

UAM National Position Statement: Barking management

Progress report for Canberra (05) UAM Conference

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Abstract

This paper presents the current draft of a UAM national position statement on barking management. The draft was developed from material gathered at last year's (Adelaide 04) UAM conference. In Adelaide during the conference workshops, barking management aspects relevant to "cause and effect", "regulation & management" and "treatment & prevention" were concurrently dealt with by three separate groups of conference delegates. All the ideas generated in this way have been gathered together to create the full document attached hereto.

Introduction

At the outset it is important to stress that this UAM position statement on barking management is intended to be a functional reference work for people in local government who are engaged in UAM activity. The structure reflects this intent by having a series of sections starting with barking causes and ending with barking prevention. Of necessity, the statement encompasses aspects relevant to the following three main areas of general UAM interest:

1. Animal behaviour
2. Animal welfare
3. Animal control and regulation.

These three elements (together) are essentially the core of what UAM is all about and while this position statement is expected to reflect reasonable attention to both animal welfare and animal behaviour matters, it is not intended to be *overly* focussed on either. It is meant, first and last, to be a UAM statement. It is meant to be an Animal Management resource that has been designed by and for people involved in the provision of local government animal control and regulation services throughout Australia.

At the Adelaide (04) UAM conference, delegates began the process by brainstorming ideas in a bid to provide reasonable background data to assist the UAM Reference Group in developing its national position statement on barking management. The three barking management aspects mentioned above were concurrently dealt with by three separate groups of delegates.

The idea for this Adelaide UAM conference was for delegates to tackle their designated aspect of the barking management story. Then, after due deliberation, each group was asked to gather all of the notions so generated in the form of a list of "one-liners". An example of the way this good work panned out is shown below.

EXAMPLE 1: Extract from Regulation & management group

Dog Management:

- breed/breeding
- interaction between dog management and environment
- manner that dog is treated prior to purchase
- early socialisation, temperament assessment of parents
- debarking as a last resort
- barking collars (counting and citronella)
- adequate mental and physical stimulation

Dog Regulation:

- accountability and traceability
- ability to measure barking nuisance
- definition of reasonable
- noise control definition
- natural justice laws should apply

- legislation must be appropriate
- reference to relevant state legislation (EPA etc),

Owner Management:

- breed choice & knowledge
- information available at point of sale
- realistic owner expectation
- licensing of owners and sellers
- mandatory annual vet checks
- provision of affordable remedies
- neighbours to communicate problems directly where possible (semi official pro-forma letter?)
- fact sheets/literature
- provide alternative concepts or potential solutions and encourage owners to seek appropriate resolution
- no intimidation

All told some six pages of dot points, similar to the example above, were generated. The fact that virtually all of these very brief dot points each spoke volumes, meant that this six initial pages expanded three fold in the "fleshing out" process that occurred after the conference.

The conversion of this treasure trove of ideas into a single primary draft required active editing that included a lot of cutting & pasting and deleting of redundancies. This process brought our draft position statement back to about twelve pages before the addition of the executive summary and the graphic précis took it back to about the eighteen pages attached hereto.

This volume could have been further reduced if *all* redundancies had been even more rigorously expunged. This is because virtually all elements included under the headings of Treatments and Prevention logically work out to be the mirror image of those that were identified under the headings of Causes and Effects. To cut either one of these sections for this reason would, however, have unduly compromised the basic structure of the statement and this extent of editing and deletion was considered inappropriate.

Interpretation of the intended meaning of the dot points in the original material was at times challenging. Where necessary, reference to the persons who chaired the different work groups was undertaken to clarify meanings. As has been already said, with all the cutting and pasting, some of the original dot point comments are not to be found where they started out, but every effort was made to ensure that each concept was retained somewhere in the document.

Suggested tasks for this (Canberra 05) UAM conference workshop:

1. Confirmation that all who contributed to this joint enterprise at the initial Adelaide conference workshop are happy that their comments have been accurately interpreted and included somewhere in the text.
2. A further scrutiny of section 4.3 Animal (treatment) Measures (immediately here-below) probably needs also to be undertaken to check the structure, the words and the relevance of this information to AMOs and Local Government.

It is important to remember that this position statement is *not* an animal welfare or animal behaviour statement, though it should reflect those influences. It is a UAM statement that is intended to realistically meet the practical needs of animal control and regulation services in Australia.

Extract from the draft on Remedial measures

4.3 Animal measures

Effective treatment of the dog that barks excessively requires two or three things:

- a) Prevent the barking nuisance itself as an immediate measure
- b) Attend to the cause/s of the barking (treat the dog's behavioural environment) as a long term treatment
- c) Perhaps employ a combination of the previous two techniques as an ongoing plan

Options for the minimisation of barking nuisance include:

4.3.1 Environmental

- Reduce visual stimulation for the dog
- Provide noise barriers to absorb or deflect sound eg. move the dog to a different location in the property or keep it indoors
- Temporarily move the dog to another location eg. friend's house
- Provide, for example, doggy day care during the times that the barking is a problem

4.3.2 Behavioural

- Address the dog's needs for exercise, company and mental stimulation
- Develop a behavioural modification (training) regime to reduce anxiety and reward quietness and calmness
- Actively discourage unnecessary barking (train to not bark)

