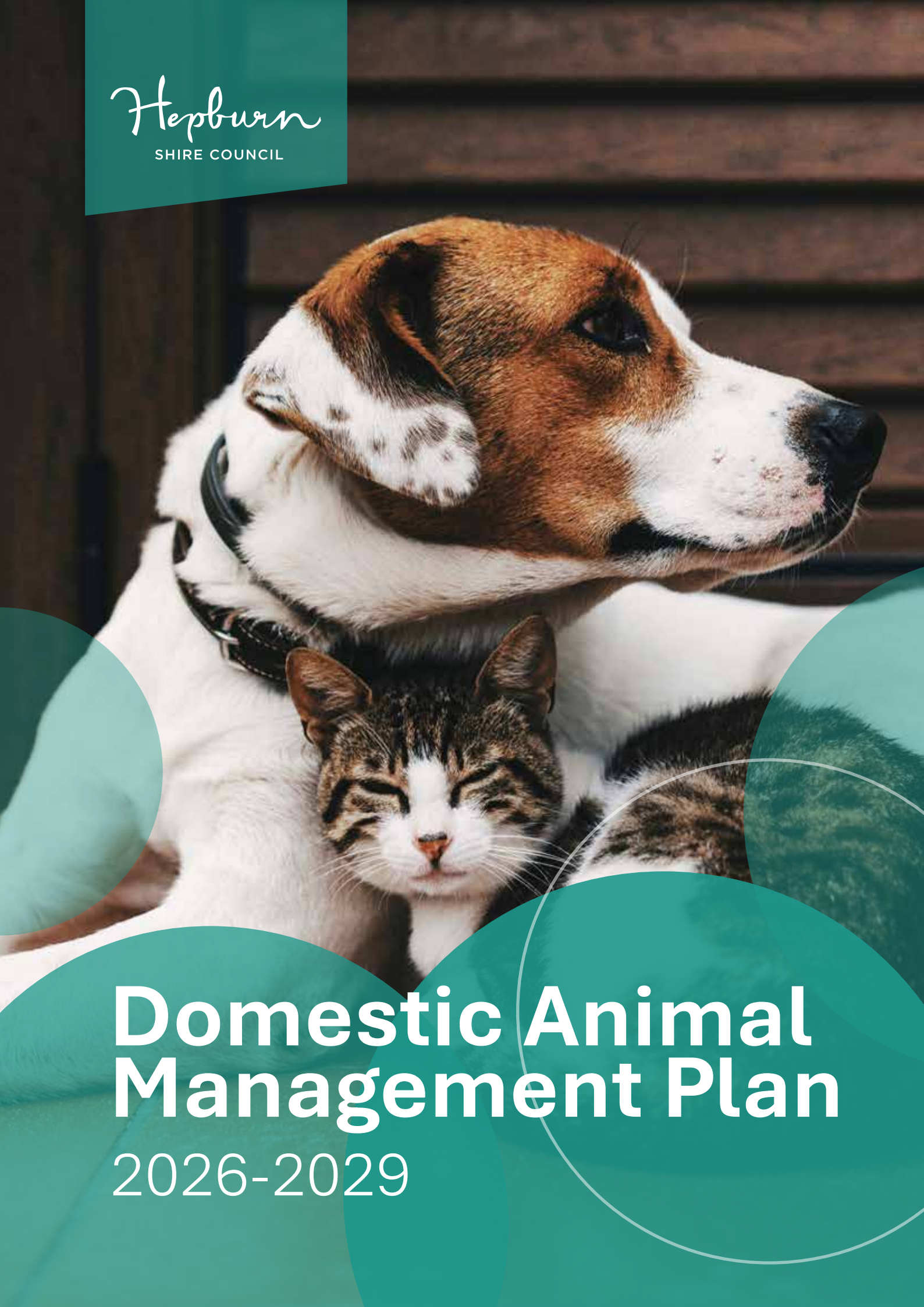




Domestic Animal Management Plan

2026-2029



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Hepburn Shire Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work. On these lands, Djaara have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We recognise their resilience through dispossession and it is a testament to their continuing culture and tradition, which is strong and thriving.

We also acknowledge the neighbouring Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri to our South East and the Wadawurrung to our South West and pay our respect to all Aboriginal peoples, their culture, and lore. We acknowledge their living culture and the unique role they play in the life of this region.



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Mayor's foreword

Pets are an important part of what makes Hepburn Shire a great place to live. They bring companionship, connection and real benefits for health and wellbeing. I see that every day in our community, and in my own life. As someone who is blind, I also understand how important a well-trained assistance dog can be in helping people live safely and independently.

With those benefits comes responsibility. Council has a clear role under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* to promote responsible pet ownership, protect animal welfare, reduce nuisance behaviour, and keep our community safe. We also have a duty to balance pet ownership with the needs of neighbours, the broader community and the protection of our unique local environment.

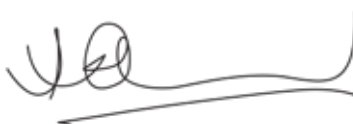
The Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026–2029 sets out our direction for the next four years. It is shaped by community feedback and focused on practical actions that Council can deliver and measure. The Plan puts a strong emphasis on preventing dog attacks, improving compliance with registration and identification, and ensuring fair and consistent responses when standards are not met.



The Plan also tackles the more complex issues we heard about cats and wildlife. It strengthens the pathway through education and support, desexing and identification initiatives, partnerships, and staged, evidence-based decision-making about future containment settings.

This is a balanced plan: it supports people to do the right thing, it is clear about expectations, and it keeps enforcement targeted and proportionate. Importantly, it includes ongoing monitoring and annual reporting so Council and the community can see progress, adjust where needed, and maintain transparency and accountability.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to contribute. With shared responsibility and steady effort, we can support responsible pet ownership, improve animal welfare, protect biodiversity, and maintain a safe and welcoming Hepburn Shire for all.



Mayor
Tony Clarke



Executive summary

Domestic animals are an important part of community life in Hepburn Shire. Pets contribute to the wellbeing of many residents and can also impact those who do not own pets.

Council recognises the need to balance these interests by planning for the management of domestic animals. This ensures that pets, their owners, and the wider community can live together safely and harmoniously.

