

01

What was the world 'Expert Meeting on Dog Population Management'? What did they decide?

TRACY HELMAN

Bureau of Animal Welfare, DPI Victoria

Background

It is estimated that there are 400-500 million dogs in the world and that at some time in their life 75% of them will roam (FAO 2011). Yes there is a lot of busy Animal Management Officers (AMO) out there!

In September 2010 the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) announced that they would host a three week electronic consultation period to discuss dog population management options. The main objective of the e-consultation was to identify dog population management options with special emphasis on animal welfare and health and to provide opportunities for researchers, development workers, national and local authorities and the international community to share their knowledge and experiences.

During the three week period over 230 people/ organizations from 69 countries participated in the discussions. The consultation provided a summary of the current state of knowledge of dog population management options.

It highlighted three major factors linked to dog population management:

1. The major role of municipalities for effective management of dogs and the need for national legislation and international collaborations.
2. The control of zoonotic disease (mainly rabies) and the other main drivers for dog population management and responsible dog ownership.
3. The importance of public awareness building on responsible dog ownership, education and continuing training of all operators on public and animal health as well as animal welfare.

The three most discussed options for dog population management were:

1. Killing/Poisoning.
2. Capturing + sheltering for a certain period + euthanizing if not claimed or adopted (or immediate euthanasia if sick or aggressive).
3. Capturing, identifying, neutering, vaccinating and releasing.

The meeting

Following the e-consultation several organizations combined resources to sponsor and support an "Expert Meeting on Dog Population Management":

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA).
- Instituto G. Caporale (IGC).
- The Fondazione – Spinola Banna per l'Arte.
- Panamerican Health Organization (PAHO).
- World Health Organization (WHO).
- World Organization for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties, or OIE).

In early December 2010 the sponsors put out a "call for experts", seeking people "to provide expert knowledge and guidance to a wide range of stakeholders including national and local governments who may address dog population management options and implement relevant international standards and best practices".

WHO WENT?

One hundred and twenty applicants applied for the meeting, of these twelve "experts" were selected. They were to be supported by representatives from the European Commission (EU), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), OIE, PAHO, WHO, WSPA, FAO and IGC.

The representatives selected were people who had worked, or were working in: Australia, Brazil, Croatia, France, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Laos, Malaysia, Peru, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.

WHAT WAS THE FORMAT?

It was made clear to all participants that the meeting was not to be seen as a conference to gather information but as a technical meeting that must result in the experts developing a practical guide to dog population management and identifying what further research is required in the area. In doing this they had to place special emphasis on considering

the acceptability, of the recommendations, depending on ethical, socio-economic, political and religious specificities of the local context.

WHEN AND WHERE?

The meeting was held 15 – 19 March 2011 in Banna Italy, a country estate just outside of Turin. Travel was funded by WSPA and the Marquise of Spinola provided the use of his private estate for accommodation, conference facilities and all food and beverages – yes we were well looked after!

WHY?

The role of the meeting was to identify dog population management options and give recommendations for the successful implementation of relevant international standards and best practices, with special emphasis on animal welfare and health through:

- **Assessing dog populations**, management options and their implementation (modeling, dynamics and behavior/ecology studies, socio-economic studies, etc.).
- **Reviewing animal birth control options.**
- **Reviewing techniques** and selection criteria for euthanasia for public health purposes.
- **Reviewing best practices** of dog catching, handling and housing.
- **Addressing animal and public health** and animal welfare issues.
- **Identifying public awareness**, education and communication on responsible dog ownership and dog management options in different contexts.
- **Defining institutional** and civil society responsibilities.
- **Considering other relevant issues.**

HOW?

The general format is:

1. **Set the scene** – experts talk about what they have seen/done in a similar situation – what worked – what didn't?
2. **What do we know** – what don't we know?
3. **What would success look like?**
4. **What is hampering that success** – what needs to change?
5. **What's to be done** and who can do it and who will do it?
6. **What are small wins** – who can do what now – make a pledge now.

I have now been to two programs organized by WSPA and have to say I love the format of their meetings. They tend to be a cross between a conference and a

workshop comprising of fast paced presentations, working groups and think tanks.

