs per household and 33% of households own one or more cats at an average of 1.6 cats per household<sup>4</sup>. This is significantly higher than pre-pandemic surveys. (40% dogs, 27% cats).

With those figures in mind, it is estimated there are 11,787 dogs and 9,973 cats in the Shire. Unfortunately, the number of registered dogs and cats (particularly cats) is significantly less than the estimated population. Registration and identification of dogs and cats will be discussed further in Part 3 of this Plan.



<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023

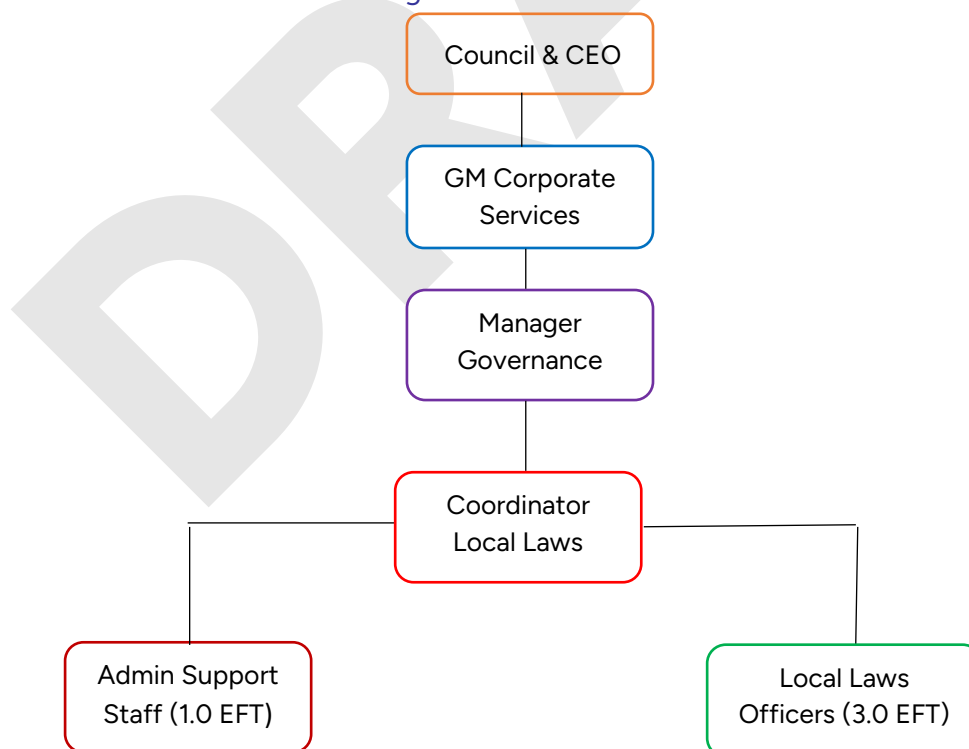
<sup>4</sup> Animal Medicines Australia 2022

## 1.5 Wellington Shire Council Animal Management Staffing

To meet legislative requirements, Wellington Shire Council employs Local Laws Officers, who are authorised under section 72 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and are included in Council's Governance business unit.



### Organisational Structure



Local Laws Officers deal with a variety of issues apart from animal management. For the purpose of this Plan, the equivalent of three officers are dedicated to domestic animal management matters.

## 1.6 Context and Current Situation

The Wellington Shire Council local laws team provide a broad range of services to ensure it meets its legislative responsibilities relating to animal management. They include, but are not limited to:

- Responding to and investigating customer requests/complaints relating to domestic animals;
- Promoting responsible pet ownership;
- Managing the Wellington Shire Pound and Animal Shelter;
- Maintaining the domestic animal, restricted breed and declared dog registers;
- Managing wandering, nuisance, unwanted/surrendered animals;
- Assisting with the feral cat population;
- Investigating dog attacks;
- Conducting patrols in popular dog walking areas;
- Registering and inspecting Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs);
- Providing a 52-week, 24/7 emergency service;
- Providing suitably trained and qualified staff;
- Maintaining collaborative relationships with partner organisations, such as – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), Victoria Police, Victorian Animal Aid Trust, Animal Welfare Victoria, veterinary clinics and other stakeholders, with a view to a multi-agency approach to animal management.

### Summary of Key Services:

Current Program	Service Level
<b>Identification and Registration</b>	All dogs and cats are required to be registered by 10 April each year. As of 30 June 2025, the number of animals registered within Wellington Shire was: <b>Dogs: 7,426</b> <b>Cats: 1,850</b>
<b>Wellington Shire Pound and Animal Shelter</b>	Consists of a facility that can accommodate 38 dogs and 36 cats. The facility is located at 111 Hopkins Road Fulham, about 5km west of Sale. It is managed under contract by Victorian Animal Aid Trust, who provide the following services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agents for the registration of pets;</li> <li>• Receive dogs and cats, contact known owners, place photographs on the website, house animals until released, rehouse or disposal of</li> </ul>



Current Program	Service Level
	<p>animals due to ill health, welfare issues or where there is failure to rehouse;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide short term care for animals whose owners are temporarily unable to care for them due to illness or situations involving domestic violence. This allows owners to focus on recovery or safety while knowing their animals are being looked after in a secure and compassionate environment.</li> <li>• Provide secure housing of seized dogs, pending prosecution;</li> <li>• Provide monthly statistics to Wellington Shire.</li> </ul> <p>During the 2024-2025 financial year, <b>572</b> lost or surrendered animals were received at the Pound and Shelter. <b>341</b> were reunited with their owners and <b>200</b> were successfully rehomed.</p> <p><b>16</b> dogs were seized pending prosecution in the Magistrates Court of Victoria.</p>
<b>Domestic Animal Businesses</b>	<p>There are <b>20</b> Domestic Animal Businesses registered with Wellington Shire. All are monitored to ensure compliance with the relevant Codes of Practice. Currently, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>5</b> Breeding/Rearing Establishments</li> <li><b>2</b> Pounds and Animal Shelters</li> <li><b>5</b> Dog Training Establishments</li> <li><b>2</b> Pet Shops</li> <li><b>6</b> Boarding Establishments</li> </ul>
<b>Domestic Animal Complaints</b>	<p>During the 2024-2025 financial year, local laws staff have responded to <b>1,286</b> domestic animal complaints, with an average initial response time of <b>1.3</b> days.</p> <p>Complaints varied from wandering cats/dogs, nuisance animals, reports of dog attacks or rushes, animal welfare concerns, requests to surrender pets and reports of non-compliance with the relevant Codes of Practice. While matters can be reported during standard business hours, Council also provides a 24-hour service to respond to urgent issues.</p>

Current Program	Service Level
<b>Restricted Breed/Declared Dog Identification and Monitoring</b>	<p>Restricted Breed and Declared dogs are identified, declared and monitored in accordance with Part 3A of the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i>.</p> <p><b>Current Count as of 8/7/2025 :</b>            Declared Dangerous Dogs   <b>2</b>            Declared Menacing Dogs   <b>4</b></p>
<b>Responsible Pet Ownership</b>	<p>Wellington Shire has developed a very comprehensive responsible pet ownership education resource section on its website. Regular animal management articles are published in local newspapers, on social media and Council's website.</p>
<b>Animals in Emergencies</b>	<p>Through the Wellington Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan, we support and provide safe refuge to pets and their owners in times of emergency, such as fires or floods.</p>

## 2.0: TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

### 2.1 Current Situation

Wellington Shire Council employ six full-time Local Laws officers, all authorised in accordance with:

- Section 72 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*;
- Section 18 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*; and
- Section 313 of the *Local Government Act 2000*.