4.3.3. Medication

- Anti-anxiety medications can have beneficial effects in appropriate cases, especially when used in conjunction with behavioural modification. (Note: As a rule medications for behavioural adjustment to reduce barking need to be dispensed by a veterinarian)

4.3.4 Barking suppression

- a) Anti-barking collars (incl. electronic and citronella) can be successful particularly in the short term to discourage unwanted barking. They can also be used in the longer term as an adjunctive behavioural control measure
- b) "Husher" type muzzles can be used to inexpensively suppress barking noise. As with all barking suppression devices, "hushers" should be used with discretion (in this case because they might induce heat stress by interfering with normal thermoregulation / panting)
- c) Dogs can be "debarked" surgically. Barking is variably muted rather than abolished all together with this technique. There is a body of opinion to the effect that de-barking should be considered an option of last resort on ethical grounds and this is presently reflected in State and Territory legislation
- d) Relocation (rehomeing) and even euthanasia are probably the final solutions for dogs that bark excessively. These are relatively unattractive options, but real nonetheless and should be considered in some cases

Barking prevention devices:

There is currently debate about the propriety of using aversive stimulus collars for barking suppression. Some animal behaviourists do not condone the use of any form of punishment as a behaviour modifying method. Electronic barking suppression devices are illegal in some jurisdictions. It should be noted that:

- a) These devices work by creating an aversive (smell or skin feeling) stimulus to the dog whenever it barks. The dogs dislike these aversive stimuli - it is unpleasant for them - it is a form of punishment - and when these collars work, this is why

- b) In deciding between barking collar options when such devices are deemed necessary, it is important to balance the efficacy and reliability of the device against the intensity of aversive stimulus that it employs. They vary between types and brands and models

Barking prevention devices can serve, however, to provide an important respite for all parties involved in a barking nuisance disputes. During this respite period, the owner of a problem barker has an opportunity to work on treating the cause. The complainant is often placated when it is evident that an effort is obviously being made to abate the nuisance and, (perhaps most beneficial of all) the council officer involved is seen to have made a tangible start on getting resolution. This respite effect is significant from the point of view of complaint management.

Barking Nuisance Workshop - Adelaide UAM Conference (04)**Executive summary**

Barking is a common cause of neighbourhood dispute and council complaints regarding noise control. The causes and the effects of barking noise are many and varied. While some "watchdog" barking is generally valued by the community, excessive barking is not appreciated. The sound of persistent barking has a number of unique qualities that can make it an unusually annoying noise. Tolerance of nuisance varies between individuals. This variation needs to be recognised and accommodated by councils.

Causes, effects, control and prevention of barking nuisance are dealt with in detail in the complete barking management position document (Appendix 2.). These elements are also shown as a graphic précis in Appendix 1.

Causes

The causes of nuisance barking can be arranged into the following four categories:

- a) Animal causes
- b) Owner causes
- c) Community causes and
- d) Council causes.

Effects

The effects, like the causes of barking noise, are also many and varied. These effects are associated with the relationship between the dog and its owner, as well as that the relationship between the dog, its neighbours and the broader community.

Control

Every Australian community expects its local authority to be able to prevent excessive barking. It is one of the routine UAM tasks that councils are obliged to control and regulate. To achieve this, three essential things are required of councils:

- a) Dog owners (and their neighbours) have to be given clear indicators as to what amounts to an excessive / unreasonable amount of barking noise
- b) The public needs reassurance that their council does have an effective public awareness and education program for barking minimisation
- c) Dog owners need to understand that the council does have the resources to ensure that excessive barking can be effectively abated when necessary.

History proves that this is all a *lot* easier said than done. The 2004 Adelaide UAM conference delegates however, worked on this assignment in the confident belief that significant systematic improvements in barking management can be made.

Treatment

In situations where a barking noise nuisance has been confirmed, the person who owns the dog in question will be obliged to abate this nuisance. To do this, the auditory impact of the barking noise has to be altered (reduced) to the satisfaction of the regulating authority. Control measures intended to prevent excessive barking can be grouped into three categories:

- a) Council measures
- b) Owner measures
- c) Animal measures

Prevention

It is said that prevention is always better than cure and so it is, but prevention does not occur by chance – it has to be actively organised and it has to be made to happen. The prevention of barking problems, as with most aspects of UAM, hinges on the three standard elements of good community management:

- a) Education (public awareness about owner responsibilities and obligations)
- b) Supervision (regulatory processes that define community expectations and set standards)
- c) Infrastructure (provision of readily available and well managed public open space and dog training facilities for exercising and educating dogs)

Included in this document is a full list of suggested measures that councils can adopt to help prevent nuisance barking if they choose to do so. Each of these suggestions can be considered on its merit and then either accepted or rejected according to individual (local) conditions and needs. The list of prevention measures in this document has been organised under the following headings:

- a) Sensible dog selection
- b) Satisfactory environments
- c) Owner competency
- d) Progressive government
- e) Broader community context

