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## Breeder permits and the community

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In March 2008, Caboolture Shire Council, Redcliffe City Council and Pine Rivers Shire Council amalgamated to create Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC). MBRC, covering 2,011 square kilometres with a population of 360,000 is represented by a Mayor and 12 Divisional Councillors. There are approximately 70,000 registered dogs and 10,000 registered cats.

The Community and Environmental Services Division, Community Response Unit is responsible for all Local Law related matters including Animal Management, Regulated Parking and Local Government Controlled Areas/Reserves. This is supported by a workable mission statement - *"Enhancing community lifestyle and enjoyment of the Moreton Bay region through innovation, education and promotion of Council local laws"*.

Despite the best attempts of the community response officers and enforcement programs, we fight an uphill battle where efforts to reduce unwanted animals, and in turn, behaviour change, fail. In saying this we focus on puppy and kitten farming...To face this challenge, Moreton Bay Regional Council has set out to regulate animal breeding in the community so the distinction between puppy and kitten farms and responsible professional and part time breeders can be made. This intern will set the standard expected for breeding animals and to help them achieve a better understanding of their pets, the community's needs and positive behaviour change.

This paper details the reasons why MBRC took this direction and the initiatives taken that have been a positive outcome for both the council and the community.

### 1 Breeder permits and the process

MBRC identified the difficulty to enforce local laws regarding puppy and kitten farms when there were no clear standards or guidelines to match the offending against. Yes there are the obvious animal ratio numbers for allotments that all puppy and kitten farms exceed but we recognised the need to be equitable, fair and transparent when enforcing

breaches of the law especially illegal breeding as we had identified many "Mum and Dad with two dogs breeding illegally" adding to the unwanted animal population.

MBRC decided to create three main categories of permits. The first was an affiliated breeder permit for cats and dogs which intended to identify those breeders aligned to an organisation or club that had a code of practice and code of ethics. Such breeders were typically the professional breeders with their pure bred animals. Many of these breeders were members of Dogs Queensland.

The second permit was the non-affiliated permits for cats and dogs that intended to identify the back yard breeder who was wanting to breed their cross bred dogs. (These people were not to be confused with the puppy or kitten farms). We believed that the breeding of pure bred dogs only would not be considered equitable, fair or transparent. Having said that the focus was to provide benefits to the affiliated breeders to acknowledge their professionalism and recognise their status in belonging to an organisation or club.

The third was the affiliated permits for other animals such as poultry and birds etc. These permits had the same criteria as the affiliated cat and dog permits. Numbers were looked at on an individual basis and all were required to be a member of a breed club.

Consultation with these groups was essential to enable a mutual understanding and respect to be developed and maintained between council and the breeders. Our first aim was to train the Customer Service Officers and Community Response Officers. Many officers saw the logics behind giving permits to the professional breeders but not the smaller back yard breeders. After explaining the idea and philosophy behind the initiative the officers understood that once the first phase had been completed it would a lot easier to identify and deal with those illegal breeders without permits.

We contacted the Presidents of both the dog and five cat organisations to obtain their feedback and advice over the suggested permits. Working with these people enabled council to have identified and address

the major concerns and issues before having to deliver our breeder presentations to the members of these groups.

We consulted with a myriad of other groups during this project such as the Poultry and Bird clubs, organic growers (with pigs) and also Pet Shops who were the middle man for the illegal breeding and the animals getting to the community.

The key benefits associated with an affiliated breeder permit is the ability to keep over and beyond the number of animals allowed in the local law. However this benefit was on the proviso that they maintain and continue to maintain the animal's nuisance free and to the minimum standards set out by council and their own code of practice.

This policy was developed to encourage affiliated breeders to deal openly with council and to offer incentives to those who were doing the right thing. These incentives ranged from as previously mentioned above local law numbers but also discounted registration. The way we determined numbers allowed relied heavily upon what council planners and the breeders themselves considered reasonable. Nine dogs was considered reasonable by both parties. Anything more was looked upon as a commercial business and a possible kennel. Fifteen cats was considered reasonable by both parties as many cat breeders required several animals to obtain the required colouring.

To allay the fears of those breeders that had current numbers above those considered reasonable we worked with those people to incorporate their needs. An example was a breeder that had fifteen dogs on the property (points to her for being open and honest). Six of her numbers were seniors that were desexed and considered pets. To show council was willing to work with her, we agreed that the seniors could stay and would be named on the permit but as they passed away they could not be replaced. So over the next few years her numbers would be brought down to the agreed number. The breeder saw that council were indeed being up front and honestly trying to work with them. This gesture soon spread amongst the group and Councils profile was enhanced due to this.

The non-affiliated permits were for cats and dogs only. The cat and dog species were considered areas where council officers had the most expertise so could better manage the aspect of people not being members of a club but could still be doing the right thing. If the on site inspection was approved then the applicant is directed to an on line quiz (based on the species standard of the organisations). This can be resat as many times as necessary. The quiz requires a 100% pass. If the applicant had minor errors the Education Officer would rely on

the Community Response Officer to speak with the applicant after which time the test would be redone. If there were major issues with the responses the Education Officer, in conjunction with the Community Response Officer would visit the applicant and conduct education surrounding the concerns. Once the Education Officer and Community Response Officer were satisfied the applicant was aware of their responsibilities the quiz could be redone.