For the purpose of this plan, three full-time equivalent positions are dedicated to domestic animal management, however additional staff are utilised for planned operations such as annual and unannounced domestic animal business inspections, pet registration checks, animal welfare investigations and emergency situations.

Wellington Shire Council recognises the importance of skilled and qualified staff, as such, individual training plans are developed as part of the professional development and performance appraisal processes.

A dedicated Coordinator Organisational Development is employed to oversee the delivery of initial and ongoing training, in addition to targeted professional development opportunities.

### 2.2 Current Training

The table below outlines the current training opportunities available to local laws staff and their participation.

Subject	Frequency	Officer 1	Officer 2	Officer 3	Officer 4	Officer 5	Officer 6
Initial Induction Training	At commencement of employment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cert IV in Animal Control & Regulation	Once	✓					
Animal Welfare Victoria Animal Management Officer Seminar	Annually	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child Safe Standards	Annually 2 yearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Human Rights	3 yearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prevention of Workplace Bullying and Harassment	Annually	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Subject	Frequency	Officer 1	Officer 2	Officer 3	Officer 4	Officer 5	Officer 6
Record Keeping & Privacy	2 yearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fraud and Corruption Awareness	2 yearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Situational Awareness	2 yearly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of Firearms	As required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of Extendable Batons	As required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Task Specific Training*	As required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Industry Training**	As required	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Occupational Health & Safety Training	Annually	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gippsland Community Leadership Program	Once			✓			

\*Such as Conducting Investigations, Preparing Briefs of Evidence, Statement Taking, Acting on Non-Compliance, Dealing with Nuisance Dogs, 4x4 Operation & Recovery.

\*\*Such as Managing Cats & Dogs in Shelters/Pounds, Dog Bite Prevention, Canine Anatomy.



## 2.3 Planned Training

Wellington Shire Council is committed to providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities for Local Laws staff. A staff development and training plan is developed annually, in consultation with individual staff and their supervisor.

## 2.4 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 1

To maintain a trained, experienced and engaged workforce by developing and maintaining individual training, professional development and performance plans for all local laws staff

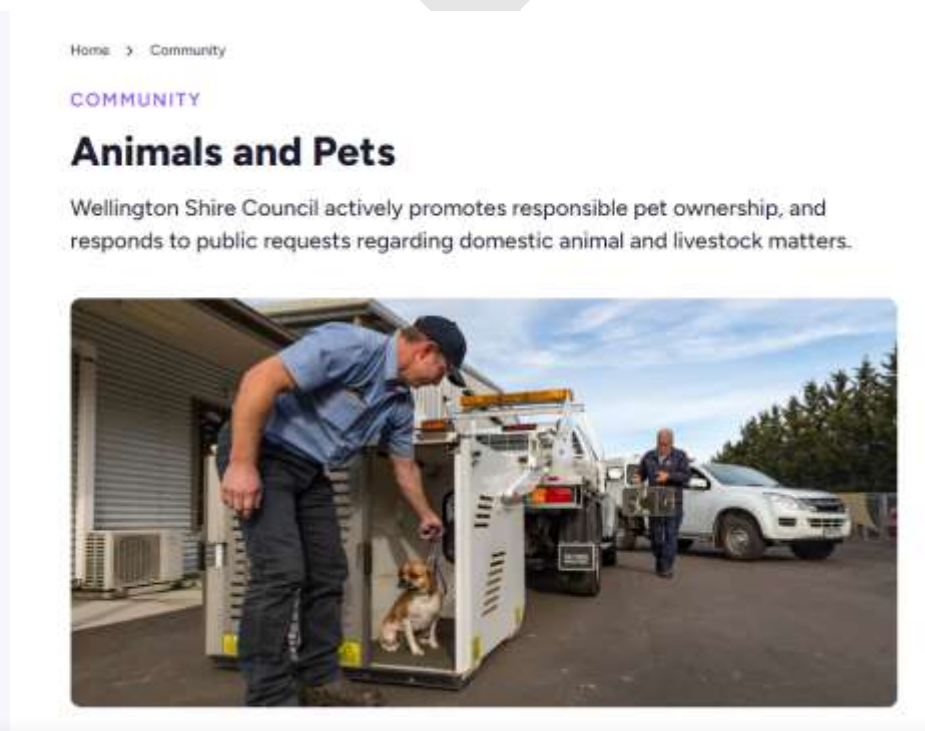
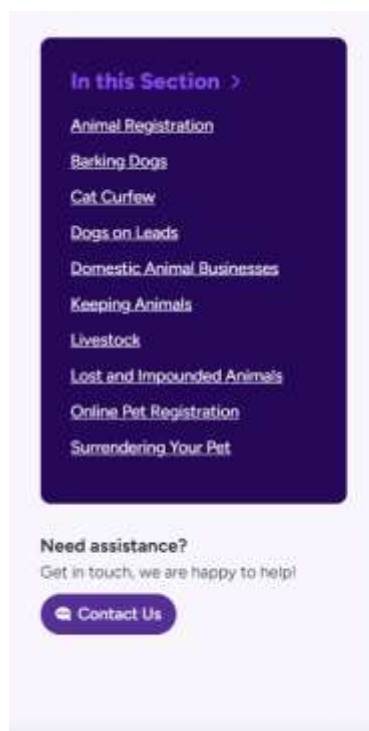
Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Conduct individual performance and development plans, identifying any training or development requirements.	Annually, with six-monthly reviews	Completion of individual performance and development plans, recorded in Council's learning management system.
2) Investigate further communication, conflict resolution and professional development training opportunities.	As required	Increased training and professional development opportunities as recorded in Council's learning management system.
3) Hold regular local laws team meetings in order to encourage a consistent and professional approach to animal management matters.	Monthly	Minutes recorded.

## 3.0: PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP AND COMPLIANCE WITH LEGISLATION

### 3.1 Current Situation

Wellington Shire, through its website, provides pet owners with information and resources designed to promote responsible pet ownership, such as:

- Online Animal Registration
- Dealing with Barking/Nuisance Dogs
- Cat Curfew
- Dogs on Leads
- Keeping Animals
- Lost and Impounded Pets
- Surrendering Your Pet
- Domestic Animal Businesses



Short videos, produced in collaboration with a local veterinarian provide cat owners with guidance on cat containment and wellbeing, and address frequently asked questions about the cat curfew.