Attached

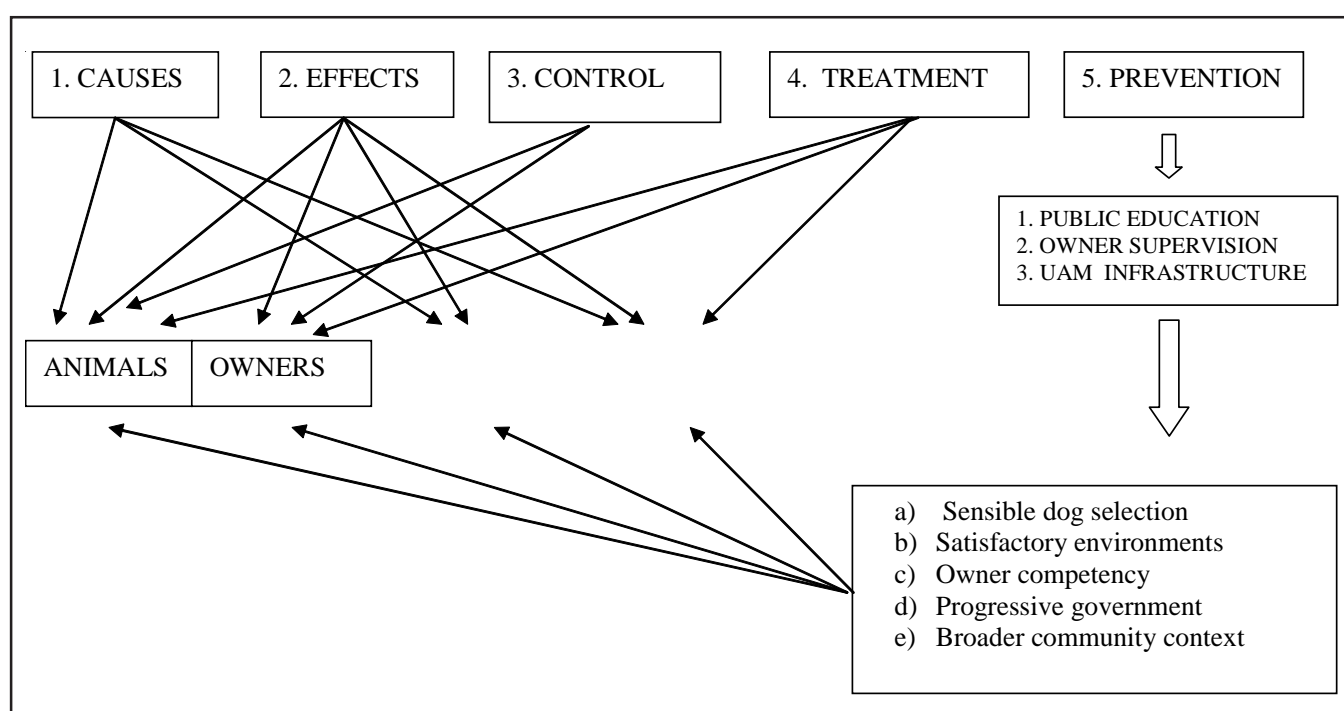
Appendix 1, (Graphic précis, barking nuisance management)

Appendix 2, (Complete document, Barking Nuisance Management)

Dick Murray

Dick Murray is a veterinarian who has long believed that companion animals have a remarkable quality of life potential in contemporary urban society. To realize the *full* potential he has no doubt at all that our society will depend more and more in the years ahead on the services of good systems of Urban Animal Management. Dick believes that provided everybody continues to help push the envelope of excellence in UAM, service quality will continue to improve for the good of all. He believes that UAM conferences like this one are the primary focus and the forum for that process in Australia and hopes that this paper will be of interest to delegates.

APPENDIX 1 (Graphic précis: Barking Nuisance Management)



APPENDIX 2 Complete document: Barking Nuisance Management

PREAMBLE

1. CAUSES

- 1.1 *Animal causes*
- 1.2 *Owner causes*
- 1.3 *Community causes*
- 1.4 *Council (regulatory) causes*

2. EFFECTS

- 2.1 *Owner/animal effects*
- 2.2 *Community effects*
- 2.3 *Council effects*

3. REGULATION AND MANAGEMENT

4. TREATMENT

- 4.1 *Council (legislative/regulatory) measures*
- 4.2 *Owner measures*
- 4.3 *Animal measures*
- Barking prevention devices:*

5. PREVENTION

- 5.1 *Choosing dog breed/type*
- 5.2 *Providing the right home environment*
- 5.3 *Being competent dog owners*
- 5.4 *Delivering progressive government*
- 5.5 *Considering the broader community context*

Preamble

Barking is a common cause of neighbourhood dispute and council complaints regarding noise control. The causes and the effects of barking noise are many and varied. While some "watchdog" barking is generally valued by the community, excessive barking is not appreciated. The sound of persistent barking has a number of unique qualities that can make it an unusually annoying noise. Tolerance of nuisance varies between individuals. This variation needs to be recognised and accommodated by councils.