Key findings from the Victorian Government's first-ever pet census¹ held in 2023 included:



58%

Victorian adults own a pet



1.4 million

Victorian households, are estimated to have a pet



Dogs

are the most common type of pet



51%

of dog owners acquired their dog from a breeder, compared to 10% of cat owners



Victorians spent **\$6.6 billion** on their pets in the year leading up to the census



10%

of Victorian adults planned to get a pet in the next 12 months



4259

total number of 3155 dogs & 1104 cats



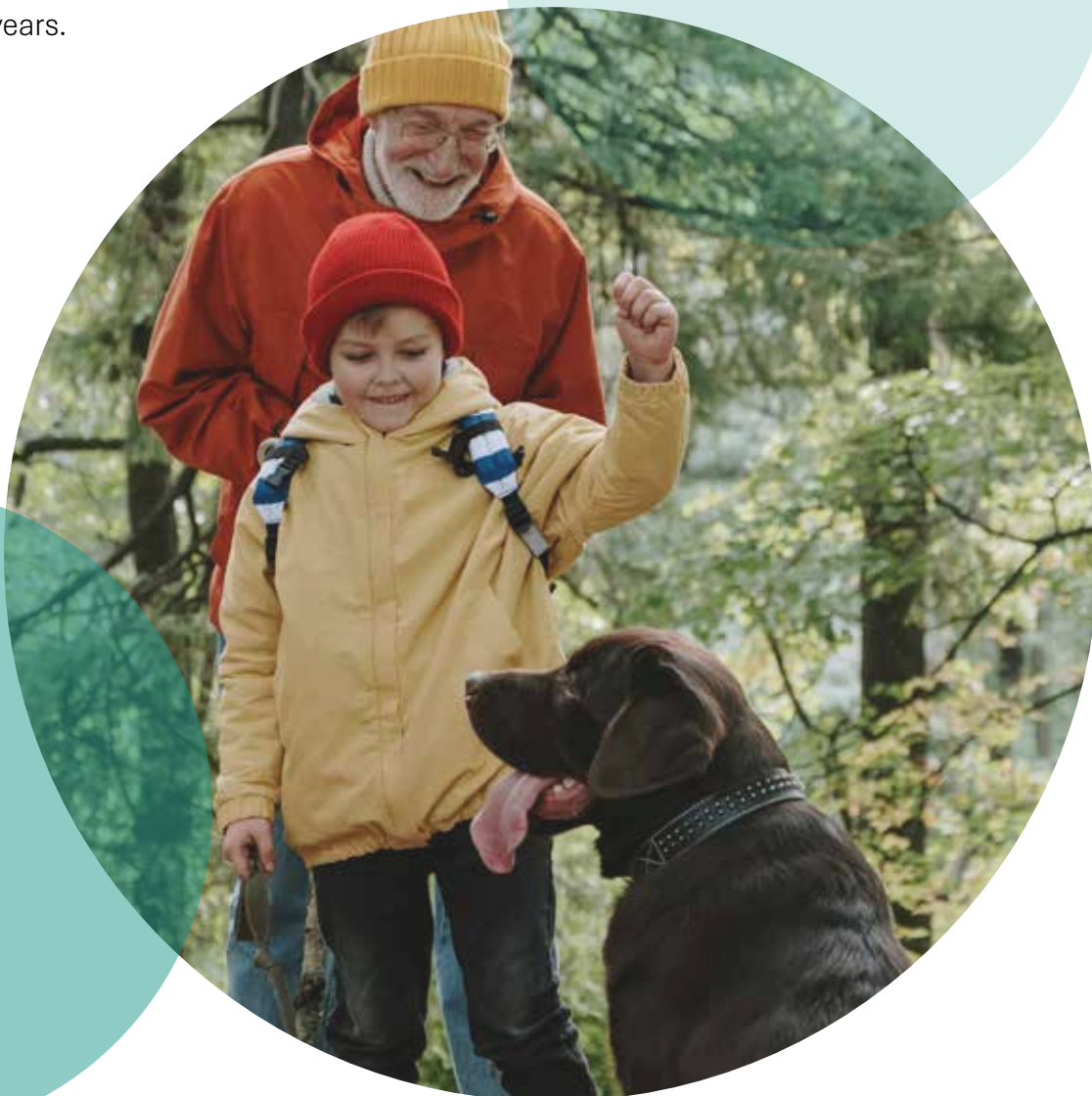
28%

of cat owners got their cat from a rehoming organisation and 22% from an animal shelter

¹ <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/animal-welfare/victorian-pet-census>

This Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026–2029 (DAMP) is a statutory requirement under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act). The DAMP provides Council with a framework for managing dogs, cats, and related businesses, ensuring compliance with the Act, while meeting community expectations.

The DAMP outlines key animal management issues and scheduled programs and initiatives. The DAMP consists of activities to monitor Council’s progress in achieving its goals and objectives over four years.



1

Introduction and context

1.1 Purpose of the DAMP

The Act requires Council to prepare a domestic animal management plan every four years.

The plan must set out a method for evaluating whether the council's animal management services are adequate to implement the requirements of the Act and the *Domestic Animal Regulations 2015*.

The plan must also outline programs for the training of authorised officers, along with programs, services and strategies to:

- ensure that people comply with the Act, regulations and any related legislation
- minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals
- encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats
- minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance.
- effectively identify all dangerous, 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
- 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 locals dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable

- provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the council's municipal district that it deems necessary
- provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy, or review outlined under the plan.

Council must also review and, where appropriate, amend the plan and publish an evaluation of its implementation in its annual report.

The DAMP provides a strategic framework for Council to guide policy, services, and actions in animal management. The DAMP is underpinned by principles that promote responsible pet ownership, protect the environment, and support community wellbeing.

Key priorities

- Provide safe off-leash areas for dogs
- Support and promote responsible pet ownership
- Use education to improve compliance with legislation
- Balance the needs of pet owners, the wider community, and the environment
- Protect the environment from the negative impacts of domestic animals
- Recognise the health and social benefits of pet ownership
- Reduce stray cat numbers across the Shire
- Apply a whole-community approach to animal management

1.2 Process applied in developing the DAMP

As part of developing the draft DAMP, Council sought community feedback to guide the future of animal management in the Shire. Community input provided valuable insights into local issues and helped identify ways to balance the needs of pet owners, non-pet owners, and the environment.

Council invited feedback through the corporate website and Participate Hepburn.

Engagement resulted in:

- 141 responses via Participate Hepburn, and two were submitted in person.
- Community feedback

Community feedback has directly shaped the DAMP's priorities and actions. A full engagement report is available, with the key themes from the consultation summarised below.

