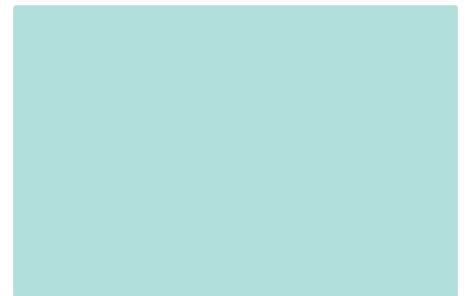
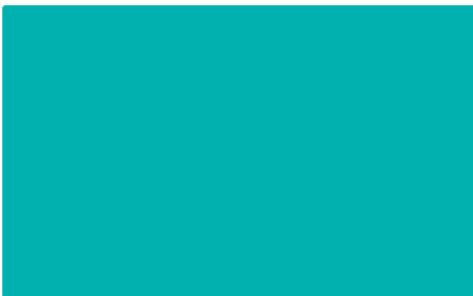


DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

FINALISED MAY 2022



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1 Introduction

As per the statutory requirements of the Domestic Animals Act 1994, all Councils must review their Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) every four years.

The DAMP describes how Council will meet its responsibilities under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and aims to support improvements in responsible pet ownership and animal welfare by focussing on eight key themes. These themes have been derived from the *Template for development of a Council Domestic Animal Management Plan* and include:

- *Training of Authorised Officers*
- *Registration & identification of domestic animals*
- *Nuisance animals*
- *Dog attacks*
- *Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs*
- *Over population & high euthanasia*
- *Domestic animal businesses*
- *Responsible pet ownership and compliance with legislation*

As part of the review process Hepburn Shire Council invited community feedback, to help identify local issues and inform the direction of domestic animal management in Hepburn Shire.

The 2021 – 2025 DAMP will build on achievements in the above themes from the previous plan and will provide a framework to guide future programs and actions for the next four years based on Council priorities and community need.

Pet ownership has many benefits for health and wellbeing. The welfare of pets and their owners is an important consideration, along with the protection of the community and environment from nuisance dogs or cats.

2 Invitation for Community Feedback

Council used a variety of methods to invite the community to provide feedback in the development of our new DAMP, primarily local newspapers, the Council's Facebook page, the Participate Hepburn Website, and the Hepburn Life newsletter.

All community members, regardless of whether they have a pet or not, were invited to take 5 minutes to complete this survey. All participants were informed that their responses would be used to inform development of the Draft plan, which will be provided to the community for feedback later this year.

Around 80% of survey responses were from owners of pets, with around 20% of responses from other community members. Of the pet owners who responded, around 42% own dogs, 19% own cats, and 19% own both cats and dogs.

Community feedback is best informed by consulting a diverse cross section of the community, so we sought feedback from community members who do not own pets, all the way through to owners of multiple pets.

Community members were welcome to submit feedback via the Participate Hepburn website. We received 440 responses via the Participate Hepburn Website. We also received 10 hardcopy surveys, and 2 submissions were received via email. This report outlines the feedback received during the period from 23rd June 2021 to close of submissions on 22nd July 2021.

3 Participate Hepburn Project Report

Performance Summary

Information regarding key visitation and utilisation metrics for your Site or projects.

934 Views	867 Visits	813 Visitors	450 Contributions	440 Contributors	0 Followers
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Views - The number of times a Visitor views any page on a Site.

Visits - The number of end-user sessions associated with a single Visitor.

Visitors - The number of unique public or end-users to a Site. A Visitor is only counted once, even if they visit a Site several times in one day.

Contributions - The total number of responses or feedback collected through the participation tools.

Contributors - The unique number of Visitors who have left feedback or Contributions on a Site through the participation tools.

Followers - The number of Visitors who have 'subscribed' to a project using the 'Follow' button.

Referral Types

Referral traffic is the segment of traffic that arrives on your website through another source, like through a link on another domain.



- Social Media: 503 - 65.07%
- Direct: 236 - 30.53%
- Search Engine: 23 - 2.98%
- Websites: 11 - 1.42%
- Campaigns: 0 - 0.00%

Direct - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by entering the exact web address or URL of the page.

Search Engine - Visitors who have arrived at a Site via a search engine. Such as Google, Yahoo, etc.