It is simple and effective, people walk away motivated, invigorated, with jobs to do and challenges to address. The format breaks down the program to lead to the final session where people walk away with tasks, outcomes or actions.

WHAT WAS MY ROLE?

In general my role was one as a regulator, to provide expertise on how legislation is developed, written and implemented and to share my experience in developing training packages and managing responsible pet ownership programs.

Each "expert" was required to prepare two presentations for the meeting:

1. A two page outline and 5 minute presentation on a single most successful experience regarding dog population management.
2. A 5 page paper and 5 minute presentation reviewing the world wide situation on a specified topic – to include a brief review of the issue, geographical differences in tackling the issue, recent developments and aspects that deserve specific attention, innovation, policy or research needs.

My allocated topic:

"Communication, awareness building, education – Capacity building of professionals in Dog Population Management".

As I have not worked in dog population management I was required to "think outside the square" for my success story! I presented the "Who's for Cats?" campaign – a project managed by the Bureau of Animal Welfare with ten other collaborators. The project aims to change community attitude and not feed stray cats with a key message of "Don't feed a bigger problem" and seeking people to take ownership or take to a pound or shelter. I believe that it is an excellent example of a collaborative approach to a complex problem that required getting a wide range of stakeholders to collaborate and work together using experts for their specialty – such as researchers for science, marketing for promotion, veterinarians and shelters for welfare and management, government for policy.

For my allocated presentation I really called on my networks. The information that I presented highlighted the fact that there are a wide range of resources, tools and training programs available for professionals. What is less clear is the access professionals have to them and how to select the best model to address the issue for the local

community – as it is the community who will need to sustain the program.

I cannot thank enough - Julia Hardaker of Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC), Sharleen Jordan - CY O'Connor Institute, Dr Tony James - Chinese University Hong Kong and Dr. Fiona Woodhouse – SPCA Hong Kong for the fantastic information they provided about working with diverse cultures and people for capacity building of professionals and training in dog population management.

The work that Sharleen and Julia have managed has been cutting edge. I was delighted to have the ability to talk, only too briefly, at an International level of the established programs, the professionalism of Animal Management Officers and cutting edge work being done by Australians.

Who was the other 'experts' and what were their allocated topics?

The eleven other "experts" and their allocated topics were:

- Alexander Wandeler: *The role of dog population management in the prevention and control of rabies.*
- Alexander Hammond Seaman: *Dog population management: cost benefit of interventions.*
- Bruno Chomel: *Dog population modeling.*
- Chinny Krishna: *The success of the ABC program in India.*
- Dganit Ben-Dov: *Shelter management.*
- Jack Reece: *Alternative methods of sterilization.*
- James Serpell: *Human-Dog relationships.*
- Kate Blaszak: *Policy and legislation of dog population management.*
- Malika Kachani: *The role of dog population management in the prevention and control of zoonosi diseases.*
- Peter Omemo: *Responsible dog ownership options.*
- Rita de Cassia Maria Garcia: *Dog catching, handling and removal.*

What did I learn?

Wow – I'm not sure where to start here, this was one of the most wonderful professional experiences that I have had, and so here are just a few "in-sights" of the new knowledge that I gained and of the type of information shared at the meeting that allowed the group to finally come to some recommendations:

- **47% of European countries** report roaming dogs as a problem – with the concern for bites (1st), nuisance (2nd) and rabies (3rd).

