

## The link between dog control and dog welfare

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### Abstract

Auckland City Council's strong dog management policies have resulted in improved animal welfare - fewer dog attacks, fewer dogs picked up wandering, and fewer unclaimed dogs euthanised and fewer dogs hurt or killed in traffic accidents.

Our policy focuses on dogs which are aggressive, wandering, unleashed and/or unregistered.

- If a dog is aggressive, we may infringe (give an instant fine to) the owner, classify their dog as menacing or dangerous, impound the dog to protect public safety or prosecute.
- If a dog wanders or is walked off leash, we give one warning then infringe with a \$300 fine.
- Our registration year is from 1 June to 31 July. From the second week of August, we impound unregistered dogs and infringe the owners with a \$300 fine.

We have learned from the experiences and research of people like Dr Richard Murray and various Australian councils in formulating our policy.

*"A review of the dog problems ... indicated that most of the City's dog problems could be overcome if all dog owners could be encouraged to comply with existing Council registration, dog noise suppression and dog restraint by-laws."*

(Murray, R. (1992). "New Direction in Municipal Dog Control". In Proceedings of the First National Conference on Urban Animal Management in Australia, p. 116, Brisbane.

### Overview

Auckland City Council has considerably reduced dog problems, particularly dog aggression. We have not come up with "different", radical or innovative policies. Rather, we have gone back to basics and enforced existing laws consistently.

By enforcing the existing laws, we have improved animal welfare – there have been fewer dogs attacking other animals, fewer dogs wandering, and fewer unclaimed dogs euthanised. Anecdotally, we are told there have been fewer dogs hurt in traffic accidents.

People who believe that the council is simply "revenue gathering" are off-target.

We firmly believe that by enforcing the dog control rules, dog owners take their dog owner responsibilities more seriously – and the dogs are better looked after.

We educate and advise – and we enforce. Our enforcement focuses on aggressive dogs, irresponsible dog owners, roaming dogs, unleashed dogs and unregistered dogs.

If dog owners ensure their dogs do not wander, their dogs are less likely to:

- attack other dogs through territorial behaviour
- attack neighbour's domestic pets
- be the victim of a traffic accident
- be impounded for wandering, and therefore less likely to euthanised if unclaimed.

The charts tell the story of Auckland City Council dog control.