The qualities that make barking annoying may be summarised as follows:

- Barking is a means of communication between dogs and has evolved to carry over wide distances and to "get attention". *It is difficult to ignore the sound of barking*
- The hearer generally has no control to stop or regulate the noise. *You can't turn it down if it is not your own dog*
- Barking that signals distress can cause a sense of discomfort. *It is a similar effect to the persistent crying of a baby*
- Barking is an alarm noise that can cause anxiety for hearers. *This is similar to the urgent sound of a ringing telephone or intruder alarm that persists unattended*
- Barking can cause fear anxiety for some people who are do not feel safe with dogs. *It is a sound they don't like to hear*

1. Causes

The causes of nuisance barking can be arranged into the following four categories:

- a) Animal causes
- b) Owner causes
- c) Community causes
- d) Council causes

1.1 Animal causes

Dogs are uniquely suited to their role as human family companion animals. This is because their social behaviour is very similar to that of their owners. Dogs however, are *not* humans and unless care is taken to accommodate their unique behavioural needs, they can become stressed. Psychological stress is probably the most significant cause of nuisance barking.

The principal behavioural needs of the dog that should be accommodated in urban environments (to help prevent this psychological stress) include all of the following:

- Dogs are highly social animals. They need to be involved and included in family group activities and not kept in isolation – *dogs locked out of the home and kept in isolation are commonly barkers*
- Dogs in normal health are highly mobile animals. They need regular outings – *dogs that don't get exercised tend to stand at the fence and bark at those that do*
- In comparative terms, dogs are intelligent animals. They need mental activities to prevent boredom – *bored dogs are more likely to bark*
- Dogs have extreme sensory ability. They need to smell and see and feel their broader environment to be in touch with their world. - *dogs that lack sensory stimulation, especially in a social context (eg. pheromones), are often stressed and tend to be noisy*
- Dogs have evolved as predatory carnivorous foragers. They like to have things to chase and to chew to feel normal, satisfied, calm and settled – *without these things they stress and stressed dogs are barkers*
- Lack of "pack" structure including (particularly) poor leadership, inadequate training & insufficient discipline causes uncertainty and insecurity for dogs that in turn causes anxiety – *anxious dogs are barkers*
- Barking is a means of communication. Dogs will bark to attract the attention of other dogs and in response to other barking – *unless they have been trained not to*
- Some breeds of dogs are more likely to bark, partly associated with the purpose for which their breed was originally intended. Breeds originally bred for guarding are more likely to bark, and other working breeds may bark out of frustration because they cannot perform their original purpose in an urban environment.

1.2 Owner causes

Improper care and management is a significant cause of nuisance barking. Owners who have made one or more of the following mistakes may have thereby created their own problems as well as problems for their neighbours. Principle errors include:

- Failure to select an appropriate breed or type of dog for the house, yard, lifestyle and interest of the owner
- Failure to provide sufficient social interaction with the dog
- Failure to train for quietness. Owners with sufficient motivation and skills can train dogs *not* to bark excessively
- Failure to recognise that their dog *outside* might be creating a noise nuisance for neighbours that they *inside* are insulated from
- Failure to provide adequate health care including, when necessary, remedial therapy
- Failure to appreciate the reality that an unresolvable nuisance may necessitate relinquishment of the animal itself
- Not having the ability to prevent and deal with behavioural problems that might arise
- Failure to understand the causes of nuisance barking
- Failure to appreciate that dogs cannot be expected to know how much barking is too much
- *Intentionally* obtaining dogs to act as intruder deterrents and then *actively* encouraging them to bark.

1.3 Community causes

Owners have expectations of what they consider to be appropriate behaviour on the part of their pets, and *so do their neighbours*. Some behaviour problems of dogs are only problems for the owners. Others are only problems for specific neighbours and yet others are problems for everybody in the neighbourhood.

What is considered inappropriate / unpopular / unacceptable dog behaviour in the context of this paper is not about what owners think *as much as it is about what their neighbours think*. This can be complicated and community factors that warrant mention here include the following:

- Different people in different communities have different perceptions and levels of tolerance when it comes to barking. *While one neighbour may have a real and even critical issue with a given dog's behaviour, other neighbours no further away may not be troubled at all*
- Being considerate of neighbours is a critical aspect of dog owner competence. *Some dog owners are considerate persons.*
- General disagreement between neighbours can sometimes be a cause of vexatious complaining. In these situations, a *barking complaint may not be the real issue at all*
- In some social situations there can be a lack of connectivity (sense of community) between neighbours. This can lead to a lack of concern for the comfort of neighbours and *this in turn can give rise to all kinds of public nuisance*
- High density living can sometimes cause social stresses that exacerbate community intolerance of all kinds of nuisance. *This intolerance can include dogs that bark but not excessively*
- When councils do not provide enough public infrastructure and dog owners can't provide them with adequate exercise, interactions and stimulating activity, *stress levels of those dogs tends to rise and behavioural problems such as excessive barking can result*
- When the owners of nuisance dogs *have not been informed by neighbours when there is a problem*, formal notification from the council tends to be inflammatory
- When pet dogs have been the subject of barking noise complaints, the people who own those dogs react in a variety of ways. They may:
 - a) Accept that their dog is causing a nuisance and endeavour to resolve the problem as quickly as they can
 - b) Be genuinely unaware that there is a problem and as a consequence *seem* careless about the nuisance when really they are not
 - c) Accept that their dog might be causing nuisance but regard the problem as the complainant's problem rather than their own
 - d) Not be convinced there really is a problem and expect the council to find a solution for them
 - e) Not care who thinks their dog is a nuisance and resent being checked by anybody including the council