- **Definitions vary** – in some countries "responsible dog ownership" means your dog does not bite people – we need to be clear with definitions rather than slogans if we are talking on an international stage.
- **The International Companion Animal Management Coalition (ICAMC)** was established in 2007, they are a coordinated coalition providing resources in many languages for individuals and groups in the front-line of animal welfare and management.
- **The FAO "gateway"** website <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/themes/animal-welfare/en/> is a fantastic resource it has members contributing from over 140 countries and has over 161,000 single visits per year.
- **A lot of the reason** to control dog populations is to control the spread of diseases in particular rabies and enchinococcosis (hydatids). Often dog population management programs are heavily linked, and funded, by "one health" programs.
- **The World Health Organization** assesses rabies vaccines – there has been rabies programs that have been ineffective due to the quality of the vaccine in some countries.
- **Controlling the dog population** will control the rabies problem – but stopping rabies will not control the dog population problem. Therefore it is VITAL to know the dog population – number, location, where coming from, how being supported, etc.
- **Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR)** programs have had a positive effect on the control of rabies – but little effect on the control of dog populations.
- **If 70% of dogs** are successfully immunized it is sufficient to control rabies in a dog population but only in a closed colony of dogs (no more coming in).
- **If 80% of dogs** are desexed it is sufficient to control rabies but only in a closed colony of dogs (no more coming in).
- **Between 30,000 and 60,000 people** per year die from rabies and 95% are due to transmission from dogs. In some countries rabies is not a reportable disease and so there is only an estimate of the number of deaths per year. (Wandeler 2011).
- **That Tasmania and New Zealand** is considered to have had the most successful and efficient programs to eradicate hydatid disease of any where in the world. (Craig & Larriue, 2006)

What was achieved?

A report will be available in September (I hope!). I aim to present on the outcomes at the AIAM meeting.

The report will be a comprehensive document based on current scientific knowledge, consolidated experience and successful models presented and discussed by the group. It will recommend dog population management options, measures for successful implementation, the development of relevant international standards and best practices to central governments, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. It will first be released in English and then once released it will be interpreted into at least five languages by the end of 2011.

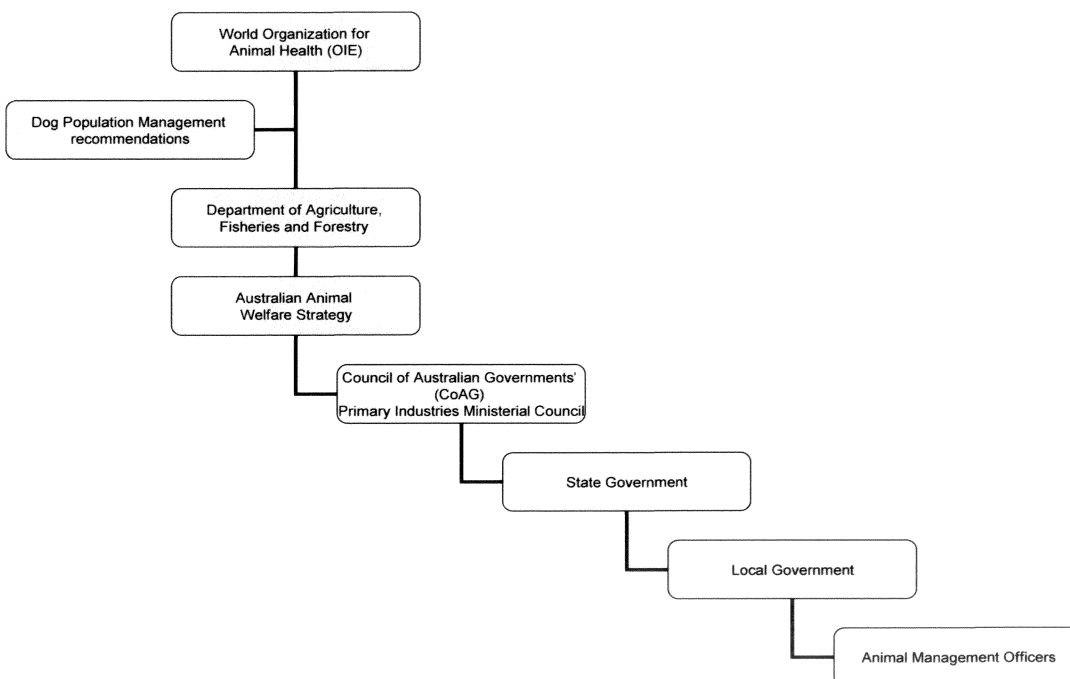
Why does it matter to us what they decide?

