city of
Victor Harbor

City of Victor Harbor Dog and Cat Management Plan 2025-2030

Executive Summary

This Dog and Cat Management Plan 2025–2030 (the Plan) is the City of Victor Harbor's fourth plan prepared under the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and provides a contemporary framework for the management of dogs and cats across the Council area over the next five years.

The Plan builds on more than 15 years of progressive companion animal management and responds to changing community expectations, increasing visitor numbers, evolving legislative requirements and emerging statewide reforms. It seeks to balance community safety, animal welfare, responsible ownership and the shared use of public spaces, while supporting Victor Harbor's role as a highly visited coastal destination.

Council's approach is based on education, engagement, early intervention and proportionate compliance, supported by evidence and operational experience. The Plan recognises the importance of clear rules, consistent enforcement and accessible information to support responsible dog and cat ownership and minimise nuisance, unsafe behaviour and environmental impacts.

Key elements of the Plan include:

- clear direction on on-leash, off-leash and dog prohibited areas, consistent with Council bylaws and resolutions;
- continued support for education and engagement initiatives that promote responsible ownership, micro-chipping and desexing;
- a structured, evidence-based approach to off-leash dog access, including trials and community feedback;
- effective service delivery through appropriately trained Authorised Persons;
- consideration of resourcing arrangements, including after hours response, shared services and access to suitable impoundment facilities; and
- ongoing monitoring, review and reporting over the life of the Plan.

The Plan has been developed with regard to the current legislative framework and acknowledges that further state level reforms are expected, particularly in relation to breeder regulation, compliance tools, registration systems and cat management. Council will continue to monitor these reforms and adapt local practices as required.

Overall, the Plan provides a clear, flexible and evidence based framework to guide Council's dog and cat management activities through to 2030, supporting positive outcomes for the community, animal welfare and the shared enjoyment of public spaces.

Cover image by Egorov

Vision for the Plan

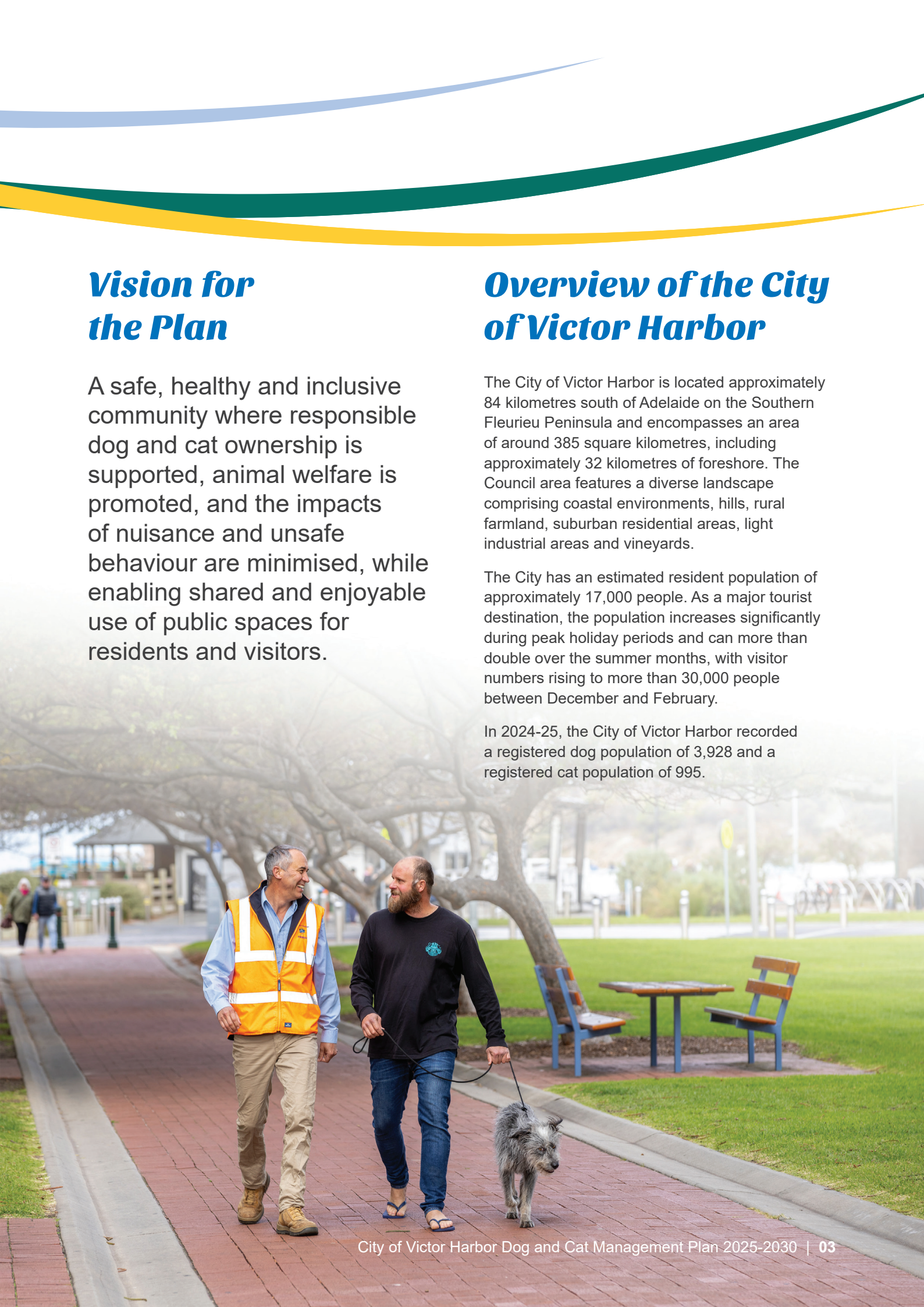
A safe, healthy and inclusive community where responsible dog and cat ownership is supported, animal welfare is promoted, and the impacts of nuisance and unsafe behaviour are minimised, while enabling shared and enjoyable use of public spaces for residents and visitors.