Other key findings

- 50 per cent of respondents did not know about Council's first free ride home for lost registered

pets, cat trap loan program, support for rehoming and community education programs.

- 40 per cent of respondents knew about the cat trap loan program.
- Over 90 per cent of respondents knew that dogs and cats over three months must be microchipped and registered with Council.

The top three areas respondents wanted Community Safety officers to focus their efforts:

- Feral cat management
- Preventing and investigating dog attacks
- Addressing nuisance complaints (barking dogs and cat trespass).

Public exhibition

The draft DAMP was formally exhibited during November-December 2025. Community members were able to have their say on Participate Hepburn and during in-person and online engagement sessions.

Nuisance cats	Aggressive dogs	Dog walking and dogs off-leash	Suggested improvement for pet owners	Suggested improvement for the general community	Further comments
Wandering cats, including feral cat management	Dog attacks	Dog waste left in public spaces	52% support for Council prioritising both education and enforcement for pet owners	Introduction of 'dog-friendly' shop, café, business scheme	Nuisance dog barking
Impacts on wildlife	Uncontrolled dogs	Dogs returned to their owner when called	Printed guides with registration notices	Cat trap availability	More rangers
85% support for mandatory desexing of owned cats	Dog education	Lack of off-leash dog areas in Creswick, Daylesford and Trentham	Posters and signage in parks	Responsible pet ownership	Visitors and transient residents
58% support for 24-hour cat curfew	Increased Council intervention		Local dog trainer information		Local animal shelter facility
Increased cat trapping			How to report animal incidents		Importance of pets to promote positive health and wellbeing

1.3 Hepburn Shire profile

Hepburn Shire is a small rural municipality with a population of 16,824, projected to grow to 17,700 by 2036. The Shire includes the towns of Daylesford, Trentham, Creswick and Clunes, along with the villages of Hepburn Springs, Allendale, Denver, Glenlyon, Kingston, Leonards Hill, Lyonville, Newlyn and Smeaton. It offers convenient access to Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo, and is recognised as a great place to live, work, invest and visit.

The Shire has a rich cultural heritage beginning with the Dja Dja Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. The gold rush era brought diverse communities whose influence remains visible in the region's distinctive architecture and cultural character.

Today, Hepburn Shire is renowned for its natural environment, mineral springs, waterways, botanical gardens, volcanic plains and fertile soils, alongside many significant heritage buildings. It is a leading tourism destination, known for its festivals, outdoor recreation, and reputation for indulgence, relaxation and wellbeing.

1.4 How we listened to the community

To help shape the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026–2029, Council asked the community for feedback between September and December 2025. We used a mix of face-to-face conversations, online options and community events so people could share their views in ways that suited them.

We heard from the community through:

- Five drop-in sessions, including four held in person at Council and community venues and one held online
- Two large community events and shows, where staff spoke directly with residents in a relaxed, informal setting
- An online survey on Participate Hepburn, which received 108 contributors and 111 survey responses
- Everyday contact with Council, including emails, phone calls and letters from residents about animal management issues

Altogether, these activities resulted in 489 pieces of feedback and interactions. This made it one of the most wide-reaching conversations Council has had with the community about animal management in recent years.

1.5 Integration with the Council Plan 2025–2029

Council, in consultation with the community, has developed the Community Vision 2021–2031 and Council Plan 2025–2029 (the Plan).

The Plan outlines the strategic framework that guides Council’s planning and decision-making over the current Council term. It sets a clear direction for how the Council will work towards delivering long-term community aspirations while responding to current priorities and challenges.

The framework is structured around five key components:

1. Community Vision

- A long-term vision that outlines the aspirations of the Hepburn Shire community.

2. Domains

- Broad areas outlining the strategic direction and priorities across the Council term.

3. Outcomes

- The outcomes Council is seeking to achieve across the Council term, reflecting the change or benefit to community, environment or organisation.

4. Strategies

- Key approaches, actions and initiatives that will drive progress towards achieving the outcomes. These strategies guide projects, policies, decision making and the budget across the Council term.

5. Indicators

- How we will monitor progress across the Council term in achieving the outcomes.

This DAMP aligns with the focus on building a healthy, supported and empowered community. It aims to improve the availability and accessibility of animal management services to support liveability, health and wellbeing across the Shire.



1.6 Context

The Community Safety team oversees animal management in Hepburn Shire. The officers responsible for animal management include a coordinator and two full-time Community Safety officers.

Program or service	Service level
Animal identification and registration	As of October 2025, 2,758 dogs and cats have been registered or renewed since April 2025.
Domestic animal complaints	General complaints are actioned within 2-3 business days.
Dangerous dog complaints	Dogs acting aggressively or that have attacked are actioned within 24 hours.
Routine street, park and lake patrols	Subject to staff availability.
Microchipping and desexing programs	Proactively promote and refer people to existing programs.
Cat trapping program	Free and available to the community via a booking system.
After-hours emergency service	24-hour after-hours phone service. Officer attendance for livestock on Council roads and dog attacks.



1.7 Domestic animal statistics

Key statistics for the financial periods between 2022 and 2025²:

Dogs	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of registered dogs	4506	3649	4706	4092	3055
Number of impounded dogs	18	49	45	81	60
Number of impounded dogs returned to the owner	n/a	n/a	21	46	38
Number of dogs surrendered	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	3
Number of dogs rehomed, fostered, and rescued	n/a	n/a	13	26	17
Number of dogs euthanised	n/a	n/a	4	6	6
Number of active declared dogs (dangerous, menacing, restricted breed)	n/a	0	0	1	1
Cats	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of registered cats	1463	1232	1552	1401	1104
Number of impounded cats	104	126	69	178	66
Number of impounded cats returned to owners	n/a	n/a	5	5	2
Number of cats surrendered	n/a	n/a	n/a	13	12
Number of cats rehomed, fostered or rescued	n/a	n/a	25	42	28
Number of cats euthanised	n/a	n/a	14	95	20
Customer requests	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Barking dogs	tbc	15	42	57	28
Straying dogs	tbc	79	106	102	60
Straying cats	tbc	27	33	68	21
Dog attacks	17	9	31	24	18
Domestic animal businesses	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Boarding establishments	2	2	2	3	3
Dog training establishments	1	1	1	1	1

² 2025 data is calculated from 1 Jan to 31 Oct 2025

2

Our plan over the next four years

The four strategies that underpin this DAMP connect operational delivery with long-term intent and Council's broader priorities for community wellbeing, environmental sustainability, and organisational excellence. They describe how Council leads and delivers its animal management service.

