

## Codes of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats and Dogs: Tools for Management and Welfare!

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To work in silos can be dangerous, both in reality and metaphorically, and yet too often the issues of animal management and animal welfare are separated out and dealt with independently by different people or organisations. Yet I believe there is general acceptance that the two are interdependent with management underpinning welfare, whether that is for the better or worse being dependant on the management and practices.

The Department of Primary Industries, Bureau of Animal Welfare (BAW) is unique in Australia in that both animal welfare and animal management policy and legislation are integrated together in the one area under the same department. This has immense benefits when looking at solutions to management and/or welfare problems and when developing new legislative tools or policy advice. The codes of practice for the private keeping of cats and of dogs (cat code or dog code) are an ideal example of these areas working together to provide a reference document that can be used not just by those responsible for the animals but as tools by both animal management and animal welfare officers.

- \* Codes of practice are a common legislative tool for setting minimum standards for the welfare of animals in Australia and overseas. There are codes available for most species kept domestically and for most activities which involve animals. In Australia codes are recognised in legislation in all states and territories. However in general they provide a defence to a prosecution rather than it being mandatory to comply with the code requirements although some jurisdictions do make non-compliance an offence.

Victoria has two main legislative vehicles which cover dogs and cats. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (POCTA or the Act) covers the welfare and cruelty issues and sets out offences for unacceptable practices or welfare outcomes. The Domestic (Feral & Nuisance) Animals Act (DFNA) covers the management of dogs and cats kept privately or by domestic animal businesses. Both Acts have related regulations and codes of practice. The implementation of the codes varies however as those codes under the DFNA relate only to domestic animal businesses and are mandatory whereas codes under POCTA relate to a wide variety of species and situations and are not mandatory.

Codes made under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act become a defence under the Act if a person can demonstrate they were complying with the requirements of the relevant code as the Act contains an exemption for actions undertaken in accordance with a code of practice. This meant that careful consideration has to be given to the content of codes of practice and ensuring that any recommendations and minimum standards lead to good welfare outcomes and don't conflict with current legislated requirements.

In Victoria our more recent codes (including the cat and dog codes) have had a change of format and been developed to set out clear minimum standards for the accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of the species. But they also set out guidelines and best practice recommendations to recognise and recommend better than minimum practices.

Such a format is currently being used in the National forum for the development of standards and guidelines under the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) where the intention is that the standards will be underpinned by legislation in all jurisdictions in a consistent manner. The process is starting with the livestock industries but will flow on to all National model codes and hopefully to codes such as the dog and cat codes although there are currently no national dog or cat codes.

The setting of minimum standards for the care and husbandry of animals to underpin their welfare is achieved by establishing essential and beneficial practices, identifying and prohibiting unacceptable practices and setting conditions for those practices which may have some negative welfare outcomes for the animals but for which the benefit outweighs that cost. This approach can be controversial as welfare organisations believe the codes can condone and allow husbandry practices that they believe are cruel or unjustified. Determining where the line should be drawn and what practices are justifiable (particularly in the cost/benefit category) can be difficult: should that benefit be limited to the animal or extended to be human benefit, what cost is acceptable and how do we limit or prohibit practices that are believed unacceptable if science isn't available? These were all questions that had to be addressed when setting standards for these codes.

The cat and dog codes were developed using scientific research, legislative requirements, current industry standards as well as community expectations. Where legislation allows practices or devices which may be controversial in relation to welfare outcomes it was difficult to make other recommendations in this code. With an increasing reliance on science and research to make decisions on what is accepted practice there is a corresponding difficulty in limiting practices for which science is yet to investigate. However where possible the guidelines or best practice recommendations do go further by recommending practices or methods that are generally accepted as creating good animal welfare outcomes. I say generally accepted as if there is one thing for certain when dealing with animals and animal welfare in particular that is you can be guaranteed you will never get unanimous agreement on any issue!

The original project was to develop a single code of practice for the private keeping of dogs and cats which set out the minimum standards as well as providing a reference document for animal owners, animal welfare officers and animal management officers and those involved in the pet industry. One of the first decisions made by the writing group was to recognise the differences in the requirements for cats and dogs by recommending the development of individual codes of practice for each species. This is an important point for those working in animal management where the two species are so often lumped together under the same laws or management strategies when in fact they have quite different management and welfare requirements.

It was agreed that the codes should cover areas such as legal and owner responsibilities, nutrition, water, health, surgical procedures, breeding & reproduction, housing, transport, training & socialisation, welfare risks, euthanasia and even trapping in relation to cats.