1.4 Council (regulatory) causes

Whether or not community/municipal issues *are* problematical or not depends on the issues themselves and also on how these issues are being managed by the local authority. The following regulatory causes of barking nuisance were identified:

- Complaints about excessive barking may be a result of dogs being at large. It is the council's job to see that they are not. If this is not done, the causal linkage is clear
- In some municipalities, current regulatory services in barking management are inadequate to successfully manage this kind of nuisance
- Insufficient research has been done to properly understand barking nuisance and better define tolerance levels

- Regulating authorities currently lack tools that can be reliably used to measure barking sound / noise. Without clear evidence nuisance complaints can not be validated
- Ineffective legislation can hamper the provision of appropriate regulatory services for barking management
- A lack of cooperation between and within state and local governments as well as between and within different departments of each can compromise barking management outcomes at the local government level
- Lack of objective criteria for the official assessment of barking nuisance leaves animal management staff in a difficult situation
- When lacking objective methods for assessment, barking nuisances have to be managed in an arbitrary manner which is unfair on Animal Management staff and unfair on the community.
- Failure of residential planning to provide sufficient quality and quantity of public open space to accommodate the exercise needs of people with dogs, can be another cause of the kind of behavioural stress that leads to nuisance barking.
- There are problems in identifying *who* is responsible for barking nuisance: is it the dogs, the dogs' owners, the community, the legislators, the regulators or the town planners... It is hard to know exactly who is/are at fault in this and to what extent the blame should be apportioned.
- Because barking nuisance is often thought of as being about community amenity rather than about community safety, intervention (from a Local Govt. perspective) is perhaps not supported as well as it should be
- Barking dogs are one of the largest sources of complaint for Local Authorities concerning dogs and yet the number of these complaints that are pursued to resolution is less than those for other complaints.
- Perhaps local government has difficulty in seeing these cases through to resolution due to the emotional attachment of officers investigating and interference by elected representatives.

2. Effects

As with causes, the effects of barking noise are also many and varied. They are associated with the relationship between the owner and the dog as well as the relationship between the dog, the neighbourhood and the broader community.

2.1 Owner/animal effects

- Dogs labelled nuisance barkers may be subjected to what some consider unacceptably harsh treatments to prevent their barking.
- Dog owners may feel that they are the victims of a circumstance beyond their control
- Dog owners may feel that they are the victims of regulatory processes that seem arbitrary and unfair
- Dog owners may feel that they are the helpless victims of intolerant neighbours and over-regulatory councils
- Dog owners may ultimately suffer the loss of their pet if they can't effectively prevent the nuisance

2.2 Community effects

- Barking nuisance can have a negative impact on the social capital potential of dog ownership in society by compromising the benefit side of the "dogs & community" equation
- The difficulty in some cases of barking nuisance can be exacerbated by the fact that negative health impacts for victims of barking dogs while real, may be impossible to identify and evaluate

- Delaying (or trying to avoid) having to address the problem of a neighbour's barking dog, can often cause unnecessary continuation and escalation of the problem
- Sometimes the public has an expectation that the Local Government can somehow wave a magic wand and the barking will cease.
- It's not unusual for the people involved in a barking nuisance dispute to expect the council to engage behavioural consultants to help fix the problem at Council's cost.

2.3 Council effects

Barking nuisance cases often seem to use up more council resources than they warrant. Barking problems can be frustratingly stressful for council regulatory services officers. Factors that can contribute to this effect are as follows:

- Increasing frequency of barking nuisance is possibly due to decreasing residential property sizes and the associated stress effects of closer living
- It can be difficult for council staff to accommodate the complexity caused by the varying perceptions and sensitivities of their residents
- Unresolved barking disputes can lead to escalating animosity between neighbours
- Animal Management Officers are expected to be able to resolve barking complaints fairly, effectively and efficiently. When they are unable to do this, both they *and* their council appear incompetent
- Because the management of barking complaints is so fraught, councils are sometimes tempted to do nothing other than hope these complaints will just go away
- There seems a public perception sometimes that AMOs should be able to deal with all the wider social issues as well as the barking noise nuisance itself

3. Regulation and management

If common sense, competent dog ownership and reasonable tolerance from neighbours were to prevail, no regulation and control for the nuisance excessive barking would be necessary. Regrettably, the reality is different. For the foreseeable future, official regulation and management are going to be required to effectively manage this common cause of public complaint.

Management of nuisance barking is one of the most common UAM tasks that councils are engaged in. To achieve this, three basic things are required:

- a) Dog owners (and their neighbours) need clear indicators as to what amounts to an excessive barking noise
- b) Councils need to have effective public awareness and education program for barking minimisation
- c) Dog owners need to understand that the council does have the will and the resources necessary to effectively deal with barking nuisance.