Overview of the City of Victor Harbor

The City of Victor Harbor is located approximately 84 kilometres south of Adelaide on the Southern Fleurieu Peninsula and encompasses an area of around 385 square kilometres, including approximately 32 kilometres of foreshore. The Council area features a diverse landscape comprising coastal environments, hills, rural farmland, suburban residential areas, light industrial areas and vineyards.

The City has an estimated resident population of approximately 17,000 people. As a major tourist destination, the population increases significantly during peak holiday periods and can more than double over the summer months, with visitor numbers rising to more than 30,000 people between December and February.

In 2024-25, the City of Victor Harbor recorded a registered dog population of 3,928 and a registered cat population of 995.



Legislative and Policy Framework

The City of Victor Harbor is responsible for the management of dogs and cats in accordance with the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*. The Act establishes the legislative framework for animal identification and registration, animal control, enforcement powers, and the role of the Dog and Cat Management Board, including associated funding and oversight arrangements.

Council's animal management services are funded in part through dog registration revenue and related regulatory activity in accordance with the Act. Registration income received by Council is applied to the delivery of dog and cat management services and associated regulatory functions. In line with legislative requirements, Council contributes a prescribed proportion of dog registration revenue to the Dog and Cat Management Fund, which supports statewide dog and cat management initiatives and oversight arrangements.

At the local level, Council's Dogs By-law 2023 (By-law No. 5 of 2023) provides the regulatory framework for the management and control of dogs within the Council area. The by-law addresses matters such as limits on the number of dogs that may be kept on a premises, expectations for responsible behaviour in public places, and requirements relating to effective control. It also enables Council, by resolution, to determine where dogs must be kept on-leash, where dogs may be exercised off-leash (including on sections of the foreshore), and where dogs are prohibited.

Council's Cats By-law 2023 (By-law No. 6 of 2023) establishes the local regulatory framework for the management and control of cats, including provisions relating to the number of cats that may be kept on a premises, identification and registration requirements, and general management expectations within the Council area.

