

## **REPORT ON WAIPA DISTRICT COUNCIL DOG CONTROL POLICY AND PRACTICES 2008/09**

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### **PART 1 – DOG CONTROL POLICY AND PRACTICES**

#### **1 DOG CONTROL IN DISTRICT**

The total number of active dogs on Council's register is 6,427 (6355 in 07/08). Council staff stopped taking 2008/09 registrations at the end of May 2009, and as at 5 June 2009 there were 6,430 dogs registered. At the time of writing this report there are 3,390 rural dogs, 3,030 urban dogs (1,616 with fencing discount, so over half with approved fencing) and seven dogs are guide or exempt fee dogs.

Council provides a round the clock animal control service, with Council's animal control officers covering business hours. Council's contractors, Select Security cover emergency calls after-hours, weekends and public holidays. Council's animal control staff provide training for the contractors, and both organisations work closely together. Council also liaises regularly with the local police, veterinarians and the Te Awamutu SPCA.

Council employs two animal control officers, an animal control co-ordinator and a part-time animal control administrator, with the Environmental Safety Manager as manager of the team. The two officers have continued to work in the field, whilst the Animal Control Co-ordinator has continued to oversee the administration of the Council database and the National Dog Database (NDD), the registration process, provide technical support and cover for the field officers.

Two animal control pounds are maintained and operated, one in Cambridge and one in Kihikihi with facilities for impounding dogs. This year the statistics demonstrate an increase in the number of impoundings. There have been 284 dogs impounded, with 202 dogs claimed, 45 dogs destroyed, and 35 re-homed. Last year there were 236 dogs impounded, with 200 dogs claimed, 28 dogs destroyed and 8 dogs re-homed. Dog owners claiming impounded dogs are required to pay an impounding fine, as well as registration and microchipping fees if the dog was unregistered.

Some improvements have been made to the Cambridge pound this year, and the exterior repainted. Population projections in the Waipa 2050 growth strategy will assist with planning for future needs, as there will be an associated increase in the numbers of dogs.

Microchip clinics continue to be held every 2 to 3 months, usually during daylight hours on a Saturday in the winter, and in the evenings after work in the summer. The clinics are held at both pounds in Kihikihi and Cambridge. Letters are sent to those who have not complied with the legislation and produced a microchip certificate to Council within two months of registration, or due to classification require to microchip their dog. Owners are charged \$25 to cover costs, and animal control officers, who have received training, carry out the microchipping. The clinics have proved to be successful and cut down on the need to chase up owners or carry out enforcement action. They also provide a useful opportunity for inter-action between animal control staff and dog owners.

The focus for the year has been on a number of matters, including a drive to reduce the number of unregistered dogs. There has also been some preparation for the upcoming review of The Waipa District Dog Control Bylaw 2004 and Dog Control Policy 2004. A survey was issued to all dog owners in the District and also some canvassing of members of the general public has been done. So far, 892 surveys have been collated and analysed. These have provided useful feedback for consideration of policy and bylaw matters. The majority support the existing Policy in the District. The review process is due to be completed by December 2009.

Further amendments to the Dog Control Act 1996 were proposed by central government. However, with the change of government this has not progressed further at this stage.

## **2 DOG CONTROL ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES**

For the period to the end of June 2009, Council received 1,346 dog-related complaints, which is again an increase on previous years, with the number recorded last year being 1,277. In most of these cases, owners have not sufficiently contained dogs on their property, or incidents are one-offs where the owner has not been aware of what their dog may be capable of doing. The first approach by animal control staff when following up complaints is always one of using education. If a registered dog is picked up for a first wandering offence, the dog is returned to the owner with a verbal warning rather than impounded.

Complaints relating to wandering dogs number 719 and 341 to barking dogs, a notable increase in the number of wandering dogs from last year which was 610. These are the most common complaints in other Districts also. In the case of wandering dogs, animal control staff work with complainants to track and capture dogs, sometimes using traps.

Most barking complaints are resolved swiftly once the owner is aware of the problem. In more persistent cases, the animal control officer will ask the complainant(s) to keep a log of the barking and will survey other neighbours to establish if the barking is a problem. An Abatement Notice can then be served under the Act, and objections heard by Council's Regulatory Committee. Staff have found this a useful tool and have never had to ask an owner to remove their dog from a property and keep it elsewhere permanently. No Abatement Notices have been issued in the last year, with staff working hard with dog owners to resolve barking issues.