The working group of delegates that concentrated on this (regulation and management) aspect of our UAM barking management position statement, identified the following important points that can assist councils to get better results:

- SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) need to assure accountability *and* traceability for both the complaints *and* the nuisance
- AMOs need to be able to measure and record "amounts" of barking in a fair, even-handed and transparent manner
- Definitions of nuisance barking noise need to accommodate different circumstances of town planning, land use, topography and proximity of dwellings etc
- Barking noise management plans require linking to the following:

- a) Relevant state noise control legislation (EPA etc)
 - b) Budgets and general UAM resource/support levels in each council
 - c) Having effective communication *within* each council between council policy managers, AM staff, parks, services, leisure, planning
 - d) Having effective communication and resource sharing *between* councils and between relevant state based government parent bodies eg. Dept Ag in Victoria and the DCMB in SA etc.
- SOPs should encourage neighbours to communicate problems directly with each other whenever possible (eg. council provided pro-forma letters that might be dropped in both letterboxes)
 - Well designed facts sheets can provide an ideal "low level" initial response to barking complaints that may avoid the necessity for further council involvement
 - Councils can benefit by establishing communication links with any useful stakeholders. This list might include:
 - a) Bona-fide complainants (not the vexatious unreasonable variety)
 - b) Vets
 - c) Dog clubs
 - d) Dog trainers
 - e) Animal welfare agencies
 - f) Doggy day care etc
 - g) Relevant state and local authorities
 - h) Neighbouring councils.
 - Best practices in barking management can be determined by performance measurement and benchmarking service requests and outcomes
 - Barking complaint SOPs should be like all others by including the following sequence:
 - a) Ascertain as quickly as possible if the complaint is valid
 - b) If yes, advise those responsible to take the necessary steps to abate the nuisance
 - c) Then finally, check to ensure that they have
 - Having magistrates and mediation services that properly understand the complexity of the issues and have had exposure to these incidences is helpful
 - Complainants and dog owners should feel comfortable to report incidences of errant dog behaviour and have access to trained persons to assist in resolution.
 - Intimidation of persons making complaints has been identified as a real reason why some people don't complain about barking dog nuisance
 - SOPs can be additionally supported by the following:
 - a) Having the support of a local laws structure that can draft provisions that prohibits errant owners from owning dogs if they have been previously subject to noise abatement orders
 - b) Having the option to be able to withdraw orders prohibiting the keeping of dogs under noise abatement notices if/when the owner and the pet have under taken recognised training in the discipline of animal behaviour
 - c) Being able to introduce incentives to owners who undertake a formal training regime in animal behaviour correction and then attend an agreed number of sessions - enforcement could be viewed as a last resort
 - d) Including standard investigation procedures (eg. questionnaire format) for complaint case assessment purposes

4. Treatment

Regardless of what kind of remedy might be under consideration, without first finding the cause for the excessive barking, no treatment will be as effective as it could otherwise be. Many remedies proposed for barking nuisance address the symptoms

but not the cause.

In most cases, experienced AMOs are well able to make adequate assessments of the cause, provided they have asked the right questions. Careful questioning of the owners is essential, and SOPs can easily employ a standard questionnaire format to obtain the critical facts. With good training and some experience, causal patterns for excessive barking quickly emerge for alert investigators and these in turn lead to better diagnostic efficiency.

Dog trainers, obedience club trainers, animal behaviourists, veterinarians, and veterinary behavioural specialists may be interested to assist with development of improved council SOPs.

In situations where a barking noise nuisance has been confirmed, the person who owns the dog in question will be obliged to abate the nuisance. To do this, the auditory impact of the barking noise has to be altered (reduced) to the satisfaction of the regulating authority. Remedial treatments for excessive barking can be grouped into three categories:

- a) Council measures
- b) Owner measures
- c) Animal measures

4.1 Council (legislative/regulatory) measures

Prompt action can help prevent routine neighbourhood barking nuisance disputes from escalating to serious conflict. It is the job of legislation to:

- a) Define what constitutes a barking nuisance
- b) Set out how the regulating authority is expected to respond to a complaint
- c) Enable efficient resolution of the problem

To do this, legislation should have the following specific capabilities:

- Allow *objective* measurement of barking noise
- Set criteria for determining *at what (measured) point* barking noise becomes an unacceptable nuisance
- *Accommodate for change* (or development by precedent) as recording technology improves
- Provide a procedural framework which emphasises the collection of *technically "proper" evidence* (evidence that will stand up in court if and when disputes go past the direct local authority resolution processes)
- Include *"orders"* eg. a consequence of failing order conditions including loss of dog
- Include *"powers"* eg. to provide the authority for council officers to remove the dog if that final remedy should be necessary

4.2 Owner measures

Once a barking complaint has been substantiated, the following suggestions can be helpful to the resolution process:

- Owners are more likely to accept the seriousness of the situation and work harder to resolve it if the implications of their failing to do so are made clear at the outset
- It helps if both parties in dispute are still talking to each other.
- Care should be taken to encourage the development of empathy rather than antipathy between neighbours in these cases
- Where possible, the employment of mediation processes (often inexpensive) can be helpful
- It helps (when it is possible) to establish a diagnosis of the cause for the barking problem
- Help from dog clubs, trainers, behaviourist, "Doggy day care" etc can be inexpensive and useful

4.3 Animal measures

Effective treatment of the dog that barks excessively requires two or three things:

- a) Prevent the barking nuisance itself as an immediate measure
- b) Attend to the cause/s of the barking (treat the dog's behavioural environment) as a long term treatment
- c) Perhaps employ a combination of the previous two techniques as an ongoing plan

Options for the minimisation of barking nuisance include:

4.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL

- Reduce visual stimulation for the dog
- Provide noise barriers to absorb or deflect sound e.g move the dog to a different location in the property or keep it indoors
- Temporarily move the dog to another location eg. friend's house
- Provide eg. doggy day care during the times that the barking is a problem

4.3.2 BEHAVIOURAL

- Address the dog's needs for exercise, company and mental stimulation
- Develop a behavioural modification (training) regime to reduce anxiety and reward quietness and calmness
- Actively discourage unnecessary barking (train to not bark)

4.3.3 MEDICATION

- Anti-anxiety medications can have beneficial effects in appropriate cases, especially when used in conjunction with behavioural modification. (Note: As a rule medications for behavioural adjustment to reduce barking need to be dispensed by a veterinarian)

4.3.4 BARKING SUPPRESSION

- a) Anti-barking collars (incl. electronic and citronella) can be successful particularly in the short term to discourage unwanted barking. They can also be used in the longer term as an adjunctive behavioural control measure
- b) "Husher" type muzzles can be used to inexpensively suppress barking noise. As with all barking suppression devices, "hushers" should be used with discretion (in this case because they might induce heat stress by interfering with normal thermoregulation / panting)
- c) Dogs can be "debarked" surgically. Barking is variably muted rather than abolished all together with this technique. There is a body of opinion to the effect that de-barking should be considered an option of last resort on ethical grounds and this is presently reflected in State and Territory legislation
- d) Relocation (rehomeing) and even euthanasia are probably the final solutions for dogs that bark excessively. These are relatively unattractive options, but real nonetheless and should be considered in some cases

Barking prevention devices:

There is currently debate about the propriety of using aversive stimulus collars for barking suppression. Some animal behaviourists do not condone the use of any form of punishment as a behaviour modifying method. Electronic barking suppression devices are illegal in some jurisdictions. It should be noted that:

- a) These devices work by creating an aversive (smell or skin feeling) stimulus to the dog when ever it barks. The dogs dislike these aversive stimuli - it is unpleasant for them - it is a form of punishment - and when these collars work, this is why
- b) In deciding between barking collar options when such devices are deemed necessary, it is important to balance the efficacy and reliability of the device against the intensity of aversive stimulus that it employs. They vary between types and brands and models

Barking prevention devices can serve however, to provide an important respite for all parties involved in a barking nuisance disputes. During this respite period, the owner of a problem barker has an opportunity to work on treating the cause.

The complainant is often placated when it is evident that an effort is obviously being made to abate the nuisance and, (perhaps most beneficial of all) the council officer involved is seen to have made a tangible start on getting resolution. This respite effect is significant from the point of view of complaint management.

5. Prevention

It is said that prevention is always better than cure and so it is, but prevention is not spontaneous – it has to be actively organised and it has to be made to happen. The prevention of problem barking, as with most aspects of UAM, hinges on the following three management elements:

- a) **Education** – public awareness about owner competence, responsibilities and obligations
- a) **Supervision** – regulatory processes that describe and oversee compliance with community expectations and owner performance standards
- b) **Infrastructure** – plant, staffing, facilities etc for getting the job done and meeting public needs

The following is a more complete list of specific suggestions for the prevention of barking nuisance. This list includes the full range of suggestions put forward by workshop delegates. Each can be considered on its merit and then either accepted or rejected according to individual (local) conditions and needs.

5.1 Choosing dog breed/type

- Encourage the breeding of more quietly behaved genetic lines by the combined processes of temperament assessment and selective breeding
- Encourage dog breed organisations to more actively promote the breeding of dogs that are better adjusted for urban life
- Support the assertion that assessment for temperament should be included as a significant (score-able) “show” quality in pedigree dogs
- Encourage an accreditation process for puppy sources (breeders, retailers and animal shelters) as “urban friendly” (geared more to introduce better adjusted household pets). This might include some of the following suggestions:
 - a) Consider “Point of Sale” registration to create the necessary linkages and information channels between councils and new owners right from the outset
 - b) Include essential nuisance prevention (including excessive barking) information as part of the puppy (or newly acquired dog) acquisition/ sale and registration process
 - c) Provide for a “cooling off” period before purchase so people can have the time to think over their motivation to obtain a new puppy but away from the immediate (emotive) pressure of the place of sale
 - d) Arrange post-purchase full refund period for those who later think twice about what was perhaps not such a good decision to buy
 - e) Encourage vet-health checks (accompanied by the new owner) around the time of sale
 - f) Endeavour to link puppy training & socialisation to puppy sales

5.2 Providing the right home environment

- Actively promote puppy socialisation (puppy school programs) for all puppies between 8 and 16 weeks of age
- Make sure all dogs and their owners have access to competent and adequate obedience education/training – provide it if necessary – at least provide the training facilities wherever they are required

- Encourage dog owners to provide adequate mental and physical stimulation for their dogs
- Ensure that dog owners know that they may need to undertake environmental modification for dogs if they are not coping with the environmental activity set-up initially provided
- Promote annual vet checks to help ensure dogs are healthy and are “behaviourally well”¹ – advice is then immediately available
- Provide readily available, public open space environments (dog off leash areas etc).