By focusing on four clear strategies, Council acknowledges that effective animal management requires both competence and care, a service that is well-governed, data-informed, and grounded in respect for people, animals and place.

This approach creates coherence between day-to-day work and the broader outcomes of safety, wellbeing, and accountability that the community expects. It also ensures resources are targeted where they deliver the greatest impact, balancing education and enforcement, planning and action, and prevention and response.

Together, they provide a framework that strengthens consistency, transparency, and collaboration across Council, helping officers, partners, and the community to work toward shared goals in a practical and coordinated way.

Each strategy reflects Council's commitment to:

- building capability in animal management, delivery, and officer safety.
- improving community wellbeing through responsible pet ownership.
- protecting the environment and animal welfare.
- collaborating for resilient, compassionate, and safe communities.

Together, these strategies allow Council to deliver practical, evidence-based and community-informed animal management outcomes across a large and diverse municipality.

They bring together governance, capability, compassion, and collaboration into a single framework that provides structure and direction, ensuring that every action in the DAMP contributes to tangible outcomes for the community, environment and organisation. Appendix One contains expanded information on each strategy, their action item, including due dates and link to the Plan's domains.



Strategy 1

Building a capable and accountable animal management service for the community

Council will strengthen its capacity to deliver safe, consistent, and transparent animal management by commitment and continuous improvement in its Community Safety officers, their systems, equipment and processes. Community Safety officers will maintain current qualifications, share learning across the region, and deliver services efficiently and professionally.

Strategy 2

Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing

Council will promote responsible pet ownership and community safety through education, balanced enforcement, and the availability of safe and accessible spaces for dogs and their owners.

Our Community Safety officers will work with the community to promote awareness, prevent nuisance behaviour, and manage risks through consistent engagement and enforcement.

Strategy 3

Reducing cat overpopulation and improving animal welfare outcomes

Council will reduce stray and feral cat populations through prevention, education, and partnerships that promote humane management and protect local biodiversity.

Our Community Safety officers will work with veterinarians, RSPCA and rescue groups to lead coordinated efforts that reduce euthanasia and improve rehoming outcomes.

Strategy 4

Collaborating for safer and more informed communities

Council will lead collaboration across departments, agencies, and the community to ensure consistent compliance, ethical animal business practices, and preparedness for emergencies.

Our Community Safety officers will work alongside Planning, Environmental Health and Emergency Management teams to share data, support compliance, and coordinate responses that protect both people and animals.

3

Training of authorised officers

Authorised officers must be well-trained and supported through ongoing professional development to meet the requirements of the Act.

Context

The Community Safety team delivers animal management within the Development and Community directorate. The team includes one full-time coordinator and two full-time Community Safety officers. The team is supported by the Manager of Community Safety and Health.

Officers undertake a multidisciplinary role, covering:

- animal management (such as responding to stray or nuisance animals)
- parking enforcement (ensuring vehicles comply with local regulations)
- fire prevention activities (conducting inspections and promoting safety measures)
- supervising school crossings to safeguard students
- enforcing local laws (addressing issues like illegal dumping and noise complaints).

All these responsibilities are vital in maintaining community safety and wellbeing.

Council is committed to ongoing training and development to ensure staff are equipped to meet legislative requirements and effectively respond to community needs.

Officers participate in Council's corporate training program, which provides a range of development and learning opportunities. They are also encouraged to attend industry forums and seminars to stay up to date on best practices.

All new staff complete Council's corporate induction program to familiarise themselves with standard work practices and guidelines.

Performance development plan reviews are conducted annually to assess completed training and identify opportunities for further development.

Council's training and development activities ensure all officers have the skills and qualifications to perform their duties effectively.

Training activities:

- Formalised training through registered training organisations
- Short courses refreshers on relevant topics
- Industry forums
- On-the-job training

The type of training offered to officers includes, but is not limited to

- Customer service, including conflict resolution
- Safe dog and cat handling
- Livestock handling
- Driver safety
- First aid
- Restricted dog breed identification
- Prosecution, statement taking and evidence gathering
- Handling pets in emergencies



4

Registration and identification of domestic animals

Registering and identifying pets greatly increases the chance of them being returned home and reduces stress for both the animal and its owner.

Context

All dogs and cats over the age of three months must be implanted with a microchip and registered with the municipal council in which they reside. Registrations must be renewed annually by 10 April.

Registration and identification are the foundations of responsible pet ownership. Council delivers programs and strategies to encourage dog and cat registration, with fees helping to fund animal management services, education campaigns, and Victorian Government initiatives.

Our local laws, policies and procedures

- Section 10C of the Act, requires cats and dogs to be microchipped as a condition of registration (which is compulsory once the animal is three months of age).
- General Local Law No. 2—Community Amenity and Municipal Place—Part 6 Animals—Clause 6.1 regulates the number of dogs and cats that can be kept at a property without a permit, depending on the land size.
- Annual animal registration renewals and reminder notices.
- Legislative requirement under the Act for registration of dogs and cats at the age of three months.

Current activities

Council provides the following domestic animal services.

- Annual animal registration renewals mailed in March
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership and registration via Council's social media and website
- Distribution of responsible pet ownership pamphlets with notices and correspondence
- 50 per cent reduced registration fee for new applications (10 October–9 April)
- First-year registration free for desexed and microchipped dogs and cats
- Online registration information and downloadable forms via Council's website
- Multiple payment options – BPAY, Post Billpay, credit card, or in person
- Compliance checks for registration as part of all animal investigations
- Identification and registration of seized/impounded animals before release
- Follow-up on registration of animals adopted or purchased from breeders and animal shelters
- Issue of registration tags
- Responding to customer requests and complaints
- Issuing notices and infringements for unregistered animals
- After-hours animal emergency service

Summary

Council's priority is to reunite lost pets with their owners quickly. Promoting registration, responsible pet ownership, and education remain key focus areas. Council will continue to support initiatives that increase registration across the Shire.



5

Nuisance animals

This section outlines programs and strategies to reduce nuisance from dogs and cats.

Context

Feral, semi owned and free ranging domestic cats in Hepburn Shire can impact wildlife, local amenity and community expectations of responsible pet ownership. National research by CSIRO estimates that feral cats kill around 1.8 billion Australian animals each year, including mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs. DNA based studies showing that cats are responsible for most recorded deaths of reintroduced native animals in monitored conservation programs.