Council received 82 complaints related to attacks or aggressive dog incidents, an improvement compared to 116 the previous year. All incidents are investigated and a rating sheet is completed by staff to help ensure a consistent approach to enforcement as there is discretion in the Act as to what action can be taken, ranging from a verbal warning to prosecution. Cases are assessed on an individual basis. This year enforcement measures for dangerous/aggressive dog incidents have included five dangerous dog classifications but no menacing dog classifications (3 of each in 2007/08) and in more minor cases, the issue of infringement fines. In some cases, the owner has arranged for the dog to be destroyed. The dangerous dog classification is a useful tool, due to the requirement for fencing.

By the end of June 2009, 44 infringement notices had been issued and either paid by the owner or followed through by the District Court (67 issued but some withdrawn after objections considered):

- ◆ 29 for non-registration (\$300 fine);
- ◆ 3 for failing to microchip a dog (\$300);
- ◆ 7 for failure to control/breach of bylaw (either \$200 or \$300 depending on whether or not the incident occurred in a public place or on private property);
- ◆ 5 for failing to meet the requirements of a dangerous dog or menacing dog classification.

It is certainly effective and useful to have infringement fines available. There were less infringements issued, possibly due to better compliance. Also considerable effort was made to contact dog owners by phone to follow up non-registration, rather than through instant fines.

There were no prosecutions commenced in the year.

### **3 DOGS PROHIBITED, LEASH ONLY AND DOG EXERCISE AREAS**

In Waipa, Council's policy is for all dogs to be on a leash in public places and most dog owners adhere to this. There are also dog prohibited areas, such as sports grounds, children playgrounds and schools. Signage is installed in exercise and prohibited areas to distinguish them and an increasing number of dog on lead signs are being added as well to remind owners of the Council's requirement. Animal control staff are required to replace signs on a regular basis, and an electronic photographic inventory of signs and bins is maintained to assist with checks.

There are now a total of 27 dog faeces receptacles which are regularly emptied. The dog exercise areas and dog faeces receptacles are well-used by dog owners. A contract is now in place with an existing Council contractor who empties all council bins, including the dog faeces ones. This allows animal control officers to concentrate on their core duties and more bins to be installed. The recent survey of dog owners indicated strong demand for more bins. Three dog faeces bag dispensers have also been trialled at busy dog exercise areas and are also popular.

Feedback from the survey indicated many owners would like more dog exercise areas, in particular fenced areas and also with facilities such as drinking water. The dog exercise areas and prohibited areas, as well as policy requirements such as dogs on leads will all be considered as part of the review of the 2004 Dog Control Policy and Dog Control Bylaw. Council staff have undertaken preparation work with reviewing existing sites and liaising with other Council departments.

### **4 DOG REGISTRATION AND OTHER FEES**

A review of the fees for dog registration was completed this year, and Council approved an increase in fees of \$5 per dog for the 2009/10 year. The fees had not been increased for two years, since 2006/07, when fees were increased by \$10 per dog. It was considered that incremental increases would be better. The fees are still very reasonable in comparison with neighbouring districts, many of which charge over \$100 for an urban dog before discounts. The funding policy requires 45% of the department costs to come from registration, impounding and infringement fees.

There is still a discount of \$20 for dog registration payment by 31 July, and discounts of \$15 and \$10 for fencing and neutering. These can be regarded as good preventative measures to stop dogs wandering which account for the majority of complaints referred to Council. The \$20 discount for payment by 31 July is generous, but the Dog Control Act 1996 allows for territorial authorities to impose an increase in fees by up to 50% after that date (which if applied would amount to more than \$20). It is a good incentive for owners to register in a timely manner, which means a high percentage of owners have registered their dogs by the end of July each year. This saves a great deal of staff time chasing up unregistered dogs.

The recent survey of owners indicated support for the discounts and fees. There were many comments and suggestions though with regard to fees and charges, and a full review will be carried out later this year to give consideration to the feedback.

The increase in fees will also absorb the levy collected by the Department of Internal Affairs in respect of the National Dog Database. The share for Waipa District for 2007/08 was \$3,634.41. The share for Waipa District for the 2008/09 year was \$3,428.00. The annual levy is required to be paid by 30 September each year.

Council staff follow up on unregistered dogs each year and issue infringement fines, if registration takes place immediately the infringement fine may be waived, except in the case of repeat offenders. Over the last few years, animal control staff have been able to keep reducing the number of unregistered dogs to less than 100 dogs, this year it was down to 50 dogs.