This Plan has been prepared in accordance with Section 26A of the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*. The Plan covers a five-year period and includes provisions for parks where dogs may be exercised off-leash, where dogs must be under effective control, and where dogs may be prohibited. The Plan will be submitted to the Dog and Cat Management Board for approval prior to taking effect and may be amended during its term with the approval of the Board.

Dog access, on-leash and off-leash areas and facilities

The City of Victor Harbor includes approximately 176 reserves, parks and open spaces, as well as around 32 kilometres of foreshore, many of which are available for dog exercise subject to dogs being kept under effective control.

The Council area provides a range of opportunities for dog exercise, including designated on-leash and off-leash areas. In some locations and circumstances, dogs may be required to be on-leash or prohibited entirely to balance dog access with public safety, environmental protection and shared use of public space.

The Victor Harbor Dog Park is a purpose built, off-leash facility that provides a safe and well used space for dog exercise. The park includes separate enclosed and open areas to cater for different dog sizes and behaviours and is equipped with seating, dog exercise equipment, waste bag dispensers, water points, shade, and accessibility features. The park supports responsible dog ownership and contributes to community wellbeing through physical activity, social interaction and shared use of public space.

Council has also undertaken a trial off-leash dog area along a defined section of the foreshore to assess how off-leash access operates within a busy, shared coastal environment.

The trial served to inform Council's understanding of usage patterns, safety, amenity and management considerations and to support evidence-based decision making. Community feedback collected through Council's YourSay platform is being used to inform future decisions regarding the continuation or refinement of the trial, the consideration of similar trials, or other dog-related initiatives.

Council recognises that community views on dog off-leash access can be varied and at times competing, balancing interests in increased exercise opportunities with safety, amenity and environmental considerations. Future off-leash provision will therefore be considered strategically across the Council area, having regard to relevant evidence, community feedback, site conditions, biodiversity values and operational impacts.

The Plan will investigate the feasibility of an additional dog park within the Council area. As part of this investigation, consideration may include locations within identified growth areas as set out in the *Urban Growth Management Strategy 2050*, alongside existing open space areas.

Dog access arrangements are determined in accordance with Council by-laws and resolutions, which remain the authoritative reference for on-leash, off-leash and dog-prohibited areas.

Resourcing and service delivery

Council is responsible for the administration and enforcement of dog and cat management functions within the City of Victor Harbor in accordance with the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 and Council by laws. These functions are delivered by Council's General Inspectors, who are appointed as Authorised Persons under the Act.

Inspectors support the effective delivery of animal management services through a combination of education, engagement, early intervention and proportionate compliance. This includes responding to service requests, undertaking patrols of public places, investigating complaints, promoting responsible dog and cat ownership, and administering registration and identification requirements.

Council will continue to apply a proportionate and responsive compliance approach, informed by service requests, local trends, officer observations and community feedback. This may include targeted education or compliance activity in locations where recurring concerns are identified, while maintaining a focus on prevention, owner engagement and practical outcomes.

To support the ongoing delivery of dog and cat management services over the life of the Plan, Council will continue to consider resourcing arrangements across a range of operational areas, having regard to service demand, legislative obligations, staff capacity and safety considerations.

After hours service delivery

Animal management matters, including dog attacks, wandering animals and animal welfare concerns, can arise outside standard business hours. Council will continue to review the adequacy of after hours response arrangements to ensure priority matters can be addressed in a timely and appropriate manner, taking into account service demand, staff capacity, safety considerations and available resources.

Shared services and regional collaboration

Council will continue to explore opportunities for shared services and regional collaboration with neighbouring councils where this may improve service resilience, efficiency or access to specialist expertise. This may include shared after hours response arrangements, coordinated training opportunities, or collaborative approaches to enforcement and education, where practical and cost-effective.

Impoundment Facilities

Access to suitable impoundment facilities is an essential component of effective dog and cat management. Council will continue to assess current arrangements for the holding of impounded animals, including capacity, location, animal welfare outcomes and operational efficiency. Opportunities to improve or formalise impoundment arrangements, including shared facilities or service agreements, will be considered where appropriate.