The next major decision was in setting standards, should these be simply those that are legislated welfare standards or something more? It was decided that the minimum standards needed to include legislative requirements, or practices that would allow such requirements to be met, but could be more so as to also include those requirements that were agreed to be essential for good welfare outcomes. Standards needed to be well accepted practices or supported by science. As an example, most cruelty/welfare legislations require an animal to be provided with 'proper and sufficient' water or food but what is proper and sufficient? The codes could expand on this in both the minimum standards and the guidelines and best practice recommendations. For example in relation to water the codes standards are shown in figure one.

#### Minimum Standards

- Cats must have access to clean drinking water at all times.
- Water containers must be checked daily and maintained in a clean condition.

Figure 1: minimum standards for water

The codes require access to water at all times, clean containers and checking of water on a daily basis. If this is done then the legislative requirements for proper and sufficient will be met.

One of the objectives behind the development of these codes was also to create a tool for animal management officers when dealing with both management and welfare issues. The codes are management based but set standards for management designed to provide for good animal welfare. For example: Accommodation standards (refer Figure 2) set out minimum sizes for dog enclosures and as such provide a tool for officers talking to owners about confinement that the officers can be comfortable recommending knowing they cater for both confinement to property and for the welfare of the animal.



#### Appendix 4: Minimum enclosure sizes for housing per adult dog

Height of dog	Min area (Sq. m)	Min width (cm)	Min height (cm)
70 cm and above	15	240	180
40 – 70 cm	10	180	180
less than 40 cm	7	120	180

Figure 2: Minimum enclosure sizes for housing per adult dog.

The codes can be used both as a reference document by officers or handed out to owners to provide much needed educational advice for those failing in either management or welfare requirements. They can also provide a legislative backup to an officer's instruction if being challenged.

The writing of these codes also lead to the development of tools such as the humane trapping information note (discussed later) and to the development of body condition charts (see Figure 3) that can be used by owners, officers and vets to assist in educating on what is acceptable body condition and identifying where proper and sufficient food is being provided (either too little or too much!). Appendixes at the back provide additional reading, organisations to contact as well as the body condition charts and recommended enclosure sizes (see figure 2).

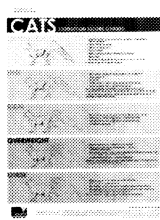


Figure 3: cat condition score chart

As discussed above in order to underpin good welfare it is important to highlight the management practices that support welfare in contrast to those that just support good management. What I hear some say, doesn't everyone agree that good management leads to good welfare?? Yes that's true however

sometimes a solution to animal management problems may not lead to good welfare outcomes. What is good management? Is it management that benefits both human and animal needs? I hope so but some could say it could also be management that solves a human problem in a way that may not be a positive welfare outcome for the animal. I discuss below how issues such as a confinement, training (especially for nuisance behaviours such as excessive barking) and trapping can be well managed but create poor welfare.

Confinement is a management issue with both welfare benefits and costs for the animal. Confinement to property is a necessary requirement these days for both management and welfare reasons, it has for both positive welfare outcomes (ie protection from being hit by a car) and potential negative welfare outcomes. Take dogs for example a social species for which confinement has the potential to cause isolation, boredom and physiological problems. The dog code sets out the legal requirements for confinement and having dogs on lead as required and of course if we achieve that we achieve good animal management? In the main, yes, however the negative welfare impacts of confinement can lead to other management problems such as barking or destructive or aggressive behaviours. A quick fix may be a correction collar for barking or tethering for escapism but are these good outcomes for the dog? The dog code sets out the legal and management requirements for confinement but it also strongly encourages owners to socialise, train, exercise and spend time with their dog so as to minimise the negative effects of this confinement on the animal itself.

So while we recognise the need for confinement to property and on lead requirements, it is also important to recognise and plan to minimise the negative impacts of such requirements. Management policies from an AMO point of view need to take into account the importance of socialisation for dogs and encouraging enrichment for cats confined inside or to enclosures. Perhaps encourage socialisation by providing plenty of access to attractive and easily accessible off lead areas (not just the unwanted parks or times!) and even looking to dog play equipment for parks as this provides a central meeting point for dogs, their owners and for AMO's to interact with and educate their dog owning ratepayers! Isn't that better than dealing with the barking, aggressive or escapee dogs?