Regular articles are published in the local print media and social media to remind pet owners of their responsibilities. Topics include:

- Registering pets
- Cleaning up after dogs
- Cat curfew reminders
- Advantages of microchipping and desexing
- Looking after pets in hot weather



Following extensive community consultation, a 24-hour cat curfew was introduced in January 2023, which requires all cat owners in Wellington Shire to confine their cats to their property.

In the twelve months since the cat curfew came into effect, **81** fewer domestic cats were collected while at large, compared to the twelve-month period directly prior to the curfew.



Wellington Shire Council

October 31, 2024 · 🌐

🐾 Hey, cat parents! Did you know Wellington has a 24/7 cat curfew?

From day to night, our feline friends need to stay in their cosy castles! Why? Because it helps protect them from harm and keeps our wildlife safe.

Since the curfew began in 2023, 81 fewer cats have been collected and complaints are down by 68 compared to the same time in previous years! These reductions show the positive impact of our community's dedication to keeping cats safe and protecting native wildlife.

Thanks for doing your part, keep up the great work 💙



### 3.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> <i>Domestic Animals Regulations 2015</i> <i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986</i>
<b>Council Orders</b>	<i>24-hr Cat Curfew gazetted 19.1.2023</i> <i>Dogs to be Placed on Leads in Nominated Areas gazetted 11.10.2017</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6: Keeping of Animals:</i> 6.1 limits the number of animals on properties based on planning zones 6.2 Regulates the type, location and cleanliness of animal shelters 6.3 Requires dog walkers to carry dog litter bags & pick up after their dogs
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i>
<b>Plans</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Plan 2025-29 Strategic Objective One: Healthy Connected Communities</i>

### 3.3 Our Plan

#### OBJECTIVE 2

Continue to promote and encourage responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Conduct regular reviews of Council's website to ensure all responsible pet ownership information is current and correct	Six-monthly or as required	All responsible pet ownership information on Council's website is current and correct
2) Continue to educate cat owners about the benefits of the 24-hour cat curfew	Quarterly or as required	Reduction in the number of impounded domestic cats
3) Continue to publish regular responsible pet ownership articles in print and social media	Quarterly or as required	At least one responsible pet ownership article released for print or social media quarterly

## 4.0: PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS OVERPOPULATION AND HIGH EUTHANASIA RATES

### 4.1 Current Situation

Wellington Shire Council has a contract with Victorian Animal Aid Trust (Animal Aid) for the provision of pound and animal shelter services on behalf of Council. The contract commenced on 1 August 2022 and is for a five-year period with provision for two, two-year extensions.

Animal Aid is a leader in providing care for lost, injured, abandoned or surrendered animals until they can be successfully rehomed, no matter how long it takes.

The current contract requires Animal Aid to comply with the *Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds*. Six monthly audits are conducted by Council staff to ensure compliance with the service specifications and to ensure all animals' health and welfare requirements are addressed.

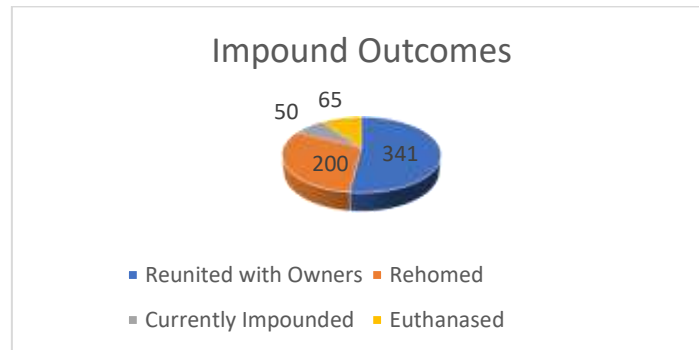
In June 2020, Wellington Shire entered into a section 84Y of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* agreement with the Maffra Animal Clinic. The purpose of the agreement was to facilitate the rehoming of cats and kittens surrendered directly to the clinic.

Wellington Shire Council welcomes the direction set by the Animal Welfare Victoria *Victorian Cat Management Strategy 2025-2035*. While the Council is already implementing several key elements of the strategy, such as cat containment, promoting feline welfare, encouraging responsible ownership, and managing the impacts of feral cat populations, it recognises that effective cat management requires a collaborative approach. Council looks forward to working with other stakeholders across the sector to strengthen outcomes for cats and the broader community.

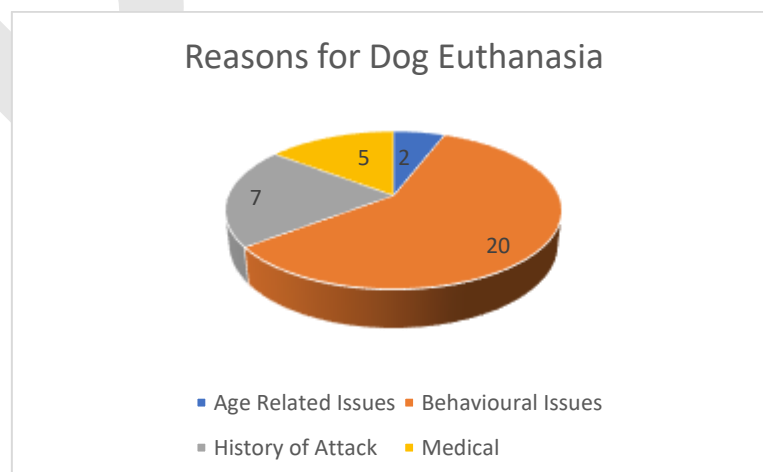
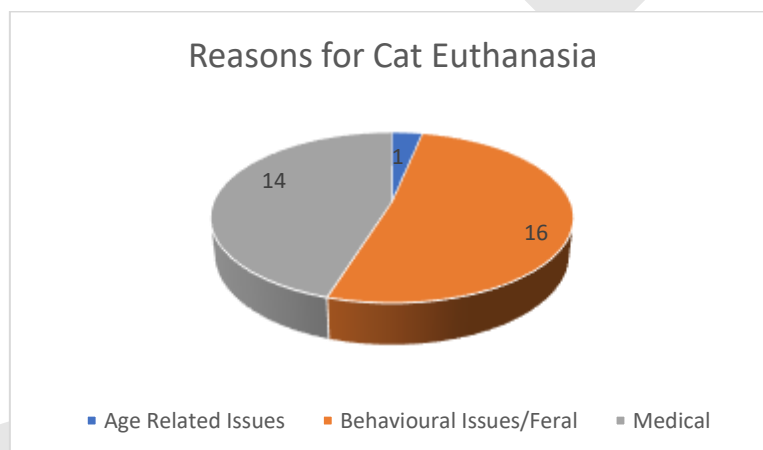


Through the outstanding work of Victorian Animal Aid Trust, unclaimed cats and dogs have an increased prospect of successful rehoming.

During the 2024-2025 financial year, **656** lost or surrendered animals were received at the Pound and Shelter. The chart below shows the outcomes of impounded animals.