Chart A: Infringement notices and warning notices

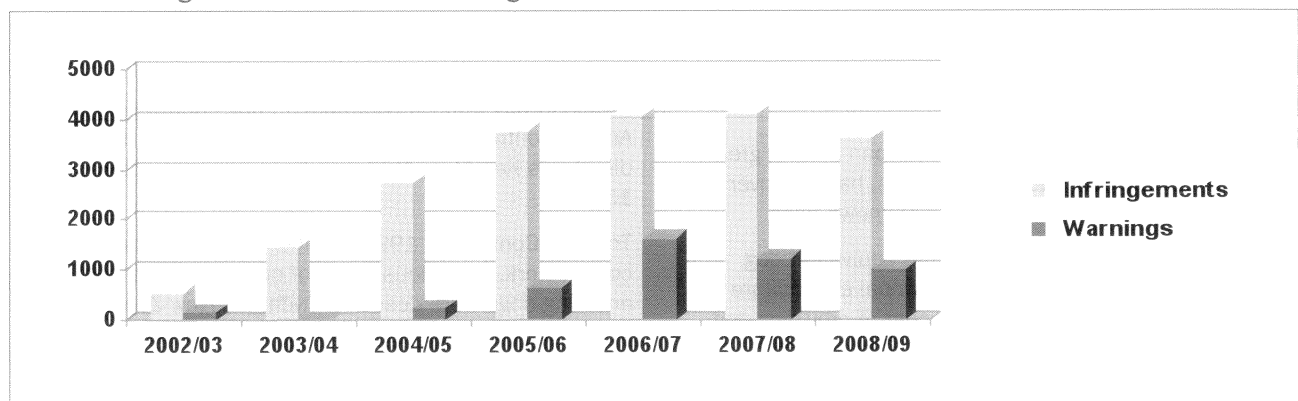


Chart B: Complaints about wandering dogs

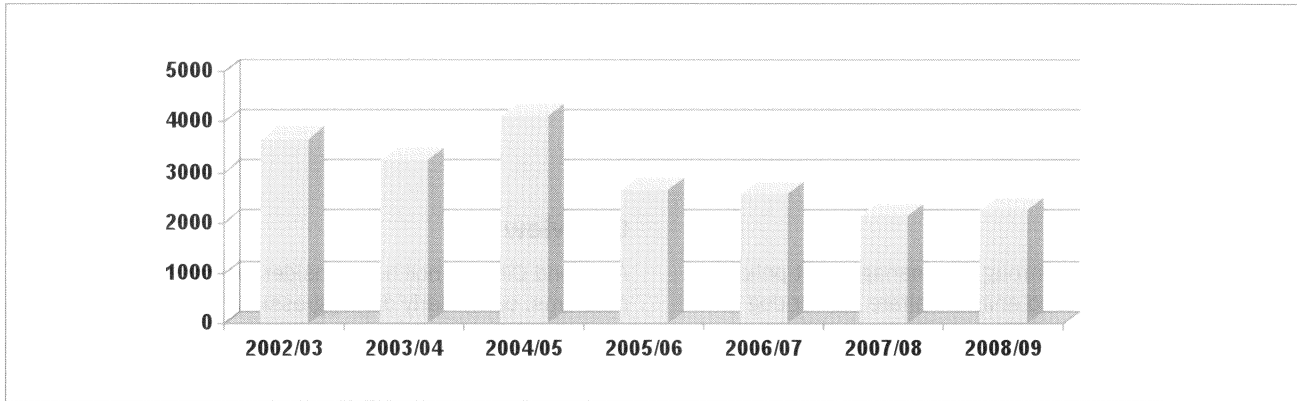


Chart C: Reported dog aggression

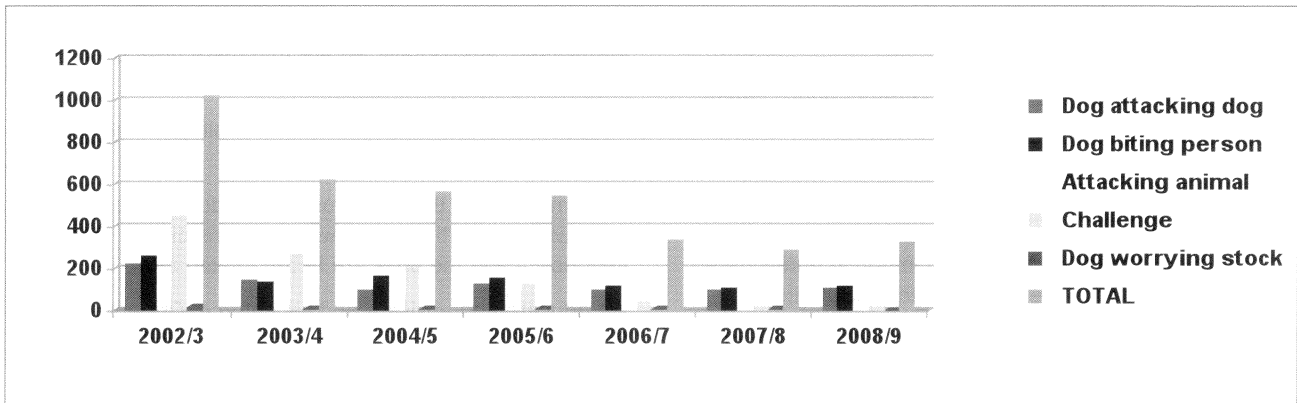
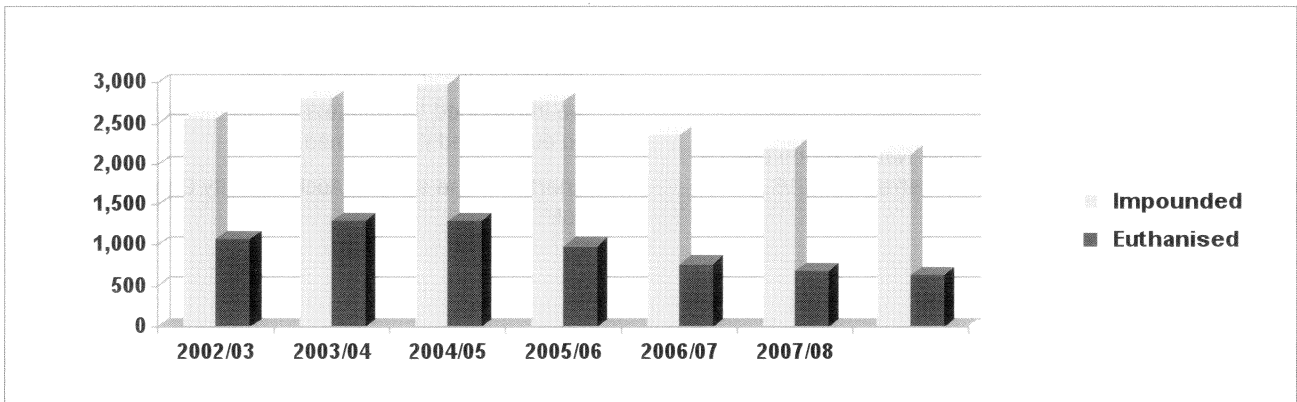


Chart D: Impoundments and euthanasias



## Overview

Auckland city (the central and mostly urban area of greater Auckland) covers 669 square kilometres, has just over 400,000 people and just over 20,000 known dogs.