Community feedback indicates that wandering cats continue to cause issues such as spraying, fighting, damaging gardens, and spreading disease. While historically used for pest control, unmanaged and undesexed cats can add to the problem.

Around 85 per cent of respondents supported mandatory desexing of owned cats. A new objective of the DAMP is to investigate its effectiveness, including benchmarking with councils that have introduced mandatory desexing orders as well as other known research.

Cat curfew

As a result of feedback during the previous DAMP review, a dusk to dawn cat curfew was introduced on 1 July 2023. The curfew aims to reduce roaming, nuisance issues and wildlife impacts by encouraging responsible confinement of cats.

During the community consultation in 2025, 59 per cent of respondents supported 24 hour cat containment. Feedback also suggested a need for clearer enforcement of the existing curfew and stronger education and support to help residents understand containment expectations.

A key action of the DAMP is to review the effectiveness of the existing curfew and develop a clear and practical pathway for Council to consider and implement a 24 hour containment requirement.

Free cat desexing program

Through funding from Animal Welfare Victoria, Council partnered with The Vet Project to support responsible pet ownership and improved cat management within the Shire.

Over six program days in 2024/25, 120 cats were desexed, microchipped and registered. This initiative represents an important step in reducing unwanted litters, managing stray cat populations, and promoting responsible pet ownership.

Council acknowledges the contribution of The Vet Project for their expertise in delivering this program.

Celebrating 12 months of The Vet Project



Council will continue to investigate funding opportunities to deliver future subsidised desexing programs, as well as promote other relevant initiatives in the area with rescue groups, pounds and shelters.

Dogs

Barking dogs can create stress in the community, and complaints require investigation to confirm a nuisance. While Council aims to resolve issues promptly, some causes of barking (e.g. wildlife or trespassing animals) may be outside the owner's control.

Wandering or uncontrolled dogs can also create problems by defecating in public or private areas, entering properties, or aggravating other pets.

Council works to return dogs to their homes whenever possible to avoid impoundment. Where owners cannot be identified, dogs are transferred to a neighbouring animal shelter.

An after-hours animal emergency service is also provided to assist with reuniting pets with their owners.

Dog off-leash areas

Council will explore designated off-leash areas in the Shire. This work will identify opportunities to improve facilities, support responsible dog ownership, and reduce issues such as rushing, fighting, and nuisance behaviours. An additional report was presented at the November Council 2025 meeting regarding the feasibility of off-leash dog areas, based on community feedback.

Our orders, local laws, policies and procedures

- Section 26 Order requiring dogs and/or cats to be restrained in specified public places.
- General Local Law No. 2—Community Amenity and Municipal Place—Part 6 Animals—Clause 6.1 regulates the number of dogs and cats that can be kept at a property without a permit, depending on the land size.
- General Local Law No. 2—Community Amenity and Municipal Place—Part 6 Animals—Clause 6.2 not to allow dog excrement to remain in a public place within a built-up area.
- Cat trapping procedure.



Current activities

Council currently delivers the following domestic animal services:

- One-on-one advice, education and support for animal owners
- Distribution of responsible pet ownership fact sheets
- Promotion of de-sexing to reduce wandering cats and dogs
- Impounding of wandering dogs and nuisance cats
- Provision of dog poo bags in key parks and reserves
- Encouraging and supplying information on cat containment using cat runs
- Free supply of cat cages for trapping nuisance cats
- Investigation of barking dog complaints
- Inspections of excess animal permit applications to reduce nuisance risk
- Guidance for dog owners on causes of barking (e.g. separation, anxiety, boredom, external factors)
- Issuing notices to comply and infringements if required, to gain registration compliance
- Regular patrols of problem areas

Summary

The most common animal-related requests to Council involve barking dogs, wandering dogs, and stray or feral cats. These issues place demand on Council resources and cause stress within the community.

Through education, pet owners, including farmers, can better understand the impacts of their animals and take steps to reduce nuisance behaviour.

Council aims to reduce nuisance across the Shire through programs and services that support responsible pet ownership, protect community amenity, and ensure all residents benefit from a safe and balanced environment.





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

Context

In 2024/25, Council responded to 24 dog attack reports, compared with 31 in the previous year. These incidents vary in severity, with one matter proceeding to court.

Dog attacks remain a high priority for Council. Officers respond to all reports as quickly as possible, including after hours where required.

The table below displays the number of dog attack reports by Council over the last three years.

2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
9	31	24

Our orders, local laws, policies and procedures

- Section 26 Order requiring dogs and/or cats to be restrained in specified public places
- General Local Law No. 2—Community Amenity and Municipal Place—Part 6 Animals—Clause 6.1 regulates the number of dogs and cats that can be kept at a property without a permit, depending on the land size.
- After Hours Animal Emergency Response Procedure
- Animal Management Procedure Manual

Current activities

Council undertakes the following activities to respond to and reduce the risk of dog attacks:

- Responding promptly to all reports received of a dog attack.
- Providing after-hours animal emergency response.
- Educating the community on responsible pet ownership.
- Promoting dog desexing to reduce aggression and wandering dogs.
- Encouraging effective confinement and control of dogs.
- Supporting early socialisation of dogs with people and other animals.
- Impounding dogs not confined to their property.
- Investigating reported attacks and ensuring compliance.
- Securing or seizing suspected attacking dogs pending investigation.
- Issuing warnings or infringements for wandering or unsecured dogs.
- Declaring dogs as menacing, dangerous or restricted where required.
- Inspecting properties where declared dangerous dogs reside.

Summary

Council takes dog attacks seriously, and reducing the risk remains a high priority. Officers respond immediately to reports wherever possible and continue to educate the community on how to minimise the risk of dog attacks.

Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

This section outlines the programs, services and strategies Council uses to identify dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs within the Shire, and details how compliance with the Act and regulations is maintained.

Context

Hepburn Shire currently has one declared dangerous dog registered, no declared menacing dogs and no known restricted breed dogs.

Council enforces the Act to identify and manage dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs, ensuring the safety of the community.

Our orders, local laws, policies and procedures

There are currently no specific orders, local laws or policies relating to declared dogs. All declared dog matters are managed in accordance with the Act.