Unfortunately, **65** animals were euthanised during the same period. The charts below outline the reasons for euthanasia:



## 4.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> <i>Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds</i>
<b>Council Orders</b>	<i>24-hr Cat Curfew gazetted 19.1.2023</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6: Keeping of Animals</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i> <i>Wellington Shire Feral Cat Trap Hire Process</i> <i>Wellington Shire Council Pet Surrender Process</i>
<b>Strategies</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Plan 2025-29 Strategic Objective One: Healthy Connected Communities</i>
<b>Other</b>	<i>Provision of Pound and Shelter Services contract between Wellington Shire Council and Victorian Animal Aid Trust.</i>

## 4.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 3

Reduce overpopulation and euthanasia rates of unwanted cats and dogs by maintaining feral cat and pet rehoming programs

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Continue to actively promote the Animal Aid pet adoption program through Council's website and local media	Ongoing	Link to Animal Aid adoptions published on Council's website
2) Promote responsible pet ownership, particularly the importance of desexing and keeping pets contained to properties	Quarterly or as required	At least one responsible pet ownership article released via social or local media quarterly
3) Continue with the feral cat trapping program	As required	Adequate stock of traps and booking system maintained.
4) Identify opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders such as Government departments to improve cat management practices and outcomes.	As opportunities arise	Opportunities for collaboration explored. Maintain currency with developments in the Victorian Cat Management Strategy. Participate in any industry sessions or surveys



## 5.0: REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

### 5.1 Current Situation

Domestic animal registration is conducted in accordance with Part 2 of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

Council data indicates the compliance rate for dog registration is 73% compared with the estimated population of 11,787, and a compliance rate for cat registration of 21% compared with an estimated population of 9,973.

<b>Estimated Number of Dogs</b> 11,787	<b>Estimated Number of Cats</b> 9,973
<b>Number of Registered Dogs</b> 7,426	<b>Number of Registered Cats</b> 1,850

While cat and dog registrations have increased over the past four years, the compliance rate has dropped from 93% for dog registrations and 30% for cat registrations<sup>5</sup>. An increase in pet ownership based on post pandemic surveys has decreased the compliance rate. Cat registrations is an area of concern.

Many households are experiencing an increase in living costs. Households with government payments as their main source of income saw the largest rise in living costs (3.2%) in the second quarter of 2025, particularly in the areas of rents, food and health costs.<sup>6</sup>

It is recognised that in some cases; pet owners need to make difficult choices when managing household budgets. Pet registration is one area that can fall by the wayside when owners are attempting to manage competing financial priorities.

Balancing the needs of pet owners, their pets and the legal requirement to register pets is challenging. Wherever possible, Council will work with pet owners to assist them meet their registration obligations.

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<sup>5</sup> Refer 1.4: Wellington Shire Demographic Snapshot

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics May 2025

## 5.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> <i>Domestic Animals Regulations 2015</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6: Keeping of Animals.</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i> Domestic Animal Registration/Renewal processes Impounding of Unregistered Cats & Dogs processes Release of Impounded Animals to Identified Owners process
<b>Other</b>	Service Delivery Contract between Wellington Shire Council and Victorian Animal Aid Trust (requirement that all animals are registered before release)

Council's current compliance activities include:

- Annual pet registration renewal process
- Follow-up with owners of unregistered pets after 10 April each year
- Door knocks in areas identified as having a low pet registration rate
- Foot patrols of popular dog walking areas, checking registration compliance
- Impounding unregistered cats and dogs found at large
- Notices to Comply for identified unregistered animals
- Infringement notices issued to owners of unregistered animals
- Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria for unpaid infringements
- Registration of all animals before release from the pound
- Inspections of records of Domestic Animal Business to ensure compliance with registration requirements.

## 5.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 4

To increase the number of pet registrations within Wellington Shire Council each year for the duration of this Plan, with a continued emphasis on increasing compliance amongst cat owners.

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Continue to promote responsible pet ownership, including registration through Council's website, social and local media	Quarterly	At least one responsible pet ownership article released quarterly
2) Conduct annual pet registration renewal process	April each year	Annual pet registration renewal process completed
3) Follow up on lapsed registrations	As required, from mid-April each year	Follow ups completed and recorded
4) Conduct targeted door knocks in areas identified with high levels of non-compliance	As required, from mid-April each year	Door knocks and letter drops completed and recorded.
5) Follow up on change of pet ownership notifications	As required	Follow ups completed and recorded
6) Adopt a consistent enforcement approach aimed at encouraging owners to register their pets	As required	Number of Notices to Comply, infringements and prosecutions for unregistered animals
7) Ensure no unregistered animal is released from the pound	Ongoing	All animals are registered before being reunited with their owners, or rehomed

## 6.0: NUISANCE PETS

### 6.1 Current Situation

During the 2024-2025 financial year, Local Laws staff have responded to **1,286** domestic animal related complaints, with an average initial response time of **1.3** days.

Complaints can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Wandering/stray cats/dogs
- Barking dogs
- Unregistered cats/dogs
- Excess animals on residential premises
- Abandoned pets
- Aggressive dogs
- Dog excrement

**Complaints Received**

**1,286**

**Average Response Time**

**1.3 Days**

Since the 24-hr cat curfew was introduced to Wellington Shire in July 2023, Council has experienced a 20% reduction in the number of domesticated cats impounded. Complaints relating to wandering/nuisance cats also reduced. Over the first 12 months of the curfew, **81** fewer domestic cats were collected, compared with the 12 months directly preceding the cat curfew. This declining trend continues.



Wellington Shire Council recognises that dogs that bark excessively can become a source of friction between neighbours and others enjoying the local environment.

Council has a dedicated page on its website providing information on:

- Why dogs bark
- Neighbourhood communication
- Lodging a complaint with Council
- Council action
- Tips for dog owners to reduce barking.

During the 2024-2025 financial year, approximately 85% of barking dog complaints were resolved after Council's first contact with the dog owner. Further enforcement options, including notices to abate the nuisance, infringements and prosecutions in the Magistrate's court are available if required.



## 6.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i>
<b>Council Orders</b>	<i>24-hr Cat Curfew gazetted 19.1.2023</i> <i>Dogs to be Placed on Leads in Nominated Areas gazetted 11.10.2017</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6:</i> Keeping of Animals 6.3: Requirement to carry animal litter device 6.4: Animal nuisance (excessive noise/smells)
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i> Nuisance (Barking) Dog Process



	Feral Cat Trap Hire Process After-Hours Response to Animal Complaints Process Impounding of Stray Cats and Dogs Process
<b>Strategies</b>	Wellington Shire Council Plan 2025-29 Strategic Objective One: Healthy Connected Communities
<b>Other</b>	Provision of Pound and Shelter Services contract between Wellington Shire Council and Victorian Animal Aid Trust.

Council's current compliance activities include:

- Ensuring all nuisance complaints are acknowledged, recorded and actioned
- Feral/trespassing cat trapping program available to all residents
- Wandering cats and dogs collected. Appropriate action taken
- Verbal warnings, notices to comply and if necessary, infringements issued to owners of wandering pets
- Unannounced inspections and/or stand-off monitoring of properties identified as having ongoing nuisance complaints
- Prosecution through the Magistrates' Court and the seeking of Court abatement or removal orders for nuisance dogs.