Grant funding and external funding opportunities

Council will continue to monitor and consider relevant grant and external funding opportunities to support the implementation of this Plan, including funding administered by the Dog and Cat Management Board and other applicable state or regional programs. Where available and appropriate, external funding may be used to supplement Council resources for initiatives such as education and engagement activities, service delivery improvements, regional collaboration, after hours response arrangements, or enhancements to animal management facilities.

Access to grant funding will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and considered alongside Council's annual planning and budget processes. The availability of external funding does not replace Council's statutory responsibilities but may assist in enhancing service outcomes and supporting innovative or shared approaches to dog and cat management.

Professional development and capability

Authorised Persons are supported through ongoing training and professional development to maintain the skills and knowledge required to administer the Act and Council bylaws effectively. Capability and performance are supported through Council's established governance, training and performance review processes to ensure consistent, professional and lawful service delivery.

Statistics

Council collects and monitors a range of data relating to dog and cat management to inform service delivery, identify trends, and support evidence based decision making. This data includes service requests, compliance activity, registration information, and provides an important context for the actions and priorities outlined in this Plan.

Service requests and compliance activity

Dog related matters continue to comprise the majority of animal management service requests received by Council. Reports of dogs wandering at large, barking dogs and dog attacks or harassment remain the most common issues, reflecting the ongoing importance of education, early intervention and proportionate compliance.

Cat related service requests are fewer by comparison and have declined over the reporting period, reflecting improved identification and registration outcomes and the distinction between identified cats managed by Council and feral cat matters addressed under state led frameworks.

Expiation data indicates that enforcement activity is used selectively and in response to ongoing or serious noncompliance, consistent with Council's Enforcement Policy that prioritises education and engagement where appropriate.

The table below shows animal management requests received between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2025.

	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
Dogs wandering at large	69	22	39	53	61
Dog attack / harass reports	10	9	11	19	16
Barking dogs	35	26	49	41	51
Cat Requests	37	38	7	5	1
Impounded Dogs	8	5	14	17	13
Dogs returned to owner	7	2	13	12	13

The table below shows expiations issued between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2025.

	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24	2024 /25
Dog wandering at large	16	5	5	7	11
Dog attack/harass	7	4	2	1	2
Unregistered dogs	54	23	3	4	10
Unregistered cats	20	14	0	0	0
Nuisance cat wandering at large	1	0	0	0	0
Breach of barking dog order	2	0	0	0	0

Registration, microchipping and desexing

Registration data indicates a gradual increase in the number of dogs and cats recorded as alive within the Council area over the past five years. Registration levels show some year-to-year variation, with lower levels recorded in 2022/23 and a subsequent improvement in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Microchipping rates for both dogs and cats remain consistently high, with the majority of animals recorded as microchipped over the reporting period. Desexing rates also remain strong, particularly for cats, and continue to be promoted by Council through education initiatives and the annual registration renewal process.

Overall, the data indicates a high level of compliance with key legislative requirements relating to identification and desexing, supporting positive outcomes for animal welfare, owner accountability and community safety.

The table below shows dog and cat registrations between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2025.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Dogs	3223	3347	3084	3305	3366
Cats	920	1030	795	862	920

The table below shows microchipping rates between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2025.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Dogs	93%	93%	95%	95%	96%
Cats	95%	96%	96%	96%	97%

The table below shows desexing rates between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2025.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Dogs	76%	74%	74%	74%	94%
Cats	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%

Impounded dogs and cats returned to owner

Where animals are reported wandering, Inspectors prioritise returning animals to their owners wherever possible. Over the reporting period, an average of 82 per cent of wandering dogs and cats were returned directly to their owners without the need for impoundment.

Returning animals directly allows Inspectors to engage with owners at the point of contact, identify potential containment issues and provide practical advice to reduce the likelihood of repeat incidents. This approach supports positive animal welfare outcomes and the efficient use of Council resources.

Data context for the Plan

The statistics outlined in this section provide context for Council's current dog and cat management approach and support an evidence based focus on education, early engagement and proportionate compliance.

Dog Waste Management

Council promotes responsible dog ownership through a range of measures designed to support appropriate behaviour in public places and protect community amenity. This includes the provision and maintenance of dog waste bag dispensers across the Council area, particularly in parks, reserves, shared paths and along the foreshore, to assist dog owners to clean up after their dogs.