It is expected that the recommendations of this report will be presented to the European Commission and the World Organization for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties, or OIE). If the OIE accept any of the recommendations and makes guidelines then Australia will have to abide by those guidelines.

It should not be underestimated how this could affect AMO's. Currently legislation on dog management and welfare sits at a local level – but there is ability for national standards. National legislation can be tied to world standards and international agreements.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

The flow chart below shows simplistically how these things filter down:



The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments' (CoAG) Primary Industries Ministerial Council in May 2004 as a way of bringing a national approach to the continuous improvement of animal welfare. The strategy is aimed at all Australians and all uses we make of animals.

AAWS is a national plan to guide future improvements for the welfare of animals and provide national and international communities with an appreciation of animal welfare arrangements in Australia. Australia's commitment to world-class standards of animal welfare domestically translates to a commitment to encourage the improvement of animal welfare in other countries.

AAWS is supported by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), and brings together representatives of State and Territory governments, industry groups and animal welfare organisations.

The, recently released, AAWS strategy (DAFF 2011) targets four key goals:

1. **Animals:** The welfare needs of animals are understood and met.
2. **National systems:** National systems deliver consistent animal welfare outcomes and give priority to ongoing improvements.
3. **People:** People make ethical decisions regarding animal welfare, supported by knowledge and skills.
4. **International:** Australia is actively engaged in international partnerships and developments to improve animal welfare.

As one of the leading developed country members of the OIE, Australia takes seriously its obligation to promote the OIE guidelines as the preferred global standards for the humane treatment of animals.

The OIE was formed in 1924 and has 178 member countries and territories. The World Assembly of Delegates is the highest authority of the OIE. It comprises the Delegates of all Member Countries and meets at least once a year. It is an intergovernmental organisation with a mandate from the World Trade Organization to improve animal health and welfare worldwide.

The main functions of the Assembly are:

- To adopt international standards in the field of animal health, especially for international trade.
- To adopt resolutions on the control of the major animal diseases.
- To elect the members of the governing bodies of the OIE (President and Vice-President of the Assembly, members of the Council and of the Regional Commissions), as well as the members of the Specialist Commissions.
- To appoint the Director General of the OIE.
- To examine and approve the annual report of activities and the financial report of the Director General and the annual budget of the OIE.

Australia has been an active member of the OIE for many years and is committed to its principles and objectives that reflect the guiding principles for animal welfare contained in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (OIE Terrestrial Code).

The OIE has already made a guiding principle in relation to stray dog control that recognises the importance of controlling dog populations without causing unnecessary animal suffering *“to deal with stray and feral dogs, which pose serious human health, animal health and welfare problems and have a socio-economic, environmental, political and religious impact in many countries”*.



Conclusion

I believe that the world “Expert Meeting on Dog Population Management”, as a means of establishing a great network of people from a wide range of backgrounds, and as a way of sharing that information, was without a doubt a huge success. It was an incredible opportunity but its success in providing outcomes, collaborations, solutions and guidance is still to be measured. I await the final report with great interest.

I hope that you can see the importance of the any findings from this meeting and effect it could have on dog control and animal management officers. The OIE may adopt or create recommendations in the future and they may not be limited to large uncontrolled populations of dogs but about a variety of related concepts such as shelter management through to humane destruction. If this were to occur it is highly likely that Australia would adopt the general recommendation and could consider the development of National Standards that would be implemented into legislation at a State level and enforced at a local level.

Please stay tuned for the report on the World “Expert Meeting on Dog Population Management”.

References

- FAO (2011) – World Expert Meeting, Banna Italy.
 Wandeler. A (2011) - World Expert Meeting, Banna Italy.
 Craig & Larrieu, (2006) – Control of cystic echinococcosis/ hydatidosis, *Advances in Parasitology*, 61, 1-68
 DAFF (2011) http://www.daff.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1986223/aaws-nip.pdf
 OIE (2011) Terrestrial Code 20th Edition, Chapter 7.7.

CONTACT

Tracy Helman

Manager Policy and Education, Bureau of Animal Welfare, DPI, Victoria

Email: Tracy.Helman@dpi.vic.gov.au