To support engagement and education among pet owners, Council has implemented a three staged approach to managing wandering or at-large cats and dogs.

1. If the animal is registered and has no prior history of being at large, where possible the animal will be returned to the owner.
2. If the animal is registered and there has been one previous incident of being at large, where possible the animal will be returned to the owner, and a verbal or written warning will be issued.
3. If the animal is registered and there is a history of the animal being at large on more than two previous occasions, the animal will be impounded, and an infringement notice will be issued to the owner.

Unregistered animals found at large are impounded, requiring the owner to register the animal and pay the appropriate release fee before release.

## 6.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 5

Continue to encourage responsible pet ownership throughout Wellington Shire by responding to, investigating and acting on animal nuisance reports in a timely and effective manner.

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Actively enforce Council's cat curfew.	As required	Number of compliance actions taken
2) Continue to work closely with owners of nuisance/barking dogs to ensure a lasting solution	As required	Reviewed on a case-by-case basis
3) Continue to promote responsible pet ownership through Council's website, social and local media	Quarterly	At least one responsible pet ownership article released quarterly
4) Ensure dog bag dispensers are regularly stocked and maintained	As required	Regular inspections to ensure dispensers are serviceable and stocked
5) Ensure responsible pet ownership brochures are readily available and issued when required	Annually	Sufficient stock is ordered and available
6) Regularly review the information on Council's website regarding nuisance animals and the cat curfew to ensure currency	Six-monthly	Council's website contents reviewed to ensure it is up to date

## 7.0: DOG ATTACKS

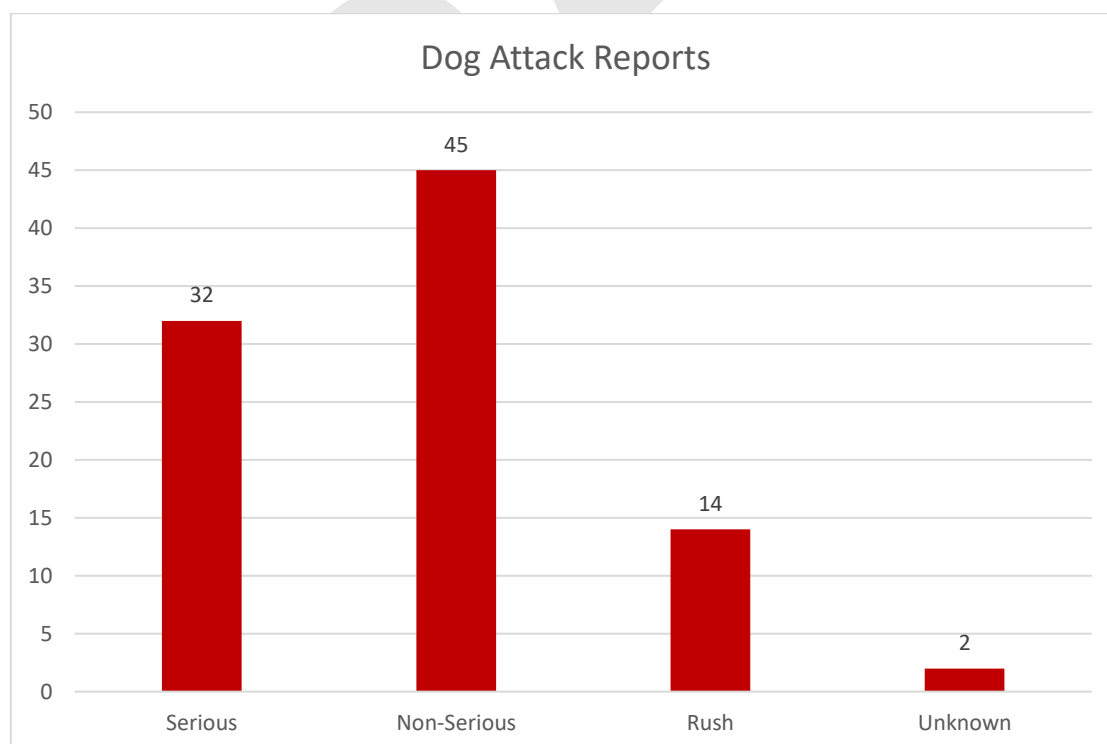
### 7.1 Current Situation

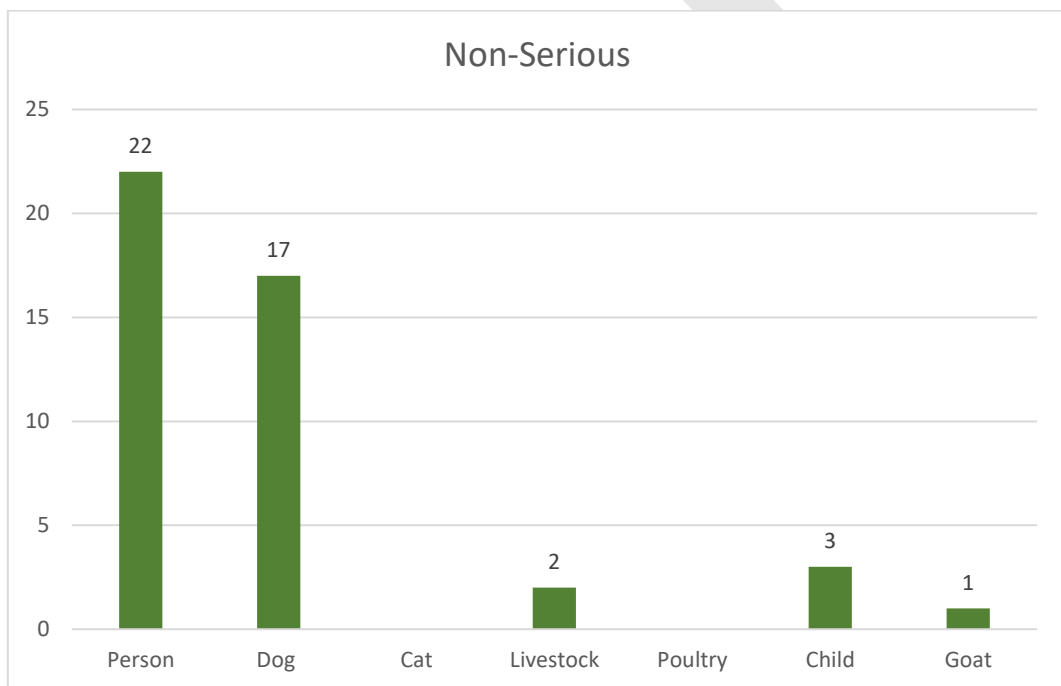
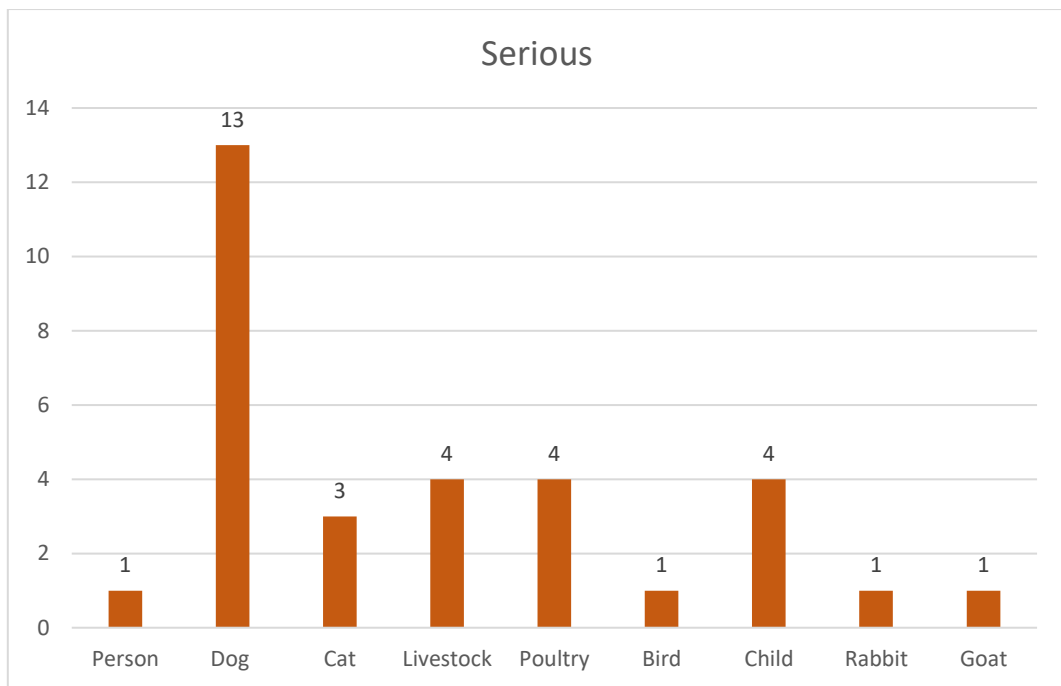
For the period 17 April 2024 – 16 April 2025, **93** dog attack reports were received and investigated by council.