The animal behaviour/training area is another example of where practices or implements may be challenged on welfare grounds while they are successful in achieving management outcomes such as stopping barking, escapism or poor behaviour. Use of training devices such as electronic collars, pronged collars and even check chains are being challenged on welfare grounds by some while justified by others in that the means justifies the end? Should we be requiring only positive training methods in the code? Possibly but at this time other methods are accepted and negative training tools allowed by legislation. The codes therefore do talk about some negative training tools (where they are legally allowed), set out cautions on use or state the legal requirements of use but they also set as a standard the requirement that training methods that are humane. Such issues are difficult to legislate or even set into minimum standards such as codes especially when even the industry can't agree on some practices.

I'm not being critical of this industry here (although some consensus would make my job easier!) animal behaviour is a complex and involved area of science and the issue of cost vs benefit is a major issue. What I would suggest however is that before recommending a solution to a management problem AMO's first think about the costs of the solution to the animal and rather than taking the quick or instance fix look to the solution that has good outcomes for both human and animal! Such a solution will have benefits to AMO's in that it is much more likely to be a permanent solution and not come back to your attention in the future!

The issue of overpopulation of cats is a topical example of both a management and welfare issue although not one I am going into in this paper however stray and feral cat management is a part of this issue and one that many AMO's, whether or not your council or state has laws for cat management, are involved in.

Cat trapping is a common tool used in an effort to control the numbers of stray and feral cats and to deal with the problem of trespassing cats (in Victoria at least). With all animal trapping there are huge welfare risks for the animal trapped and a wide range of traps for use with varying degrees (or not) of humaneness. It was due to the high welfare impacts of trapping that it was considered important enough to specifically deal with in the cat code as privately kept cats may be the target of trapping programs (the issue of wild dog trapping was considered outside the province of a code for private keeping of dogs). The cat code sets out that trapping methods must be humane, a difficult outcome in a society where the humaneness of trapping is only now becoming an issue and where the degree of usefulness, nuisance or attractiveness of the animal impacts on the level of concern for that species or animal. Owned cats vs stray cats vs feral cats, they are all the same species and deserve the same consideration.

Minimum standards in the cat code go beyond what was or is legislatively in place by stating that leg/foot hold traps, snares or noose traps must not be used and only supports confinement type traps where the cat is totally contained by the trap not just caught by a part of its body. Even cage traps have welfare risks, how often are they checked, are they set out in the sun, how long is the cat without water, is it being harassed by a dog living on the property on which it is trapped. All these issues were considered and some basic standards put into the code but it is an involved area and so a humane trapping of cats information note was developed which details humane trapping for cats and the code requires that trapping of cats is done in accordance with that information sheet. The code thus puts in place welfare standards for a problem that might otherwise be dealt with successfully (management wise where the aim is to control numbers) in ways that are definitely not welfare friendly.

Too often these days in the light of increasing workloads and demands on time it is easy to work within the silo of our work role only considering the direct responsibilities, activities and impacts of our actions to get through the day. It is easy to overlook the impacts our work has on other issues or on animals and simply focus on solving the immediate problem. However by taking this a step further and looking at solutions which fix both the immediate problem and improving the welfare of the animal we can not only feel good that we have achieved a good outcome but also know that we have perhaps prevented a longer term or alternative problem from developing.

I have diverged from strictly talking about the codes and their standards however one of my aims in submitting this paper was to emphasis is the importance of addressing the management issue while talking into account the animal's welfare to achieve the best possible outcome for all.

It was never to spell out the contents of the codes; they are available already and can be downloaded at ([www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare)). I have talked about the link between management and welfare, raised the issue that while good management can be good welfare this is not true all of the time and tried to highlight that the job AMO'S do isn't just about management (be that your prime focus) but also about welfare and that how you do your management tasks and set council policies can also have a major impact on animal welfare.

I hope I have been able to highlight the importance of going beyond simply management solutions and policies to ensure both welfare and management requirements are considered. This is what we have tried to achieve in these codes and goes to the basis of the new message that we at BAW in Victoria will be encouraging all to consider in the future:

**"Where your activities may affect animals you must take reasonable action to protect their welfare."**

### About the Author

Cathy Pawsey is the Coordinator Policy and Legislation for Victoria's Bureau of Animal Welfare. This role involves the development of policy and legislation primarily related to animal welfare but also involvement in the domestic animal management area. Cathy has a Bachelor of Applied Science (Agriculture) and has worked in a range of animal related industries including both animal health and animal welfare regulatory roles.

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