Dog waste management is approached using a proportionate, compliance focused framework that prioritises education and support as the first response. Inspectors engage with dog owners to promote awareness of responsibilities and encourage compliance, recognising that most instances of noncompliance can be addressed through information, advice and early intervention.

Where ongoing or repeated noncompliance occurs, enforcement action may be taken in accordance with the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and Council bylaws. This approach recognises that strengthened penalties reinforce the longstanding expectation that dog owners take responsibility for managing their dog's waste and contribute to the cleanliness, safety and enjoyment of shared public spaces.

Council will continue to monitor dog waste related issues through service requests, observations and community feedback to inform the placement of waste bag dispensers, targeted education initiatives and compliance activities over the life of the Plan.

Cat Management

Council's approach to cat management is guided by the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995* and Council's Cats Bylaw 2023 (Bylaw No. 6 of 2023), which establishes requirements relating to the keeping, identification and management of cats within the Council area. These arrangements support responsible ownership and provide a framework for engagement, education and compliance.

Over time, Council's local cat management framework has contributed to improved levels of cat identification and registration, supporting more effective engagement with owners and improved outcomes for animal welfare and community amenity. Council's actions in relation to identified cats focus on owner responsibility, compliance with registration and identification requirements, reunification where appropriate, and education to support responsible ownership.

Notwithstanding this progress, cat management continues to present evolving challenges, influenced by community expectations, legislative settings and broader policy discussions at the state level. The Plan recognises that further work will be required over its life to respond to these factors, with a continued focus on education, monitoring trends and adapting local approaches where appropriate.

The Plan also recognises the distinction between identified and unidentified cats as set out in the Act and Regulations. Unidentified, stray and feral cats are managed under separate State frameworks, with feral cat control led by State Government agencies and Landscape Boards.

These programs focus on environmental protection, biodiversity outcomes and animal welfare, rather than owner compliance.

Council recognises ongoing community concern regarding roaming cats, cat containment and the impacts of cats on native wildlife, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas.

Within its statutory role, Council will continue to support and advocate for responsible cat ownership through education, identification, compliance and owner engagement, while working collaboratively with relevant State agencies, Landscape Boards and other stakeholders where broader feral cat management outcomes are sought.

The Plan recognises that feral cat management is not solely a local government function and that responsibilities differ depending on whether a cat is owned, identified, stray or feral. Council will continue to provide information to the community on these distinctions, support referral pathways where appropriate, and participate in broader policy discussions and collaborative responses where this may assist local outcomes.

Over the life of the Plan, Council will continue to monitor community expectations, legislative developments, emerging state policy frameworks and best practice relating to cat containment, wildlife protection and owner responsibility.

This will include participating in consultation processes, engaging with relevant stakeholders and adapting local cat management practices where appropriate to ensure they remain consistent with contemporary best practice, statewide directions, and Council's available powers and resources.

Implementation and Review

Council will implement this Plan through its day-to-day operations, existing service delivery arrangements and established governance and reporting processes.

Responsibility for implementation rests with relevant Council staff, supported by internal coordination across service areas where required.

The actions outlined in this Plan will be delivered progressively over its five year life, having regard to operational priorities, available resources, legislative requirements and emerging issues. Implementation will be guided by Council's established approach to education, engagement, early intervention and proportionate compliance, supported by operational experience and evidence.

Council will monitor progress against the objectives and actions of the Plan through the collection and review of relevant data, including service requests, compliance activity, registration and identification trends, and community feedback.

This information will be used to identify emerging issues, assess performance against key performance indicators and inform service planning, education initiatives, compliance activities and operational priorities.

Council will continue to use available service request, compliance, registration and infrastructure data to inform implementation of the Plan. This includes reviewing trends in issues such as nuisance complaints, roaming animals, off leash use patterns and infrastructure demand to support responsive service planning and targeted education or compliance activities where appropriate.