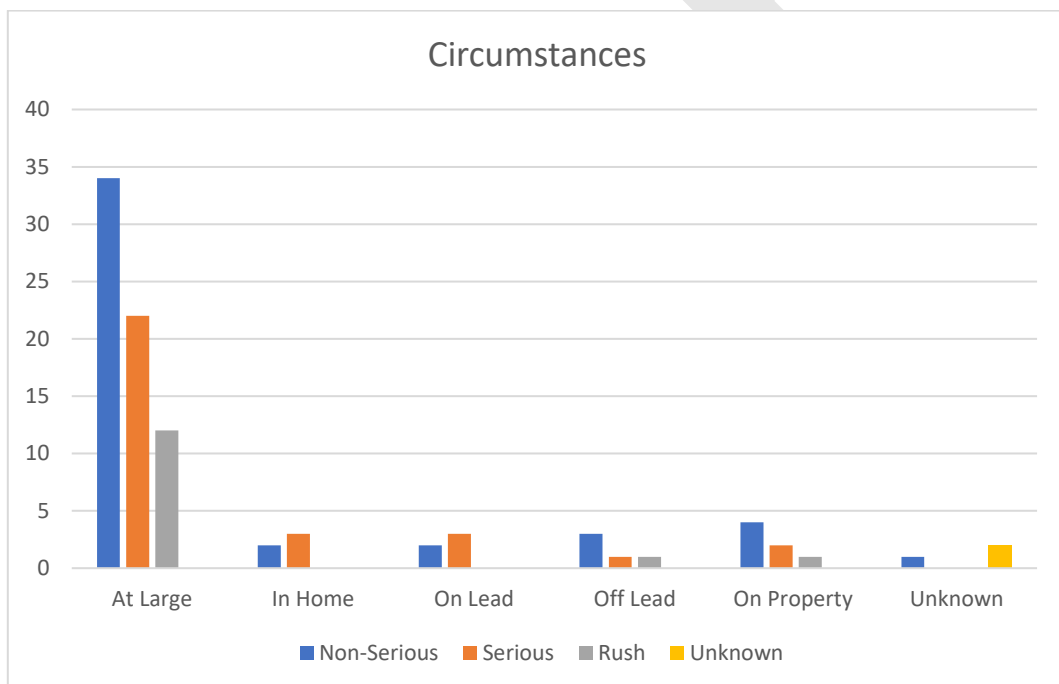
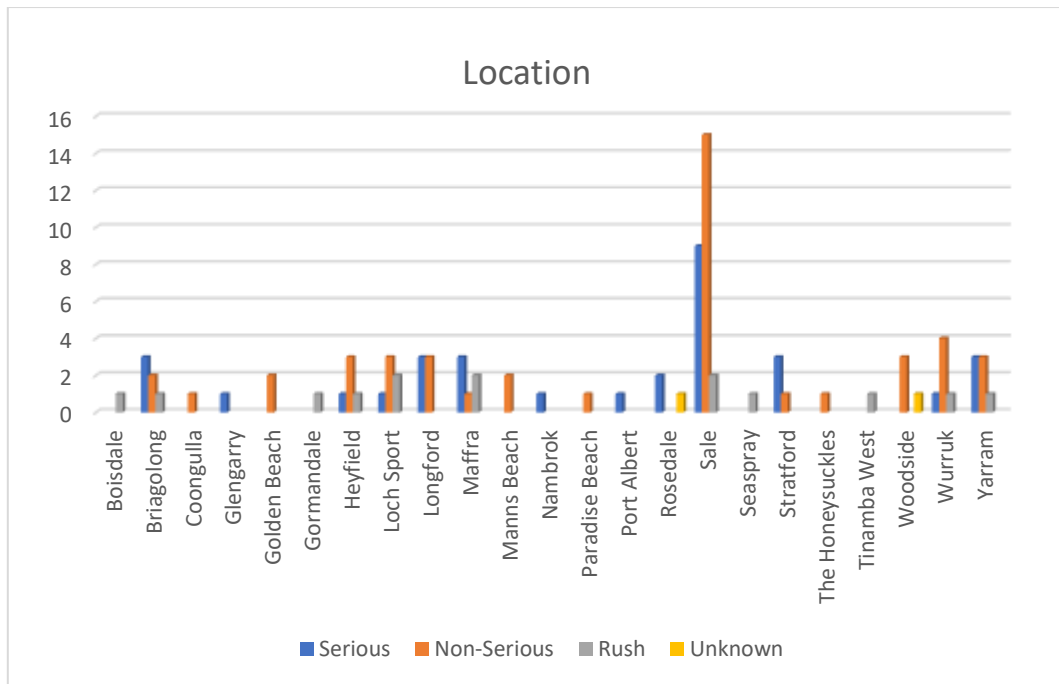
Serious dog attacks on people remained relatively static over the past four years, however the number of incidents involving children in the home (**4**) is a concern.

