

South Australian Dog and Cat Management Board response to the Ombudsman's enquiry

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Abstract

An investigation by the South Australian Ombudsman in 2008 found that some Animal Management Officers (AMOs) employed by local councils were either not aware of their powers or were stepping beyond the legislative framework which confers those powers.

The subsequent report by the Ombudsman identified a lack of training as a significant issue that effected how AMOs in South Australia could successfully carry out their duties in accordance with the legislative structure and community expectation.

The aim of this paper is to give the reader an insight into the Board's response to the Ombudsman's enquiry particularly in relation to the development of an induction package for all AMOs in South Australia.

The paper will deal with:

- The Dog & Cat Management Board and its role
- Standard Operating Procedures for AMOs
- The Training Package

Who is the Dog and Cat Management Board and what is their role?

Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 is an Act to provide for the management of dogs and cats; and for other purposes.

12—Composition of Board

- (1) The Board consists of 9 members appointed by the Governor, of whom—
 - (a) 4 will be nominated by the LGA; and
 - (b) 4 will be nominated by the Minister; and
 - (c) one, to chair the Board, will be jointly nominated by the LGA and the Minister.
- (2) The members of the Board nominated by the LGA under subsection (1)(a) must together have the following attributes:
 - (a) practical knowledge of and experience in local government, including local government processes, community consultation and the law as it applies to local government;
 - (b) experience in the administration of legislation;
 - (c) experience in financial management;
 - (d) experience in education and training.
- (2a) The members of the Board nominated by the Minister under subsection (1)(b) must together have the following attributes:
 - (a) experience in state government processes and the administration of legislation;
 - (b) veterinary experience in the care and treatment of dogs or cats;
 - (c) a demonstrated interest in the welfare of dogs or cats;
 - (d) a demonstrated interest in the keeping and management of dogs or cats;
 - (e) experience in community health or medicine.
- (2b) The person nominated to chair the Board must, in the opinion of the LGA and the Minister, have the abilities and experience required to promote the effective performance of the Board and its functions.

21—Functions of Board

- (1) The Board has the following functions:
- (a) to plan for, promote, and provide advice about, the effective management of dogs and cats throughout South Australia;
 - (b) to oversee the administration and enforcement of the provisions of this Act relating to dogs, including—
 - (i) monitoring the administration and enforcement of this Act by councils; and
 - (ii) issuing guidelines and providing advice to councils about—
 - (A) planning for the effective management of dogs;
 - (B) training for dog management officers;
 - (C) the appropriate level of administration and enforcement in the circumstances prevailing in the area;
 - (D) the issuing of orders or related directions under this Act;
 - (E) the standard of facilities used for the detention of dogs under this Act;
 - (F) the keeping of registers under this Act and the issuing of certificates of registration and registration discs;
 - (G) any other matter related to the administration or enforcement of the provisions of this Act relating to dogs; and
 - (iii) otherwise providing support and assistance to councils;

Standard operating procedures

Most Councils in South Australia have operating procedures. The Ombudsman identified deficiencies in some operating procedures.

Ongoing audits by the Board found that many councils did not have sufficient, if any, standard operating procedures in relation to the animal management officers role. The Board began developing some standard operating procedures and was therefore not surprised at the recommendations of the Ombudsman. In consultation with the Local Government Association (LGA) the Board has developed the following standard operating procedures;

- Wandering Dog
- Dog Attack and Harass;
- Dog Destruction and Control Order
- Seizing and Impounding a Dog

The LGA is developing other standard operating procedures in relation to other duties of compliance officers i.e. impounding of vehicles, enforcement policy. The Board is working with the LGA and the AMOs themselves to identify other standard operating procedures which would assist them and would ensure that they were in compliance with their legal obligations.

It is expected that these procedures will be available to Councils by the end of 2009

Training of officers

In 2006 the Board provided a grant to the Authorised Persons Association, (APA) to improve the professionalism and qualifications of AMO's. The APA represents authorised officers working in Local Government Regulatory Services. This includes Rangers, Compliance Officers, General Inspectors, and Animal Management Officers.

The APA appointed a private consultant to develop the APA Charter and TAFE Certificate IV in Regulatory Services in consultation with the Board, LGA and TAFE. The Board also funds animal behaviour training to officers through the RSPCA.

In 2008 the Ombudsman's enquiry made comments on animal management in councils in particular the lack of training and knowledge of powers of officers.

It was recognised by the Board that while a number of AMOs in South Australia had started or completed Certificate IV, a base level of training for all AMOs was lacking. This applied in particular to new officers who had little or no knowledge of, or experience in animal management, had to hit the ground running but were not able to enrol and complete the Certificate IV course immediately.

The Board tendered for the development and delivery for of a professional development program for animal management officers. The tender was awarded to Scott & Associates Consulting, NSW.

The Course has been developed in two parts, one of which will be delivered online and the other will be face to face at a one day training session.

The online component has been developed so that the officer can work through the session with the aid of their manager or "buddy" and will cover;

- basic legislation,
- powers of officers
- resources available.

TAFE will provide reports to the Board on who has completed the course.

The face to face training session will cover;

- The Acts under which an AMO operates
- AMO Roles and Responsibilities
- AMO powers and constraints
- Communicating effectively
- Principles of evidence and third party evidence collection.

The face to face session will involve group sessions, and aims to have active participation from attendees' members and encourage networking amongst animal management officers. Participants will be given a work book to complete which they will keep for future reference. At the end of the course participants will be encouraged to enrol in the Certificate IV in Regulatory Services.

An addition to the above package Animal Management Officers will should complete a one day course run by the RSPCA on behalf of the Board which covers;

- Breed recognition
- Dog behaviour
- Dog handling techniques
- Bite prevention

In the coming months the Board will make recommendations to Councils regarding the attendance requirements at these courses.

Summary

The Board's response to the Ombudsman's enquiry means that all animal management officers in South Australia will have access to standard operating procedures specifically for their role and will have the opportunity to undertake some training prior to commencing active duty. The development of this course will provide the Board with confidence that AMOs have a basic understanding of their role.

About the author

Ms Adele Steel, is the Urban Animal Management Officer for the Dog and Cat Management Board and has worked in the in Animal Welfare Unit since June 2004.

Adele says that the best part of her job is working with the animal management officer groups and team leaders to increase the professionalism and recognition of the role of an animal management officer. She is a current member of the Veterinary Surgeons Board. She emigrated to Australia in 2003.