An internal review of progress will be undertaken annually to assess the effectiveness of current approaches, identify emerging trends or risks, and consider whether refinements are required. This review will inform ongoing service planning and may be used to support adjustments to operational practices where appropriate.

Progress updates will be reported internally and provided to Council or the Senior Management Team as required. This approach supports accountability and oversight while allowing Council to remain responsive to changing community needs, legislative reform and operational demands over the life of the Plan.

The Plan may be amended during its five-year term in accordance with Section 26A of the *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*, subject to the approval of the Dog and Cat Management Board.

Objectives and Actions

1. Support and educate the community about responsible dog and cat ownership.

- Share clear and up-to-date information with dog and cat owners.
- Support access to education that promotes safe and responsible pet ownership.
- Work with veterinarians, local animal clubs and relevant organisations.
- Promote statewide education resources, including Good Dog SA.
- Engage with the community through positive, accessible and consistent messaging.

Key performance indicator:
Up to date information and resource materials available to dog and cat owners on Council's website and in print form at the Civic Centre and other relevant outlets

2. Support increased microchipping and desexing of dogs and cats across the community.

- Educate pet owners about mandatory microchipping and desexing requirements under the Act.
- Encourage compliance through Council registration fees, incentives and rebates where appropriate.
- Promote access to existing microchipping and desexing programs, including low-cost and community-based initiatives.
- Support measures that help reduce the number of unwanted dogs and cats.

Key performance indicator:
Increase the proportion of registered dogs and cats that are microchipped and desexed within the Council area, using Dogs and Cats Online data.

3. Provide appropriate support to dog and cat owners to maintain and improve the welfare of their pets.

- Provide and maintain public facilities that support dog exercise and wellbeing.
- Encourage positive pet socialisation opportunities.
- Promote pet friendly home and community environments.
- Continue engagement between Inspectors and pet owners to provide advice and support.
- Investigate locations and options for additional leash-free and/or dog park facilities to support a growing community.

Key performance indicator:
Dog exercise and wellbeing facilities are maintained and assessments of opportunities for additional leash free and dog park facilities are undertaken where appropriate.

4. Manage dog and cat behaviour and promote compliance to protect community amenity.

- Encourage participation in obedience training and responsible dog behaviour.
- Explore incentives that support early and ongoing dog registration.
- Respond to nuisance dog and cat issues in a timely and balanced way that supports reasonable community amenity.
- Provide practical advice and tools to assist owners to manage nuisance behaviours.
- Use powers under the Act and Council bylaws, including enforcement and control orders where necessary, to support compliance and prevent repeat issues.

Key performance indicator:
Reduce the rate of dog and cat related nuisance service requests per annum and improve average response times to nuisance complaints, as measured through customer service and enforcement data.