The reports have been analysed to provide Council with a better understanding on the types, circumstances, locations and outcomes of the attacks reported.

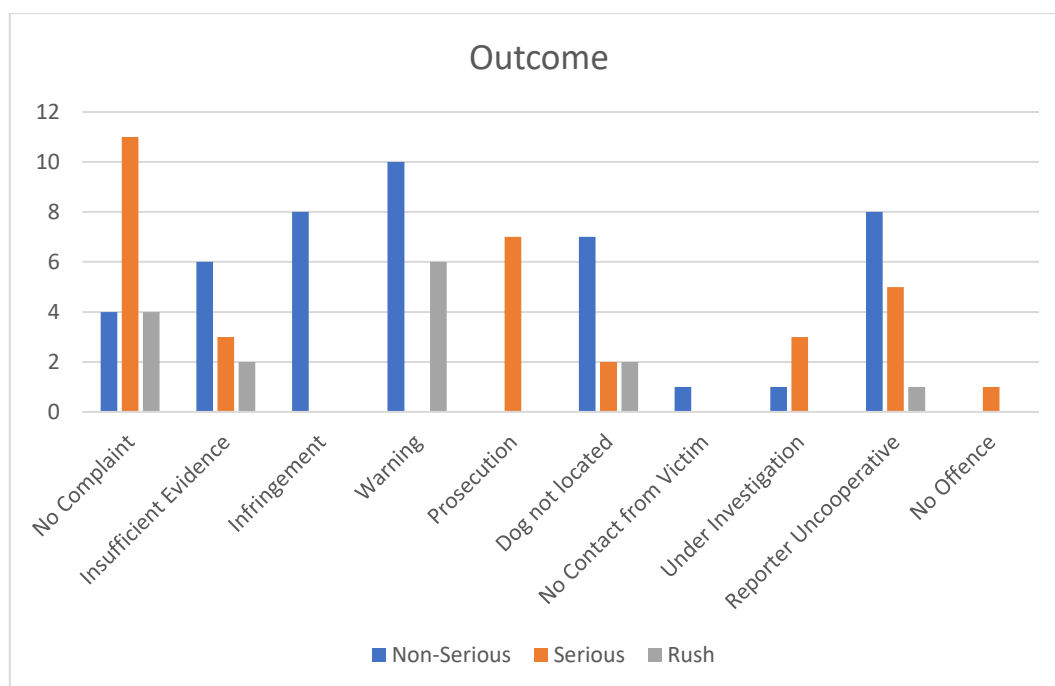
- **68 (73%)** of all attacks occurred while the attacking dog was at large.
- **12 (13%)** occurred while the attacking dog was in the home or on the property.
- **26 (28%)** of reported dog attacks occurred in Sale, which has the highest population in the Shire.
- **16** warnings and **8** infringements were issued to dog owners for non-serious attacks and rushes.
- **7** serious dog attack matters were successfully prosecuted in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.
- **3** serious dog attack matters are currently before the Court.
- **16** dogs alleged to have been involved in attacks were seized by Council pending an outcome of investigations and/or prosecutions.











## 7.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i>
<b>Council Orders</b>	<i>Dogs to be Placed on Leads in Nominated Areas</i> gazetted 11.10.2017
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6: Keeping of Animals</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines:</i> After-Hours Response to Animal Complaints Process Dangerous/Menacing Dog Declaration Process Search Warrant and Seizure Processes Dog Surrender due to Aggressive Behaviour process
<b>Strategies</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Plan 2025-29 Strategic Objective One: Healthy Connected Communities</i>
<b>Other</b>	Provision of Pound and Shelter Services contract between Wellington Shire Council and Victorian Animal Aid Trust (requirement to care for seized dogs)

Council's current compliance activities include:

- Provision of 7-day, 24-hour response to dog attack reports
- All reported dog attacks thoroughly investigated
- Temperament testing of all impounded dogs prior to rehoming
- Regular patrols of areas identified as having a high incidence of wandering dogs.

## 7.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 6

**Reduce the number of serious and non-serious dog attacks by encouraging responsible pet ownership, maintaining a rapid and thorough response to dog attack reports and vigorously pursue legislative recourses such as infringements and prosecutions for dogs at large and dog attacks.**

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Thoroughly investigate all dog attack reports	As required	All investigation outcomes are recorded on Council's information management system
2) Increase patrols of areas identified as having a high incidence of wandering dogs, particularly in Sale	Ongoing	A reduced number of wandering dog reports received by Council
3) Continue to promote responsible pet ownership through Council's website, social and local media	Quarterly	At least one responsible pet ownership article released quarterly
4) Implement an awareness program of child safety around dogs in the home	Year two of the Plan	Child safety around dogs program developed and released to the public
5) Utilise the Victorian Declared Dog Registry to identify high-risk dogs	Ongoing	VDDR regularly audited and updated as required
6) Continue to work closely with Victoria Police and RSPCA to identify and respond to reports of neglected/aggressive dogs.	Ongoing	Combined operations conducted and recorded

## 8.0: DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

### 8.1 Current Situation

Wellington Shire Council actively identifies and manages declared dogs in accordance with Part 3A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*.

Annual unannounced inspections are conducted by authorised officers at properties identified as housing declared dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs. Any non-compliance is dealt with swiftly. If necessary, the dogs are seized, and appropriate legal action is taken.

Council regularly consults the Victorian Declared Dog Register (VDDR) to ensure declared dog data is captured accurately.

There are currently 6 declared dogs within Wellington Shire:

<b>Declared Dangerous</b>	2
<b>Declared Menacing</b>	4

### 8.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994, Part 3A</i> <i>Domestic Animals Regulations 2015, Part 2</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6:</i> Keeping of Animals
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i> After-Hours Response to Animal Complaints Process Dangerous/Menacing Dog Declaration Process Search Warrant and Seizure Processes Dog Surrender due to Aggressive Behaviour process
<b>Strategies</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Plan 2025-29 Strategic Objective One:</i> Healthy Connected Communities
<b>Other</b>	Provision of Pound and Shelter Services contract between Wellington Shire Council and Victorian Animal Aid Trust (requirement to care for seized dogs) Victorian Declared Dog Register (VDDR) Council's Animal Registration Database (highlights declared dogs)

Council's current compliance activities include:

- Unannounced inspections of properties known to house declared dogs.
- All declared dog owners provided with information on their legislative responsibilities.
- All dog attack investigations reviewed to determine whether a declaration is required.
- Victorian Declared Dog Registry reviewed to ensure currency/accuracy.

## 8.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 7

**Maintain continued compliance with legislation relating to declared and restricted breed dogs.**

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Ensure adequate staff are trained in Canine Anatomy and Identification, so as to confidently identify restricted breed dogs	Ongoing	Training records updated to reflect Canine Anatomy and Identification attendance
2) Review all dog attack investigations to determine if a declaration is appropriate	Ongoing	Investigations and reviews conducted and stored on Council's record management system
3) Conduct unannounced inspections of all properties identified as housing declared dogs	At Least Annually	Results of inspections recorded on Council's record management system
4) Regularly review the Victorian Declared Dog Registry to ensure currency and accuracy	At Least 6-monthly	VDDR reviewed and updated as necessary.