Websites - Visitors who have arrived at the Site after clicking a link located on an external website.

Social Media - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by clicking a link from a known social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

Campaigns - Visitors who have arrived through a campaign (using a UTM). See your email campaign report for more details on campaigns sent from this platform.



440 responses were received via
the Participate Hepburn portal
10 hardcopy surveys completed



Two additional submissions
were received via email



Just 2% of responses were
from outside the Shire

4 Snapshots of Feedback

Domestic Animal Management Survey Results

Top themes in order of frequency

Nuisance Cats	Aggressive Dogs	Dog Walking / Dogs off lead	Suggested Improvements for Pet Owners	Suggested Improvements for the General Community	Further Comments
Attack on birds and native wildlife	Dogs Rushing	Enforcement of dog on lead laws	Increased enforcement	Enforcement and reporting	Pet ownership issues relating to holiday accommodation
Cats out at night (including feral cats)	Dog Attacks (including people, pets, livestock and wildlife)	Education and responsible dog ownership	Improved facilities (including increase of off lead dog parks, tracks or areas)	Improved facilities (including increase of off lead dog parks, poo bins and 24hr accessible pound)	Visitor expectations
General nuisance (fighting, annoying indoor pets, defecating)	Dogs off lead	Improved facilities (including increase of off lead dog parks, tracks or areas)	Incentives	Responsible pet ownership education	Lack of an appropriate dog park in Trentham
Increased Council intervention (cat curfew, responsible pet ownership)	Increased Council intervention		Community education		Lack of dedicated dog parks or tracks in Creswick and Daylesford
90% community support for a night-time cat curfew	Dogs not confined		Reporting systems and 24/7 hotline		Importance of pets to promote positive health and wellbeing

5 Community Feedback



Majority of feedback was supportive of the topics addressed in the survey questions. Questions primarily related to sensitive issues such as dog attacks, nuisance complaints against cats, and dogs on lead. Most responses support improvement in these areas.

Some responses to the survey indicated that our communication and processes are working well, however also provided suggestions for improvement.

Several comments expressed the important role animals play in people's lives, recommending a balance between the wellbeing of domestic animals and people in the Hepburn Shire.



Most people who responded feel that the Hepburn Shire Council needs to improve communication about keeping dogs on a leash and increase awareness of responsible pet ownership for dogs and cats.

Several people commented that the survey should have addressed concerns around wandering dogs, due to the increased potential for attacks on people, other domestic animals, livestock and wildlife.

There were many requests for increased presence of Rangers and improved follow-up of customer complaints. There was acknowledgement that Rangers have a vital role to play in educating the community regarding responsible pet ownership.

Two objections were received about the wandering cats' question – one that the definition of wandering was ambiguous, the other that the survey questions were not constructed in a way to minimise bias against cats.

6 Themes from Community Feedback

6.1 Nuisance Cats

Complaints regarding cats are an ongoing concern in Hepburn Shire. Cats are a popular domestic animal and can be wonderful companions, but it's important to find the right balance between cat ownership and community amenity.

The Community Safety Team have seen a steady increase in the number of cats they have impounded over recent years as highlighted below:

CATS	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Impounded	9	22	33	73
Returned to owner		2	4	2

Given the minimal number of cats that are returned to their owners, this data indicates that a large majority of impounded cats are likely to be feral or strays.