Current activities

Council's current activities in relation to declared dogs include:

- Educating dog owners about the laws governing declared dogs.
- Responding to all complaints regarding suspected dangerous, menacing or restricted breed dogs.

- Inspecting properties where declared dogs reside, annually or as required.
- Registering and identifying declared dogs in line with legislative requirements.
- Monitoring compliance with conditions for keeping declared dogs.
- Recording all declared dogs on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR).

Summary

Declared dogs are not currently an issue in the Hepburn Shire. Officers will continue to educate the community about declared dogs required to raise awareness of what would be required if dog owners do not take adequate precautions to prevent their dog from escaping and attacking.

Annual audits will occur routinely, and any issues of non-compliance will be addressed accordingly.

8

Overpopulation and high euthanasia

The overpopulation of animals is an ongoing issue that presents challenges within the environment, such as impacts on wildlife, people and other pets.

There are also impacts on the welfare of stray or semi-owned animals due to the limited capacity of owners to care for them. The overpopulation of cats within the stray population can be problematic, as it leads to high euthanasia rates due to low rehoming rates.

Context

Council's pound and euthanasia procedures are guided by the Act. Council prioritises reuniting lost or seized animals with their owners wherever possible and provides this service free of charge. Officers also educate owners on adequate fencing and animal identification (ID tags or microchips), which are essential to enable animals to be returned.

Where animals cannot be identified, they are transported to a neighbouring animal shelter. Unclaimed animals may be rehomed if they meet health and behavioural requirements. Animals that are untreatably ill or pose a risk to community safety may be euthanised.

The overpopulation of stray and unowned cats remains a significant issue in the Shire, contributing to low rehoming rates and higher euthanasia numbers. An uncontrolled wild cat population can impact native wildlife, create nuisance issues, and spread disease and parasites.

Council assists property owners with the free trapping and removal of unwanted and unowned cats. For officer safety and animal welfare, cats must be trapped in Council-supplied cages and in line with Council's Cat Trapping Guidelines.



Our orders, local laws, policies and procedures

- General Local Law No. 2—Community Amenity and Municipal Place—Part 6 Animals—Clause 6.1 regulates the number of dogs and cats that can be kept at a property without a permit, depending on the land size.
- All lost and unwanted animals are taken to a neighbouring animal shelter. Dogs and cats found wandering or lost are held for eight days, in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds, to be claimed, and a release fee is payable. Any dog or cat that is impounded and not claimed within eight days then becomes the property of the animal shelter and may be rehomed or euthanised.
- All impounded animals must be implanted with a microchip and registered to their owner before their release. All animals rehomed from the shelter must also be vaccinated and desexed.



Current activities

- Subsidised cat desexing to reduce the number of unwanted cats.
- Provision of cat traps delivered and collected by Community Safety officers.
- Provision of the first free ride home program, where registered animals can be reunited with their owner.
- Assistance with reports of animal hoarding.
- An excess animal permit system to manage the number of animals per property.
- All animals impounded are to be microchipped and registered to their owner before their release.
- All dogs and cats rehoused from the shelter are also desexed before rehoming.
- Issuing of warnings and infringements for dogs and cats found at large, and follow up on registration and identification requirements.

Summary

Council's priority is to reduce the number of feral and semi-owned cats within our Shire.

Council will continue to promote pet desexing to reduce overpopulation and euthanasia within our community.

Council will continue to raise community awareness with a strong emphasis on feral and semi-owned cat populations and work with them to reduce these numbers.

9

Domestic animal businesses

All domestic animal businesses must be registered with their local council.

Under the Act, Council may:

- refuse registration if a business fails to comply with legislation or relevant codes of practice.
- apply conditions to the registration of any domestic animal business.

This section outlines the programs and strategies Council will use to ensure compliance with the Act and associated regulations.

Context

Three domestic animal businesses are registered in Hepburn Shire, two boarding establishments and one dog training facility. These businesses are inspected annually to ensure ongoing compliance with regulations.

No breeding establishments or pet shops are currently registered in the Shire.

Our orders, local laws and policies and procedures

- General Local Law No. 2 – Community Amenity and Municipal Place – Part 6 Animals – Clause 6.1 regulates the number of dogs and cats that can be kept at a property without a permit, depending on the land size.

- Hepburn Shire Town Planning Scheme – requirement for a planning permit in certain areas for animal-related businesses.

- Any new domestic animal business must be inspected prior to registration.

Current activities

Council undertakes the following activities to ensure domestic animal businesses comply with legislation:

- Providing information to registered businesses.
- Annual registration and audits of all businesses.
- Investigating suspected or unregistered businesses.
- Issuing notices to comply or infringements as required.
- Liaising with the planning department on suspected cases.

Summary

Council is committed to ensuring all domestic animal businesses operate according to the Act and Code of Practice.

10 Other matters

This section reviews other matters related to managing dogs and cats in the Shire that are not covered in the previous sections.

Animals in emergencies

Extreme weather events have impacted Council in recent years. The most recent event, in 2022, was the storm and flooding events in and around Creswick and Clunes, which damaged 180 primary residences and made 45 severely damaged or uninhabitable.

Victoria's emergency management framework identifies the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action as the lead agency for domestic animal welfare during emergencies. However, as the level of government closest to the community, local councils also play a key role in supporting emergency animal welfare activities.

Experience from past emergencies shows that pets influence people's decisions during crises, highlighting the importance of planning for animal welfare. While animal owners are responsible for preparing their pets, Council is committed to supporting the community through comprehensive emergency management planning.

Council has developed an Emergency Animal Management Plan (EAMP) as a sub-plan of the Municipal Emergency Management Plan. The EAMP addresses domestic animal welfare during emergencies.

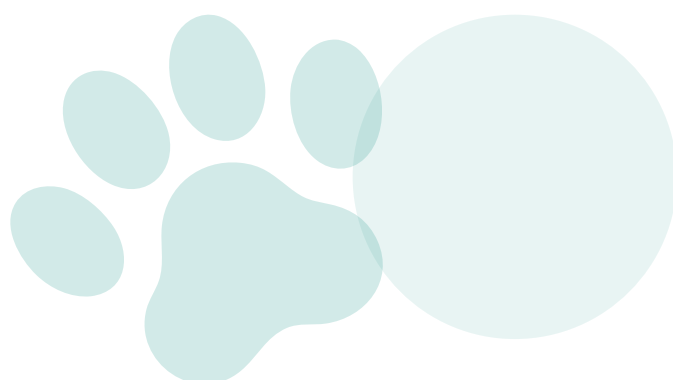
As part of its responsibilities, Council conducts annual emergency management exercises and participates in regional exercises to ensure readiness. Council is also an active member of the Central Victoria and Grampians Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement groups, which share knowledge and coordinate activities, including animal welfare management.