## 9.0: DOMESTIC ANIMAL BUSINESSES

### 9.1 Current Situation

There are currently 20 Domestic Animal Businesses (DABs) registered with Wellington Shire Council (see table below).

All registered DABs are inspected at least annually to ensure compliance with the relevant Code of Practice. Continued registration is conditional on compliance with the relevant Code. Where breaches of the Code have been identified, they are dealt with by way of notices to comply, work schedules, infringements and, in serious cases, prosecution.

During the 2024-2025 financial year, two large scale unregistered dog breeding facilities have been identified. The matters are currently before the Court.

<b>Animal Shelter</b>	1
<b>Pound and Shelter</b>	1
<b>Pet Shop</b>	2
<b>Boarding Establishment</b>	6
<b>Training Establishment</b>	5
<b>Breeding and Rearing Establishment</b>	5

Part Four of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* requires any breeding domestic animal business with over ten relevant fertile female dogs to seek approval from the Minister for Agriculture in addition to being registered as a DAB with Council. They are known as Commercial Breeders. There are currently five Commercial Breeding establishments registered with Wellington Shire Council. Since 2020, seven breeding domestic animal businesses with less than ten relevant fertile female dogs have opted not to renew their registration with Wellington Shire and become a member of an applicable organisation which allows them to continue operating as a recreational breeder.



## 9.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994, Part 4</i> <i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986</i> <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i> <i>Code of Practice for the Management of Cats and Dogs in Shelters &amp; Pounds</i> <i>Code of Practice for the Operation of Boarding Establishments</i> <i>Code of Practice for the Operation of Pet Shops</i> <i>Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Establishments</i>
<b>Local Law</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Community Local Law 2021, Part 6: Keeping of Animals</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<i>Wellington Shire Council Offence Management Guidelines</i> <i>Annual DAB Inspection program</i>

Council's current compliance activities include:

- Annual audits of all registered DABs
- Unannounced inspections of DABs where potential breaches of the relevant Code of Practice have been identified
- Investigating reports of unregistered DABs and where appropriate prosecutions in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria
- Combined operations with the RSPCA where illegal breeding activities are reported/suspected.
- Regular monitoring of Internet sites that advertise pets, such as Facebook Marketplace and Dogzonline to identify any unregistered breeding facilities that may be operating in the Shire
- Provision of information regarding commercial breeder applications to Animal Welfare Victoria

## 9.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 8

**Ensure all Domestic Animal Businesses within Wellington Shire are Identified and regulated in accordance with the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and relevant Codes of Practice.**

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Investigate all reports of unregistered DABs	As required	All investigations recorded on Council's record management system
2) Maintain an accurate register of all DABs within the Shire	Ongoing	DAB Register periodically audited to ensure accuracy



Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
3) Promptly respond to all DAB information requests from Agriculture Victoria	As required	All responses completed within 5 working days and recorded on Council's record management system
4) Maintain an inspection schedule to ensure all DABs are inspected and audited at least annually	At Least Annually	All DABs inspected/audited, and the audit results recorded in Council's record management system
5) Conduct unannounced inspections of DABs in response to reports/concerns from members of the public	As required	All complaints and responses recorded on Council's record management system

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## 10.0: ANIMALS IN EMERGENCIES

### 10.1 Current Situation

Wellington Shire has historically been subjected to major floods and fires, which have had a devastating impact on the environment, property, the wellbeing of residents and their animals.

Family pets can be a deciding factor for people when making decisions about their personal safety, such as evacuating a threatened property or seeking emergency shelter.

Animal owners have the ultimate responsibility to plan and provide for the needs of their pets in emergencies. Several organisations share animal welfare responsibility and together have an enormous capacity and willingness to assist pet owners during emergencies.

Wellington Shire Council is responsible for the coordination, provision and operation of emergency relief centres. By doing so, it is also responsible for the coordination and provision of safe refuges for affected pets and the management of animal welfare at its relief centres.

Family and gender-based violence is a significant issue in Wellington, affecting one in five women and contributing to preventable death, illness, homelessness, and poor mental health.

Those fleeing situations of family violence are often burdened with a great number of considerations.

Wellington Shire Council recognises that pets are a part of the lives of many families and may be a deciding factor when considering whether to leave an abusive environment. To assist those fleeing family violence situations, no cost pet respite care is offered, where pets are taken into the care of our animal shelter until a safe alternative is attained.

### 10.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994.</i> <i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986</i> <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	Wellington Shire Council Municipal Emergency Management Plan Wellington Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan
<b>Other</b>	Emergency Management Manual Victoria Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan Guidelines for Managing Animals at Emergency Relief Centres

Council's current activities include:

- Emergency information available on Council's website
- Annual Emergency Management refresher training conducted
- Annual inspections of safe refuge sites
- Regular stocktakes of emergency equipment
- Regular reviews of the Wellington Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan to ensure currency.

## 10.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 9

**Remain in a constant state of readiness to respond rapidly and appropriately to any emergency impacting people, their pets and animals.**



Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Ensure sufficient emergency response equipment is available for rapid deployment	Six-monthly	Stocktake conducted and recorded
2) Ensure local laws participation in annual emergency management refresher training	Annually	Training conducted and recorded on Council's training and development system
3) Conduct annual inspections of safe refuges to ensure they remain suitable as temporary accommodation for animals	Annually	Safe refuges inspected and the results recorded
4) Conduct regular reviews of the Wellington Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan to ensure currency	As required	Wellington Shire Council Emergency Animal Welfare Plan is current and correct
5) Ensure an ongoing capacity at the animal shelter to cater for pets requiring respite care	Ongoing	Number of pets received at the shelter annually requiring respite care

# 11.0: REVIEW OF DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

## 11.1 Current Situation

Section 68A (1) of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* requires every Council to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years.

Section 68A (3) of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* requires every Council to:

- a) Review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually, and if appropriate amend the plan;
- b) Provide the Secretary with a copy of the Plan and any amendments to the Plan;
- c) Publish an evaluation of the Plan in its annual report.

## 11.2 Our Orders, Local Laws, Council Policies & Procedures

<b>Legislative</b>	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> Section 68A
<b>Other</b>	Wellington Shire Council Annual Report

## 11.3 Our Plan

### OBJECTIVE 10

**Maintain compliance with section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* by preparing a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years and conducting annual reviews of the Plan.**

Activity	Frequency	Evaluation
1) Prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years	Four-Yearly	Compliance with section 68A (1) of the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> . Plan submitted to the Secretary Animal Welfare Victoria.
2) Conduct annual reviews of the Domestic Animal Management Plan	Annually	Compliance with section 68A (3) of the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> . Review submitted to the Secretary Animal Welfare Victoria.
3) Publish an evaluation of the implementation of the DAM Plan in Council's Annual Report	Annually	Compliance with section 68A (3) of the <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i> . Evaluation published in annual report



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