The permit fees were again developed to ensure affiliated breeders were given incentives. The permit application fee was set at \$140 per permit (this was the standard application fee across council for most applications). The lower senior/junior fees were created to cater for the more mature applicant and in the cases of poultry and bird breeders where it was common practice for younger members to keep, breed and show these animals. The current renewal fee is \$25 per annum. For cats and dogs the affiliated breeder permit registration fees are the flat rate of \$20. For non-affiliated breeder permit registration is the full entire rate of \$88 per annum.

## **2 Permit conditions**

The conditions for our permits were based on our local law and the code of practice for each of the species. To be able to process the application an on site inspection was required. The main focus of this inspection was to ensure the property was able to sustain the numbers of animals requested. To assist in making this determination we checked that the fencing and materials used for the fencing was adequate for containing the animals upon the land. The next item looked at was the keeping of the animals themselves. The shelter/housing area was checked. We ensured that the pet food was secured in vermin proof containers etc.

If any defects or breaches were detected we allowed the applicant to rectify those issues by issuing a compliance notice. Reinspections were conducted if required. If the property inspection was approved then the applicant had to abide by the minimum standards of the keeping of that animal including the group's code of practice and ethics. The affiliated breeder permit applicant had to supply evidence that they were indeed a current breed member of the group which was usually followed by the providing of a prefix or breeder name. An important element of the conditions were that all breeders, once approved, had to include their breeder permit number on all advertising/websites etc. This is to assist in our second phase of the permit project.

The applicant is informed very early on in the process that should they be successful that the permit can be revoked at anytime if any of the

conditions are breached. This has been endorsed by the Presidents of the groups and accepted as fair by all applicants.

### **3 How we determine reasonable numbers**

MBRC took an "individual" approach to determine how to ascertain what numbers would be reasonable. As well as the above mentioned conditions looked at such as fencing, shelter, and nuisance etc we decided to judge numbers on a case by case basis.

The main criteria was how the applicant complied with the basic permit conditions, breed of the animals, property size, fencing, enclosures, proximity of neighbours and any history of complaints.

Taking all of the above into consideration we determined what numbers would be reasonable.

For example having four large dogs on a 400m<sup>2</sup> block would not be likely granted but four cats or small dogs most probably would. However breed size is not the only determining factor, all factors are looked at. If the applicant can satisfy council that they can sustain four large dogs on a small block then the permit will be granted.

Another example would be a small block with six Huskeys on it, however the applicant races his dogs and runs them 15kms every morning and 15kms every night ensuring full mental and physical stimulation then there would be no reason why we would not grant the permit.

If the applicant satisfies this requirement we demand the animals are adequately identifiable so as we can ascertain the keeper's name, address and contact details. This would be by way of a registration tag and microchip.

The applicant must ensure that waste waters from enclosures are drained in a nuisance free manner and that run-off is kept off adjoining land or as otherwise directed by an authorised person. This is also requested as a permit condition.

The keeper must ensure that excreta, food scraps and other material that is, or is likely to become, offensive is collected at least daily and, if not immediately removed from the premises, is kept in a fly proof container of a kind approved by the local government.

The keeper must ensure that any enclosure in which the animal is kept is in a clean and sanitary condition and free of dust and odour.

The keeper must ensure that the enclosure is vermin free.

In addition to the general standards, a person who keeps an animal or an animal of a specified species must also comply with the code of practice for that species of animal. Hence why we include the code of practice for affiliated breeders into their permit conditions.

To assist our applicants comply with the minimum standards council run microchipping days where breeders are welcome to attend along with general pet owners and they can have each animal chipped for \$15.

To date through our council's PetSmart Program over 6000 pets have been chipped.

At the conclusion of the permit project we have 208 affiliated breeders and 19 non-affiliated breeders on our books.

Councils second phase is to educate the public on what to look for when you buy an animal. We intend to run ads in the papers, radio and possibly on television confirming our vision and most of all ensuring the public sights a breeder permit number/certificate before buying.

### **Conclusion**

Local Laws benefit the community through structure and guidelines. This in turn promotes a harmonious living environment for all residents. Breeder Permits within MBRC have enabled council to identify and endorse the professional and part time breeders in our community that are doing the right thing. Education is knowledge and knowledge is power. When a community is educated, the gained knowledge increases awareness and interest in the future success of their local environment. In turn, this leads to a powerful community willing to take responsibility and get involved, thus everyone works together towards a common goal.

It is important to remember that working together is the key. Communication, inclusion, feedback and feed forward are crucial. Community Response Officers work in conjunction with Education Officers to ensure that the community is supported from a regulatory and educational perspective. Teamwork assists in creating positive results through behaviour change.

### **References**

Web site – [www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmartbreeders](http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmartbreeders)  
[www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart](http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/petsmart)

## ◎ BIOGRAPHY

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Stuart Duck has worked within the regulatory and enforcement sector for over 16 years incorporating the New Zealand Police and local government. He is currently the Operational Support Officer for Moreton Bay Regional Council's Community Response Unit.



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