Animal welfare

The *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* (POCTAA) allows councils to authorise officers as POCTAA Inspectors under Section 72 of the Act.

Council officers are not currently authorised under POCTAA. RSPCA Victoria investigates animal welfare offences in the Shire.

Council maintains a strong partnership with the RSPCA, supporting their investigations where possible and referring any suspected animal welfare offences as required.





11

Annual review of the DAMP and reporting

As required under the Act, Council must review and update its DAMP each year. The following section outlines how Council will meet this obligation.

- Provide the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Victoria with a copy of the DAMP and any amendments to the DAMP.
- Review the DAMP annually, and if required, amend it.
- Publish evaluation of the DAMP in Council's annual report.
- Provide progress reports through Council's quarterly reporting framework.
- Undertake a major review of the DAMP after four years.



12 A day in the life of a Community Safety Officer

Join us for a day in the life of a Community Safety Officer (CSO) — where every day is different, and every task helps keep our community safe.

Council's Community Safety team is responsible for a range of duties, including:

- animal management
- local laws
- fire prevention
- parking enforcement
- school crossing supervision.



8 am

On route to office

CSO collects a dog on the loose from a primary school, scans for microchip, contacts owners and returns the dog home. As this was a first-time offence and the dog was registered, no release fee or fine was issued.

12:30 pm

Lunch and admin

CSO breaks for lunch then returns to continue following up with residents and working on open cases.

11:15 am

Animal management call out

CSO collects a dog on the loose from a primary school, scans for microchip, contacts owners and returns the dog home. As this was a first-time offence and the dog was registered, no release fee or fine was issued.

10 am

Office

CSO checks the status of open cases and follows up with impacted residents.



1 pm **Park patrol**

CSO patrols a lake to chat with dog walkers and owners, ensuring compliance with leashing and registration.

1:30 pm **Change of plans**

CSO had scheduled to complete local law compliance and fire prevention checks, but RSPCA calls and asks for assistance with an animal welfare investigation.

2 pm **Joint animal welfare investigation**

CSO attends suspected animal hoarding property with RSPCA.

3 pm **School crossing supervision**

School crossing supervisor unwell for afternoon shift, so CSO steps in to supervise school crossing at a primary school.

4:20 pm **Stray kitten found**

CSO attends library to collect a stray kitten that had been found. CSO calls local shelters to check availability as no microchip detected. Leaves office at 4:50 pm to take kitten to shelter and heads home after.

5:15 pm **Shift ends**

CSO on call this week for any after-hours urgent animal management issues, such as dog attacks and livestock out on roads.

13 Appendix One – The DAMP and the Council Plan 2025–2029

This appendix presents the four strategies that guide Council’s management of dogs and cats over the life of the DAMP. Each strategy aligns with the Council Plan 2025–2029 and reflects the values of working together, supporting community wellbeing, and protecting our environment.

Together, they form the framework for the actions and priorities described in the main body of the DAMP, linking day-to-day animal management work with the long-term goals of a safe, healthy and sustainable community.

Strategy 1	Strategy 2
Building a capable and accountable animal management service	Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing
Council Plan link: Hepburn Working Together	Council Plan link: Hepburn Life
Goal: A skilled and supported team delivering consistent, fair and transparent animal management.	Goal: A healthy and informed community where responsible pet ownership is easy and expected.
What this means Council will strengthen its capacity to deliver safe, consistent, and transparent animal management by investing in workforce capability, governance systems, and continuous improvement. Officers will maintain current qualifications, share learning across the region, and deliver services grounded in professionalism and respect.	What this means Council will promote responsible pet ownership and community safety through education, balanced enforcement, and the creation of safe and accessible spaces for dogs and their owners. Our Community Safety officers will work with the community to promote awareness, prevent nuisance behaviour, and manage risks through consistent engagement and enforcement.
By doing this, we will: • build a skilled and confident workforce. • maintain 100 per cent compliance with training requirements • strengthen transparency and accountability through regular reporting to Council.	By doing this, we will: • achieve a safer, more respectful community environment • maintain above 90 per cent registration compliance.

Strategy 3	Strategy 4
Reducing cat overpopulation and improving animal welfare outcomes	Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing
Council Plan link: Future Hepburn	Council Plan link: Hepburn Together
Goal: Protect wildlife and improve animal welfare by reducing stray and feral cat numbers.	Goal: Work with partners and the community to achieve consistent, sustainable outcomes.
What this means Council will reduce stray and feral cat populations through prevention, education, and partnerships that promote humane management and protect local biodiversity. Our Community Safety officers will work with veterinarians, RSPCA and rescue groups, shelters and pounds to lead coordinated efforts that reduce euthanasia and improve rehoming outcomes.	What this means Council will lead collaboration across departments, agencies, and the community to ensure consistent compliance, ethical animal business practices, and preparedness for emergencies. Our Community Safety officers will work alongside Planning, Environmental Health and Emergency Management teams to share data, support compliance, and coordinate responses that protect both people and animals.
We will: • continue to enforce and promote the 12-hour cat curfew through education and compliance patrols • partner with vets, RSPCA, rescue organisations, shelters and pounds to deliver subsidised desexing and rehoming programs • encourage early age desexing and microchipping at registration to prevent unwanted litters • integrate animal welfare and animals in emergencies into Council's Emergency Management and Recovery planning and coordination.	We will: • increase registration and microchipping compliance through education, digital reminders, and incentives • deliver targeted education on barking, leash laws, and waste management to improve local amenity • respond quickly and decisively to aggressive or uncontrolled dogs to protect the community • develop explore additional off-leash options, and maintain dog off-leash areas (DOLAs) each year to support safe recreation and compliance • conduct regular audits of declared and restricted breed dogs to ensure ongoing compliance and safety.
By doing this, we will: • reduce stray and feral cat intake by 20 per cent by 2029 • support responsible ownership and protect wildlife • strengthen partnerships that deliver compassionate and practical welfare outcomes.	By doing this, we will: • ensure 100 per cent compliance among domestic animal businesses • strengthen local emergency and welfare readiness • build community trust through open, coordinated and ethical service delivery.