General Community Feedback

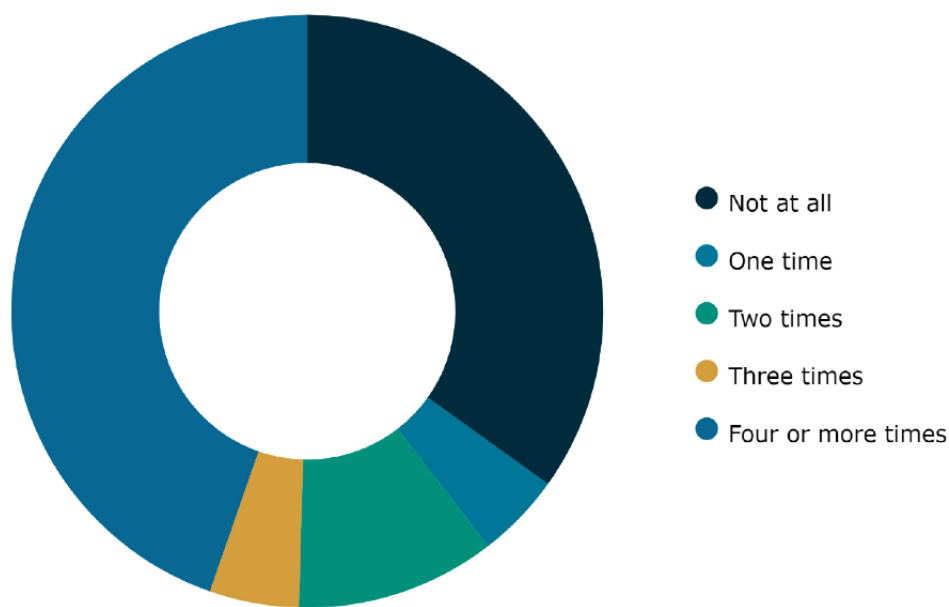
Of the 450 people who responded to the survey, 65% indicated that they had seen at least one cat wandering on their property or on public land in the past 12 months. Of these people, 45% had seen wandering cats four or more times.

56 mentions in the survey comments were in relation to feral cats and 44 mentions were in relation to neighbors' cats, indicating that feral cats are slightly more of an ongoing issue.

Several respondents used emotive language such as '*traumatising*', '*horrible memory*', and '*it is very frustrating and heartbreaking to see the birds being killed*'.

6. Have you been personally affected by a wandering cat or witnessed a wandering cat (not yours) on your property or on public land over the past 12 months? Required

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 450 (100%)



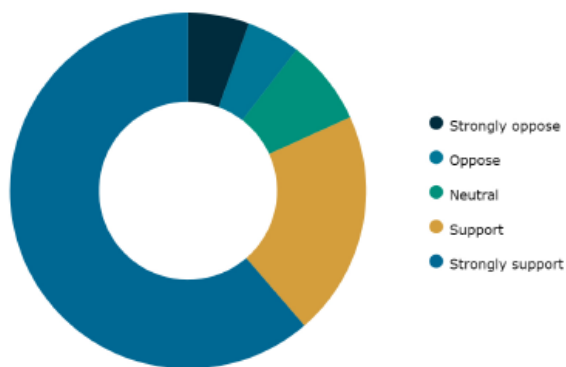
From the 450 submissions, 168 respondents chose to describe the circumstances. The top themes in order of frequency are as follows:

1. **Attack on wildlife** - 58 comments relate to cats attacking birds and/or other native wildlife. Quotes include *'stalking birds in my garden'*, *'killed a sugar glider'*, *'killing a lot of wildlife'*, *'catching lizards'* and *'absolutely terrified irreparably mangled rosella'*
2. **Cats out at night** - 56 people raised concern about cats out at night, including feral cats
3. **Nuisance cats** – 44 mentions were about cats being a general nuisance, including annoying inside pets, fighting, spraying and defecating on private property. Quotes include *'annoys my dog'*, *'irks my pet chickens'* and several reported neighbouring cats using their property *'as their kitty litter tray'*
4. **Council intervention** – 29 comments mention they would like more Council intervention, curfews and responsible cat ownership

6.1.1 Cat Confinement Program

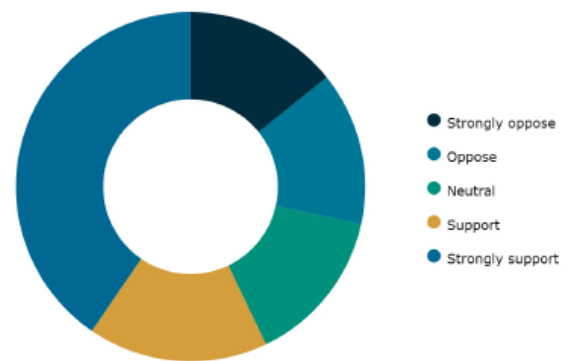
The following results demonstrate strong community support for a cat confinement program, with a preference towards a night-time cat curfew

Night-Time Cat Curfew



90% of respondents indicated support of a night-time cat curfew
5% strongly opposed

24hr Cat Confinement



71% of respondents indicated support of a 24hr cat confinement program
14% strongly opposed

6.2 Dog Aggression/Attacks

Dog attacks remain a high priority for Council with officers responding immediately, where possible, to all reports, including after hours.