For dog control we have 14.5 full time equivalent dog control officers (17 people) and an annual expenditure of over \$2 Million. Around 30% of the cost of providing dog control services is met by rates (council levies); the remainder is met through dog registration and infringement fees.

Auckland City Council contracts its dog control services to Animal Control Services Limited (ACSL), whose managing director is Ken Muir. ACSL has been our contractor for 15 years.

The Dog Control Act 1996 provides the framework for dog control work. A previous focus of dog control work was ensuring dogs were dosed for hydatids. New Zealand was declared free of hydatids in 1999. Now our focus is promoting responsible dog ownership.

## The turning point: the Carolina Anderson attack

In January 2003, a seven year old girl in Auckland, Carolina Anderson, was viciously attacked by a dog, requiring 10 hours of facial surgery and re-constructive surgery over several years. Her face is permanently disfigured. There was intensive media coverage of the incident and dog control issues, particularly in the main Auckland newspaper.

In February 2003, Parliament got tougher on dog control. It amended the Dog Control Act to:

- increase fines
- increase powers for officers, eg for seizing unregistered or aggressive dogs
- classify a dog as "menacing" (as an alternative to a "dangerous" classification)
- increase fines and penalties
- require owners to use or carry leash with a dog in public (except for working dogs).

	Before Carolina	After Carolina
Fine for a bylaw offence	\$200	\$500 (later reduced to \$300)
Max. penalty dog causing a serious injury	Three months imprisonment & \$5K fine	Five years imprisonment & \$20K fine

In addition, Parliament introduced compulsory microchipping for dogs which were:

- first registered since 1 July 2006 (unless a working farm dog)
- classified as menacing or dangerous after 1 December 2003
- impounded when unregistered or impounded twice.

Although the Dog Control Act imposes national rules and a framework, Councils set dog registration fees, dog bylaws and a local dog control policy. Councils can:

- issue infringement notices
- prosecute owners
- classify dogs as menacing
  - by breed or type (Pit Bull terrier, Brazilian Fila, Dogo Argentino, Japanese Tosa)
  - by deed = aggressive behaviour
- classify dogs as dangerous
- classify owners as probationary or disqualified
- impound dogs for various reasons (unregistered, roaming, a threat to public safety).

Councils keep records of their dogs, and update the National Dog Database with many of these records, especially the microchip number and if the dog or owner is classified.

## Auckland City Council's previous dog control policy

Until February 2003, Auckland City Council had an "average" dog control policy.

- If a dog wandered, we would return the dog, without infringing the owner. With a continuing problem, we would write to the owner; if the problem still continued, we would infringe.
- If a dog was off-leash in public, we would usually only infringe if the dog had not been kept under control. The dog control officer would tell the owner that the local bylaws required dogs to be on leash in public – but we did not keep consistent records of these verbal warnings.
- If a dog was not registered, we would send the owner a letter reminding them to register their dog. If the dog remained unregistered, we then issued an infringement notice.

Our prosecution policy has remained unchanged for many years. We will prosecute for serious aggression, after considering the individual circumstances.

## Auckland City Council's current policy

In February 2003, the council introduced a zero tolerance policy for dog control offences.

From April 2004, our contract with ACSL increased the number of officers and their working hours. The contract specified policies and procedures; even the work roster.

In September 2004, the council introduced our current four-tiered policy, which is:

1. providing information and advice
2. issuing warnings
3. issuing infringement notices, prosecuting owners, and classifying menacing and dangerous dogs and probationary and disqualified dog owners
4. immediate enforcement action for unregistered dogs.

### 1. Providing information and advice

The council provides information and advice through:

- our website
- our newspaper, which is sent to every Auckland city household
- pamphlets, brochures, posters, information packs for council office, libraries, vets etc
- contact with media (especially community newspapers)
- educational sessions in schools, kindergartens, and kohanga reo
- attendance at public events
- specialised training, eg, for power meter readers, nursing staff, Census staff
- providing good dog owner sessions
- daily dealings with dog owners and the public.

## **About the author**

Clare Connell has been the animal contracts manager for Auckland City Council since July 2004. She previously worked as a lawyer for the kiwi equivalent of the Competition and Consumer Commission and in the health sector. She cares for a black Lab, Jack Sparrow.

Her favourite insults from her work with the council to date are, "If Hitler had children, we know where they work" and "I hate you guys more than parking wardens". To date, her favourite excuses for not registering a dog are, "He weighs less than 5 kilos" and "But I live in a million dollar house".