Appendix Two - DAMP actions table

Section	Objective	Action	Time-frame	Evaluation and outcome	Council plan domain link	Council plan strategy link	DAMP strategy link	Priority
1. Training of authorised officers	1.1 Ensure all Community Safety officers are appropriately trained.	Define essential, refresher, and specialist training; 100% completion rate annually.	2026	The training matrix is part of the annual PDP program; 100% compliance within 12 months.	Hepburn Working Together	3.2 – Build a capable, supported and accountable workforce.	1 – Building a capable and accountable animal management service for the community	High
2. Registration and identification	2.1 Increase registration and microchipping compliance.	Conduct annual door-to-door audits using microchip data to identify unregistered pets.	Annual	10% increase in registration compliance.	Hepburn Life	1.2 – Strengthen community safety through education and compliance.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High
	2.2 Simplify registration and renewal.	Implement SMS and email reminders and partner with vets for on-the-spot registration.	2026–28	15% reduction in lapsed renewals.	Hepburn Working Together	3.4 – Improve customer experience and digital accessibility.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High
3. Dog Off-Leash Areas	3.1 Investigate options to improve dog exercise opportunities while maintaining safe and shared public spaces.	Investigate the feasibility of designated dog off-leash areas in the Shire, informed by community feedback and officer assessment, including consideration of safety, amenity, environmental impacts, and operational requirements.	2026–29	Feasibility findings reported to Council by December 2026, including options and a recommendation for Council consideration.	Hepburn Life	1.3 – Support liveable neighbourhoods and shared public spaces.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	Medium

Section	Objective	Action	Time-frame	Evaluation and outcome	Council plan domain link	Council plan strategy link	DAMP strategy link	Priority
4. Nuisance animals	4.1 Reduce nuisance through education and containment and improve community amenity patrols and signage.	Deliver 'Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife' campaign; monitor cat trespass reduction.	2026–29	20% drop in cat nuisance complaints.	Future Hepburn	2.3 – Protect and enhance biodiversity and amenity.	3 – Reducing cat overpopulation and improving animal welfare outcomes	Medium
	4.2 Reduce nuisance and wildlife impacts.	Review the effectiveness of the current dusk to dawn cat curfew and develop a costed, evidence based implementation pathway for a 24 hour cat containment requirement, including benchmarking, legal and enforcement modeling, resourcing needs, targeted community and stakeholder engagement, and an equitable education and transition plan to support community understanding and compliance, and builds upon Councils previous commitment to work towards the development of a 24 hour cat confinement policy.	2026–27	Report to Council with recommendations (incl. community feedback, enforcement model, education plan and costs); Council decision prior to the mid-term DAMP review.	Hepburn Life	1.3 – Support liveable neighbourhoods and shared spaces.	3 – Reducing cat overpopulation and improving animal welfare outcomes	Medium
5. Dog attacks	5.1 Review the dog attack procedure and improve response consistency.	Benchmark Council's dog attack procedure for best practice.	2026	Procedure implemented; faster response times.	Hepburn Life	1.2 – Protect community safety through prevention and response.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High
	5.2 Increase public awareness of reporting and control.	Run annual 'Leash Up, Look Out' campaign; publish enforcement outcomes.	Annual	10% increase in incident reporting accuracy.	Hepburn Working Together	3.3 – Strengthen community confidence through transparency.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High

Section	Objective	Action	Time-frame	Evaluation and outcome	Council plan domain link	Council plan strategy link	DAMP strategy link	Priority
6. Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs	6.1 Ensure declared dogs are compliant with legislation and risks are minimised.	Conduct random and annual property inspections; maintain accuracy of VDDR records.	Annual	100% of declared dogs inspected and recorded.	Hepburn Life	1.2 – Maintain a safe and lawful community environment.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High
	6.2 Standardise enforcement through policy and officer training.	Develop a Declaration and Enforcement Policy and provide refresher training on breed identification.	2027	Policy adopted and applied consistently.	Hepburn Working Together	3.1 – Deliver clear, consistent policies and enforcement practices.	1 – Building a capable and accountable animal management service for the community	High
7. Overpopulation and high euthanasia	7.1 Reduce cat overpopulation through desexing partnerships.	Explore delivering subsidised desexing clinics with local vets.	Annual	≥100 cats desexed annually; euthanasia down 20%.	Future Hepburn	2.2 – Support a sustainable and healthy natural environment.	3 – Reducing cat overpopulation and improving animal welfare outcomes	High
	7.2 Encourage humane containment of stray cats.	Maintain free trap loan service and promote containment education.	Ongoing	15% decrease in stray intake.	Hepburn Life	1.4 – Encourage responsible ownership and community stewardship.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	High
8. Domestic animal businesses (DABs)	8.1 Maintain compliance and transparency of DABs in the Shire.	Audit 100% of DABs annually; identify unregistered operations through planning and social media monitoring.	Annual	All DABs are inspected and compliant.	Hepburn Working Together	3.1 – Ensure regulatory compliance and consistent oversight.	1 – Building a capable and accountable animal management service for the community	Medium
9. Promote responsible pet ownership	9.1 Foster responsible pet ownership through education and awareness.	Deliver four seasonal education campaigns (registration, desexing, training, wildlife protection).	Quarterly	Campaign engagement metrics; complaint reduction.	Hepburn Life	1.2 – Promote responsible pet ownership and safe coexistence.	2 – Strengthening responsible pet ownership and community wellbeing	Medium
10. Animal welfare and animals in emergencies	10.1 Strengthen animal welfare in emergency management.	Review and update Emergency Animal Welfare sub-plan annually; test with MEMPC.	Annual	Plan endorsed and reviewed; agency list updated.	Future Hepburn	2.4 – Build resilience to emergencies and climate impacts.	4 – Collaborating for safer and more informed communities	High
11. Annual review and reporting	11.1 Maintain transparency and continuous improvement.	Evaluate DAMP annually, reporting progress and data to Council and Agriculture Victoria.	Annual	Annual review completed and published.	Hepburn Working Together	3.3 – Transparent governance and regular performance reporting.	1 – Building a capable and accountable animal management service for the community	High

Glossary

Term	Definition
DAMP	Domestic Animal Management Plan
The Act	<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i>
MEMPC	Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee
EAMP	Emergency Animal Management Plan
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
VDDR	Victorian Declared Dogs Register

Legislation

Domestic Animals Act 1994

Emergency Management Act 2013





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