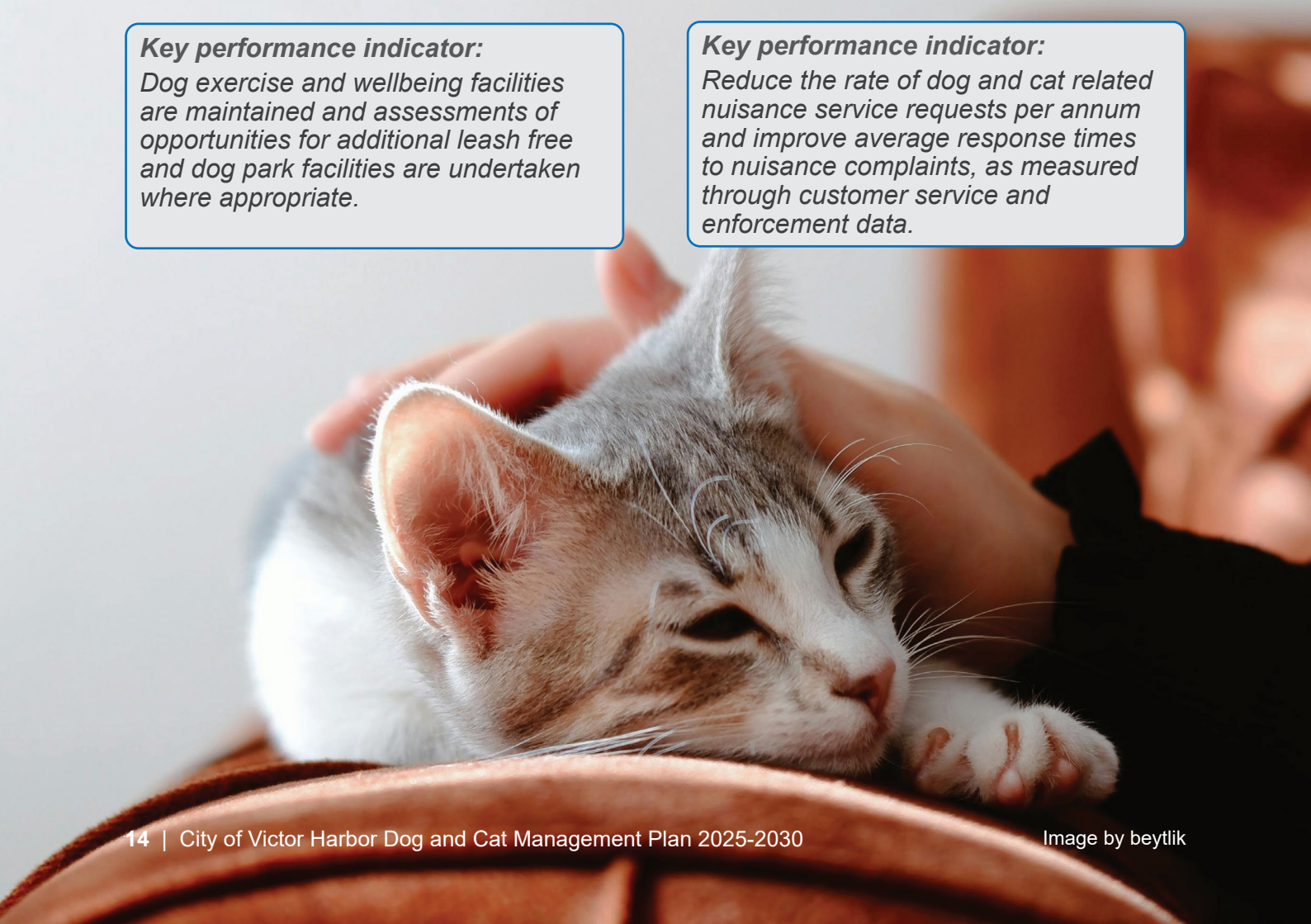


Image by beytlik

5. Minimise public and environmental nuisance associated with dogs and cats.

- Provide and maintain dog waste bag dispensers in parks, shared paths and other high use dog walking areas.
- Encourage responsible behaviour by promoting the importance of picking up after dogs.
- Use education and, where necessary, enforcement under the Act and Council bylaws to address issues related to dog faeces.
- Manage feral cats on Council land in partnership with relevant state and Commonwealth government agencies.

Key performance indicator:
Reduce dog waste related nuisance service requests and reported issues in high use public areas over the life of the Plan, as measured through customer service data, officer observations and enforcement records.

6. Effective and consistent administration of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.

- Maintain the skills and knowledge of authorised officers through ongoing training and professional development.
- Continue to promote Dogs and Cats Online (DACO);
- Provide support to residents to register new dogs and cats and update registration details through online and assisted channels.
- Use DACO to share relevant and timely information with pet owners, such as notifications about fireworks, events or animal disease outbreaks.
- Encourage compliance with registration, microchipping and desexing requirements through education, engagement and enforcement where necessary.
- Maintain data and report on trends throughout the life of the plan to inform appropriate and evidence based initiatives, projects and service levels associated with Council's Annual Business and Budget planning processes and subsequent Dog and Cat Management Plans.
- Review Dog and Cat Management related Council resources to ensure mandatory requirements and best practice can be met in the context of a growth community.

Key performance indicators:
Maintain or improve compliance with registration, microchipping and desexing requirements, improve customer feedback related to dog and cat management services, and maintain participation in authorised officer training and proactive engagement activities over the life of the Plan.

Stay in Touch

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