## **5 DOG EDUCATION AND DOG OBEDIENCE COURSES**

An annual newsletter is sent to all dog owners each May, and each year Council organises a seminar or event. This year animal control staff participated in the Cambridge Christmas parade to carry out some education. Council staff also took part in the VE Vet Day in Te Awamutu. Staff assisted with workshops and open days conducted by Council and carried out school, kindergarden and pippins visits. Animal control officers are involved after-hours with local puppy classes and dog obedience classes as well.

In addition, the microchipping clinics have been seen as providing an opportunity to provide education. All new dog owners in the District are issued with an "owner information and dog registration pack" which contains information on training and obedience courses and Council also has a number of information leaflets to assist owners.

## **6 DISQUALIFIED AND PROBATIONARY DOG OWNERS**

No owners have been classified this year.

## **7 MENACING AND DANGEROUS DOGS**

At the end of June 2009, there were 12 dangerous dogs (13 in 2007/08) and 38 menacing dogs (39 in 2007/08) classified in the District out of a population of over 6,000 dogs. Council classified a total of 20 dogs in the 2008/09 year (19 in 2007/08). Five dogs were classified as dangerous, 15 dogs classified as menacing on account of breed/type, and no dogs classified as menacing this year on account of behaviour. These statistics are very similar to the previous year. Any new dog coming in to the District of the menacing breeds/type is identified at the time of registration, classified and a follow-up compliance check is carried out.

Under the Act, owners may object within 14 days to classifications, which are heard by Council's Regulatory Committee. There were no objections and hearings this year.

Council's Dog Control Policy requires menacing dogs to be neutered and most owners comply with this requirement. In the case of non-compliance by owners, Council staff follow this up at the same time as checking that classified dogs are microchipped. Animal control officers endeavour to assist owners with compliance by providing low-cost microchipping clinics and free muzzles.

Compliance with other conditions of classification, such as fencing for dangerous dogs is checked by Council. Animal control staff carry out more monitoring of dogs classified as dangerous or menacing due to behaviour, as they are seen as a greater risk in the community. Most of the dogs classified as menacing due to breed/type have never offended. Monitoring compliance is onerous and an increasing requirement, as new dogs are added to the list.

If there is a breach of classification conditions, the legislation allows Council animal control staff to uplift and retain the dog until compliance is achieved or staff may issue infringement fines for breaches of this nature.

## **8 OTHER INFORMATION**

Council requires owners of more than five dogs on properties over one hectare and owners of more than two dogs on an urban property to apply for a three-year permit from Council. As registration applications are received, owners are advised to apply for a permit. Animal control staff then inspect the dog owner's property and the conditions in which the dogs are kept, to check that they comply with certain criteria designed to avoid nuisances, before issuing or refusing a permit. A new permit was issued in June 2009 to the Te Awamutu SPCA for up to 20 dogs to be housed in the shelter.

## PART 2 – STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Category	As at 30 June 2009	For period 1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008	For period 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009
1) Total # Registered Dogs	6430	Not Required	Not Required
2) Total # Probationary Owners	0	0	0
3) Total # Disqualified Owners	0	0	0
4) Total # Dangerous Dogs	12	3	5
➤ Dangerous by Owner Conviction Under s31(1)(a)	1	1	0
➤ Dangerous by Sworn Evidence s31(1)(b)	10	2	4
➤ Dangerous by Owner Admittance in Writing s31(1)(c)	1	0	1
5) Total # Menacing Dogs	38	16	15
➤ Menacing under s33A(1)(b)(i) - i.e. by Behaviour	6	3	0
➤ Menacing under s33A(1)(b)(ii)- by Breed Characteristics	0	0	0
➤ Menacing under s33C(1) by Schedule 4 Breed.	32	13	15
6) Total # Infringement Notices.	Not Required	90	90
7) Total # Complaints Received	Not Required	1,277	1346
➤ Aggressive	Not Required	62	27
➤ Barking		356	340
➤ Bite/attack		54	55
➤ Breach of Council Bylaw		13	19
➤ Lost/Found		68	76
➤ Rushing in public place		55	55
➤ Unregistered		27	29
➤ Wandering		610	719
➤ Worrying animals		14	15
➤ No water, shelter, food or exercise		18	10
8) Total # Prosecutions Taken	Not Required	0	0