In responding to dog attack reports, officers find that the alleged attacking dog had attacked previously, however was not reported to Council. Had the initial attack(s) been reported, subsequent attacks may not have occurred. Education is required to encourage the community to report dogs at large, dogs rushing and dog attacks of all types.

The below table displays the dog attack reports received by Council over the last 4 years:

Dog Attack Reports	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Hepburn Shire	32	40	34	13*

*The reduction in dog attacks during 2020/2021 may be a result of more people being home with their dogs during the COVID 19 pandemic.

General Community Feedback

Of the 450 people who responded to the survey, 42% of all respondents indicated that they have witnessed at least one instance of dog aggression or attack. Of these people, 10% have witnessed aggression four or more times.

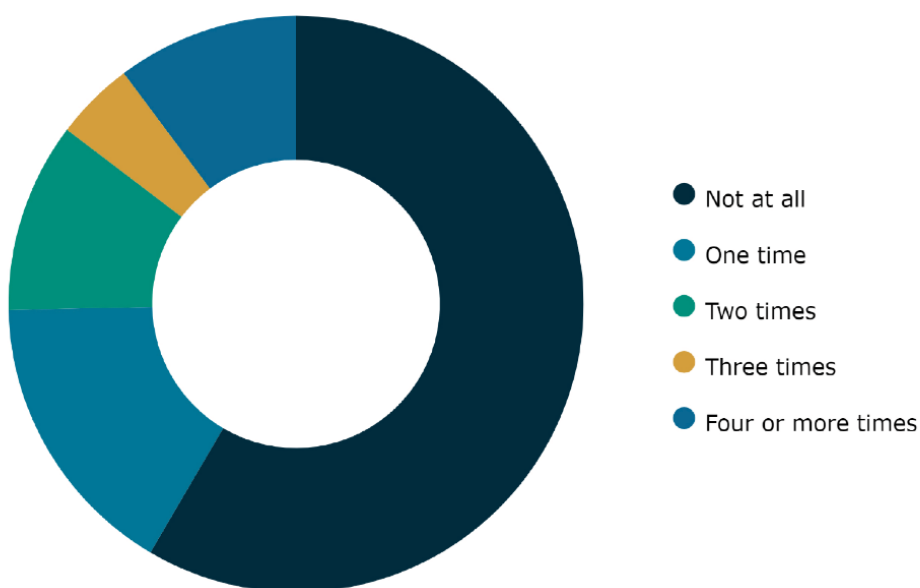
30 respondents used emotive language, such as traumatised, frightened, fear, scared, distressed, threatened, terrified, devastated and distraught.

Included in this category were respondents who expressed that dog aggression / attack impacted their freedom to walk, bike ride or exercise. Also included were phrases such as *'extreme anxiety'*, *'do not feel safe'*, *'children in tears'*, *'ruin my relaxational activity'*, *'diagnosed with PTSD'* and *'requiring psychological counselling.'*

26 responses mentioned incidents that have occurred at Victoria Park or Lake Daylesford.

Off leash or wandering dogs are a potential risk to people, pets, and wildlife. A respondent from the Hepburn Wildlife Shelter said they *'regularly receive animals that have been mauled and/or chased by dogs.'*

10. Have you been personally affected, and/or witnessed dog aggression/attacks in the past 12 months? Required
Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 450 (100%)



From the 450 submissions, 133 respondents chose to describe the circumstances.
The top themes in order of frequency are as follows:

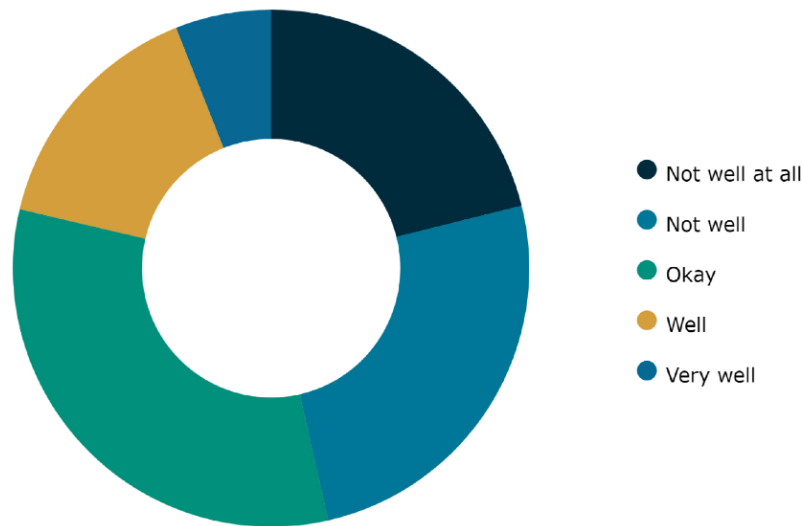
1. **Dogs rushing** - 56 mentions of dogs rushing, including the words: coming out, barking, snarling, nuisance, sniffing and jumping
2. **Dog attacks** - 46 mentions of attacking my dog / pet / farm animal or attacking me. Included were the words mauled and killed my dog / pet / farm animal. Quotes include *'lost part of a finger'*, *'reconstructive surgery'*, *'damaged'*, *'prematurely dead'*, *'dog recovered from multiple bite injuries'*. There were several reports of domestic cats killed by dogs that weren't properly confined to their property
3. **Dogs off lead** – 42 mentions of dogs off lead with many of these expressing that the dogs were not under effective control
4. **Council intervention** – 30 comments mention they would like to see more Council intervention and more responsible dog ownership
5. **Dogs not confined** - 21 mentioned dogs that either weren't confined or weren't properly confined as they were wandering or jumping the fence.

6.3 Dogs on Leash

Survey responses indicate that only 21% of people feel that the Hepburn community follow dog leash orders well or very well.

Dog owners self-reported that they follow dog on lead orders consistently 61% of the time.

12. How well do you think the Hepburn community follow dog on-lead orders? Required
Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 450 (100%)

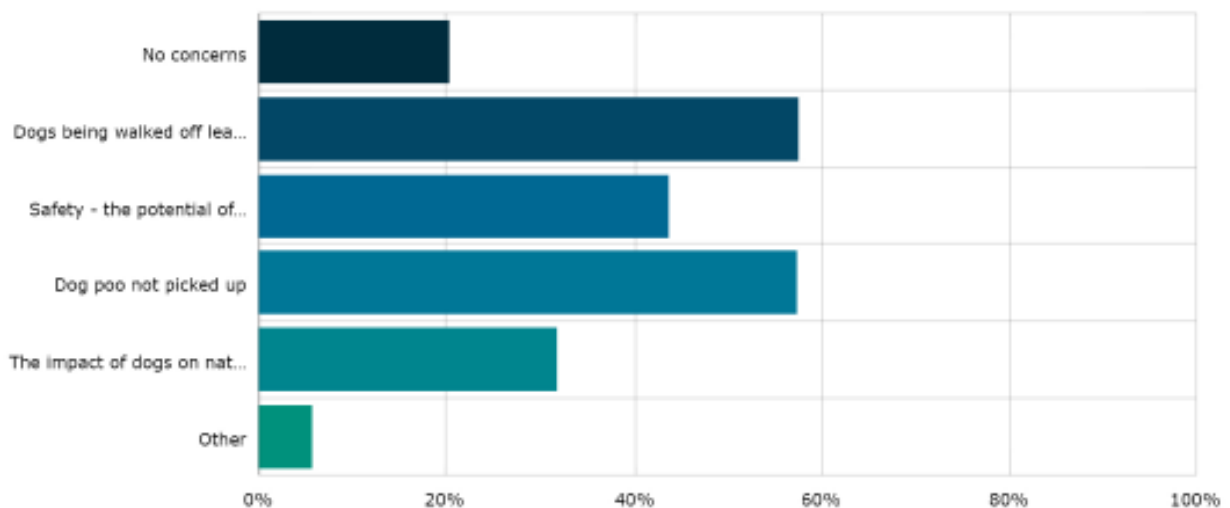


From the 450 submissions, 145 respondents chose to describe the circumstances. The top themes in order of frequency are as follows:

1. **Enforcement** - 66 respondents support enforcement and suggested increased dog on lead law enforcement, increased ranger presence and increased signage
2. **Education** - 41 respondents believed responsible dog ownership and education were important including responsibility for picking up/disposing of dog faeces
3. **Facilities** - 31 respondents suggested more off leash dog parks and designated tracks/areas

Respondents concerns about dog walking in Hepburn

As demonstrated below, many respondents expressed a range of concerns regarding dog walking.