5.3 Being competent dog owners

Encourage dog owners to provide for the following behavioural needs (See Sect 1.1, under causes of excessive barking, above)

- Inclusion rather than isolation
- Exercise and outings rather than boredom
- Strong leadership rather than uncertainty
- General obedience training rather than not knowing what is expected
- Training for quietness rather than noisiness
- If anxiety can’t be avoided, it can be managed and it can be medically treated

5.4 Delivering progressive government

- Encourage a good public understanding about how social capital can involve dog ownership
- Encourage a good appreciation of what competent dog ownership entails (ideally before acquisition)
- Discourage the purchase of dogs purely as intruder alarm systems on the grounds that a principal property protection role:
 - Encourages barking
 - b) Tends to lead to the behavioural stress of the “dog-locked-up-in the-back-yard” syndrome
 - c) Tends to lead to the behavioural stress of the “ignored and bored” syndrome.
- Consider licensing to own a dog which:
 - a) Links to the idea of owners making a formalised commitment to be competent & considerate dog owners
 - b) Can possibly be directly linked to registration at point of sale
- Consider licensing (or accreditation for) dog vendors (anyone who sells or even gives away dogs). This can:
 - a) Link retailers to making a formalised commitment to competency in the proper retail of this consumer product
 - b) Take steps to “defuse” the commercial potential of “impulse selling” and “emotion based” marketing (avoid the puppy in the window syndrome and the puppy at the pound syndrome)
 - c) Look into the potential of “pre-purchase” information and advice services
 - d) Be subject to a “quality assurance” type of check list as a requirement of trading
- Promote public use of bonafide web based pre-purchase breed/type advice services along the lines of existing services
- Provide for community awareness about breed specific behaviour traits (the tendency for some types of dogs to perhaps be more noisy than others – at all levels -Officers, vet, owner etc.)
- Achieve better public awareness of legislation and local laws relevant to dog ownership
- Promote the notion that animal control legislation is a “community code for competent pet ownership” and not just a set of infringements, offences and penalties

- Reward those dog owners who make the effort to get their ownership roles and responsibilities right and as a consequence don't cause barking problems – this is the reverse (pro-active) side to having penalties that “load” the kinds of careless owners who don't get it right and *do* cause problems
- Provide quality training for AMOs to help improve their image and enable them to perform more proactively and less reactively
- Discourage dog sales through unauthorised breeder channels that make it impossible for local authorities to maintain retail QA system for pet animal purchase
- Introduce animal and customer support systems that encourage good animal /owner behaviour
- Engage those in the community who have been affected by barking dog concerns to come forward and help seek options for management of the problem
- By actively making connections between councils and special interest organisations eg. dog clubs, obedience clubs, trainers, veterinarians, behaviourists etc., councils can:
 - a) Engage such groups in their pet management strategies
 - b) Improve general awareness about their regulatory services, officer's tasks, powers and responsibilities with UAM.
 - c) Assist in promoting more positive images of the skills and status of council AMO's.

A presence in the class room (kid's awareness programs) can achieve the following advantages:

- a) Channel education, tools and information re proper rearing of dogs
- b) Engender more self regulatory support for council
- c) Facilitate community group discussion of the problems – eg. mediation and group assistance
- d) Heighten appreciation of the kind of social capital that is associated with pet ownership in our communities.
- e) Engage local government in demonstrating their appreciation of the value of pets to people and their understanding of the negative impact that unresolved pet nuisance does have for all the community

5.5 Considering the broader community context

The following points were made by workshop delegates on this theme:

- Public education eg. “barking happens” – “considerate dog owners” – “be reasonable neighbours” etc , are matters of interest to the whole community and not just dog owners.
- When barking nuisance cases end up in court, they have already always become a source of serious personal conflict. This can be conflict with the council, or with a neighbour or with both. It is important to remember that these cases would not *be* in court if they could have been resolved by more efficient management measures
- When barking nuisance cases *do* end in court, it helps if the magistrate has a good awareness of the significance (and complexity) of the issues involved. All too frequently, magistrates don't seem to have a good appreciation and tend to be dismissive
- Legislation, regulation and management measures are essentially a community's “code” of reasonable conduct. With barking nuisance laws, they define (set the bar height) of expected dog owners
- Legislation, regulation and management measures can't indicate the bar height of community expectations when this information is not freely available through all available channels incl. media, web and word of mouth
- Both dog owners *and their neighbours* need to know what the rules are (where the “bar height” has been set)
- Empathy & tolerance between neighbours is helpful. For example by introducing something like “neighbourhood watch” techniques for “sharing the caring” of pet dogs, it may be possible to significantly heighten awareness between neighbours about pre-emptive problem management. While neighbours are still talking to each other, pending problems can often be tackled *before* they become critical
- Much can be done to help with the better management of dogs by the provision of improved “public” (community) infrastructure. Providing good public infrastructure that has been purposefully designed to provide for the public needs of dog owners, means that *more* people are *more* able to keep their dogs *less* stressed. Examples of such public infrastructure include:
 - a) the provision of managed open public spaces to encourage dog exercise and socialisation,
 - b) the provision of dedicated dog training facilities for clubs and associations interested in agility, trialling, tracking etc

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Hetts S, Heinke ML and Estep DQ 2004 JAVMA 225 (4) 506-513