The top four comments in order of concern include:

1. Dogs being walked off lead or not under control of the owner (57%)
2. Dog poo not picked up (57%)
3. Safety – the potential of dog aggression or attack (44%)
4. The impact of dogs on native wildlife (31%)

6.4 Improvements to Council's Animal Management Services for pet owners

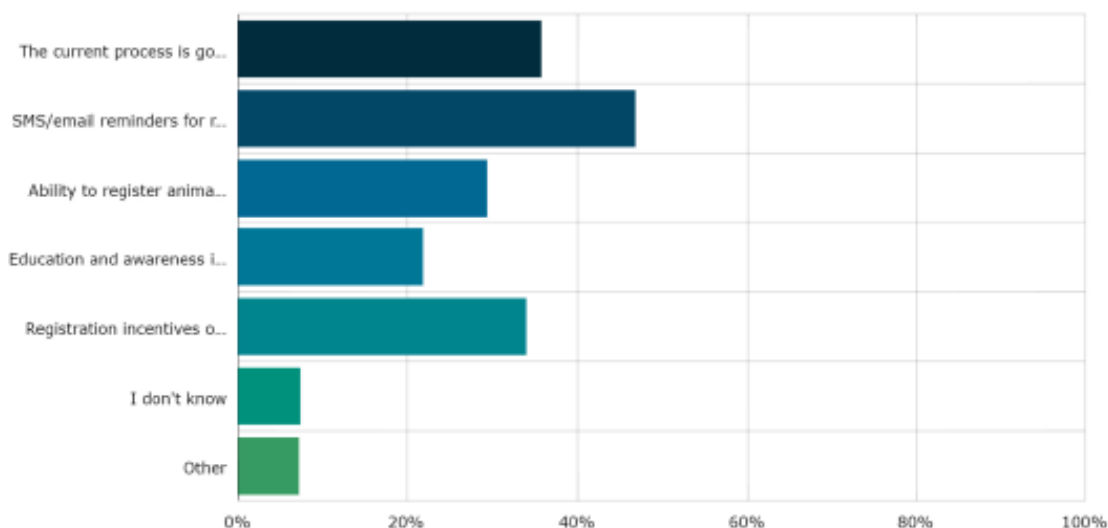
When asked for suggestions on how Council could improve its animal management services for pet owners, 188 of the 450 respondents chose to comment.

Themes in order of frequency include:

1. **Enforcement** - 65 mentions of people wanting increased enforcement action, improved signage and improvements to Councils response to complaints. Some comments also included suggestions of more Rangers and improved Ranger training
2. **Facilities** - 33 mentions regarding the need for more off lead dog parks
3. **Incentives** - 25 mentions of Council offering incentives in the areas of registration, microchipping and de-sexing. They would like Council to explain what registration fees cover and provide an easy online registration process
4. **Education** - 23 mentions in support of more community education and awareness. They would like easy access to information on the Council website, including the rules clearly stated
5. **Reporting** - 18 mentions proposing the implementation of a community reporting system, repeat offender strike system, lost/found pets reporting system and a 24-hour Hotline/Helpline. This category also included respondents wanting a holding facility for lost pets and a 24-hour accessible pound

Pet Registration

When asked 'What would make it easier for residents to register their pets?' the following responses were provided:



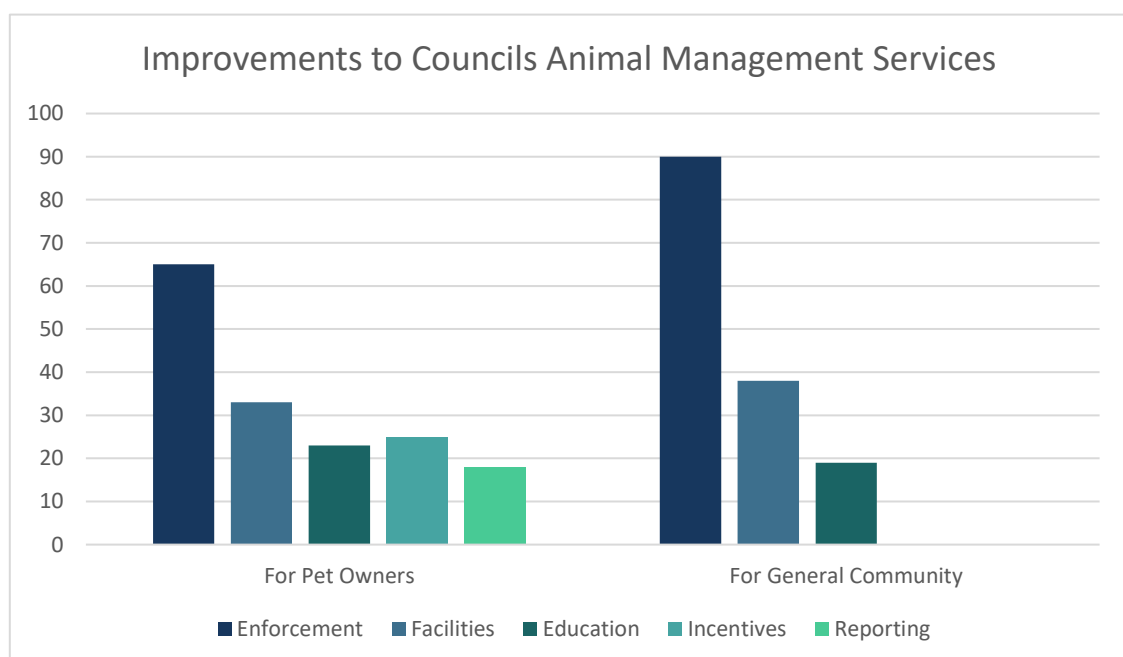
The top five comments in order of preference include:

1. SMS/email reminders for registration renewals (47%)
2. The current process is good (36%)
3. Registration incentives or discounts (34%)
4. Ability to register animals at vet clinics (30%)
5. Education and awareness incentives in the community (22%)

6.5 Improvement to Councils Animal Management Services for the Benefit of the General Community

When asked for suggestions on how Council could improve its animal management services for the benefit of the general community, 157 of the 450 respondents chose to comment. Themes in order of frequency include:

1. **Enforcement and reporting** - 90 mentions supporting Council intervention and enforcement action. This category also includes recommendations of more ranger presence with the work 'policing' frequently used. Support for a local pound and a 24/7 hotline or online registry / reporting system
2. **Facilities** - 38 mentions encouraging Council to provide more resources such as poo bins and bags, more off lead areas and better signage
3. **Education** - 19 mentions in favour of more responsible pet ownership education



6.6 Further Comments or Feedback

When invited to write further comments or feedback in relation to pet management in the Shire, 89 respondents provided a comment. There were a variety of themes, most of which were a repeat of previous comments.

A few new themes emerged, including:

- Pet ownership issues relating to people staying in holiday accommodation
- Visitors expectations when they visit our Shire
- A few mentions were made regarding the dog park in Trentham: *‘The main concern is the lack of dedicated off lead park areas for dogs to play and socialise in Trentham. There is a fenced area however, this is a shared area that includes access to the tennis courts and children’s’ play equipment.’*
- Several comments suggested dedicated dog parks and tracks are needed in Creswick and Daylesford
- 12 respondents mention that pets are important for people, their health and well-being. These comments reflected a sense of *‘living with’* and finding solutions

‘The benefits of pet ownership can’t be underestimated. However, I worry that owners think their pets can do no wrong, no matter what the circumstances. Continued education around the negative impact pets have on wildlife, and the importance of keeping pets under CONTROL control in public areas is vital.’

7 Conclusion

Council appreciates the time taken by the community to provide feedback on domestic animal management in the Hepburn Shire. This community engagement report will help inform the new actions of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021 - 2025.

