

Domestic Animal Management Plan

2026 - 2029

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1. INTRODUCTION

Councils in Victoria are required by the *Domestic Animals Act* (1994), to prepare and implement a Domestic Animal Management Plan every 4 years. The objective is to document and publicise Council's plans for animal management within the municipality.

The purpose of this Plan is to:

- Document current processes and practices under the Alpine Shire animal management responsibilities.
- Ensure that Council's processes are in compliance with the *Domestic Animals Act* (1994).
- Increase pet owners' knowledge of the principles of responsible pet ownership and enhancing community safety and awareness.
- Assist the Animal Welfare Victoria to achieve its stated objectives of reducing the numbers of dogs and cats being euthanised.
- Assist Animal Welfare Victoria and customers with the registration and use of the Pet Exchange Register when breeding dogs or cats.
- Encourage the registration of dogs and cats in the Alpine Shire.
- Enforce and assist Domestic animal businesses comply with legislation and codes of practice.
- Minimise the harmful effect of domestic pets on the population of native birds, mammals and reptiles.
- Take into account community views on animal management matters and assist community to feel safe and enjoy animals within the community.
- Assist the Bureau of Animal Welfare to achieve its stated objectives of reducing the number of dogs and cats being euthanized.

Domestic animals play an important role in our community. This includes a wide range of positive physical and mental health impacts to domestic animal owners, including improved emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Council is responsible for providing community education, compliance, safety and amenity in relation to regarding domestic pet ownership

The Domestic Animal Management Plan contributes to the following Objective and Priorities under the Alpine Shire Council Plan 2025-2029:

Objective 3 – Vibrant and Healthy Alpine

- Priority 3.7: We support people of all ages and stages to thrive, and
- Priority 3.8: We support compliance with regulations to help our community enjoy lifestyles and spaces that are safe and welcoming for all

2. DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Under Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act), every Council must prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan as follows:

- (1) *Subject to subsection (1A), each Council must, in consultation with the Secretary, prepare a domestic animal management plan on 4 December 2021 and at the end of each period of 4 years after that day.*
 - (1A) *A Council may apply to the Secretary for an extension of time within which to prepare a domestic animal management plan.*
 - (1B) *The Secretary may grant an extension of time under subsection (1A) if the Secretary believes that special circumstances exist that warrant the granting of an extension.*
- (2) *A domestic animal management plan prepared by a Council must—*
 - (a) *set out a method for evaluating whether the animal control services provided by the Council in its municipal district are adequate to give effect to the requirements of this Act and the regulations; and*
 - (b) *outline programs for the training of authorised officers to ensure that they can properly administer and enforce the requirements of this Act in the Council's municipal district; and*
 - (c) *outline programs, services and strategies which the Council intends to pursue in its municipal district—*
 - (i) *to promote and encourage the responsible ownership of dogs and cats; and*
 - (ii) *to ensure that people comply with this Act, the regulations and any related legislation; and*
 - (iii) *to minimise the risk of attacks by dogs on people and animals; and*
 - (iv) *to address any over-population and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats; and*
 - (v) *to encourage the registration and identification of dogs and cats; and*
 - (vi) *to minimise the potential for dogs and cats to create a nuisance; and*
 - (vii) *to effectively identify all dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breed dogs in that district and to ensure that those dogs are kept in compliance with this Act and the regulations; and*
 - (d) *provide for the review of existing orders made under this Act and local laws that relate to the Council's municipal district with a view to determining whether further orders or local laws dealing with the management of dogs and cats in the municipal district are desirable; and*

- (e) *provide for the review of any other matters related to the management of dogs and cats in the Council's municipal district that it thinks necessary; and*
 - (f) *provide for the periodic evaluation of any program, service, strategy or review outlined under the plan.*
- (3) *Every Council must—*
- (a) *review its domestic animal management plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the plan; and*
 - (b) *provide the Secretary with a copy of the plan and any amendments to the plan; and*
 - (c) *publish an evaluation of its implementation of the plan in its annual report.*

3. ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL PROFILE & PET OWNERSHIP

The Alpine Shire Council is located in north east Victoria with a population of 13,235 residents. Nearly 30% of all households in the municipality are single person households which is higher than the state average.

Single parent families account for 11.7% of the population; with females comprise of 74% of single parent households.

In Victoria, 58% of adults own a pet. Dogs are the most popular pet with 41% followed by cats where ownership is at 24%.

Pet ownership is typically higher in regional areas, particularly in households where there are children under the age of 18, people under 55 years of age and higher income households. Pet ownership is also higher in English speaking households.

Cat owners are more likely to procure a pet from a rescue / rehoming or volunteer run organization or animal shelter. Pet food followed by veterinary services were the largest expenses incurred by pet owners.

Pet registration has been found to be higher in households where there is only one dog or cat; households where the annual household income is greater than \$120,000; and households where the owners are aged 55 years or older. (Ag Vic 2023:81)

Reasons for animals not being registered focused on the effort to do so, or the cost being seen as being too expensive – 27%. Similarly microchipping was also higher amongst owners who had registered their animals.

In relation to animal surrenders, dogs are twice as likely to be surrendered as compared with cats. Owners surrendering animals, they are more likely to be under the age of 35, living with a disability or from an Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander background. (Ag Vic 2023:91) Reasons for pet surrendering including aggressive behavior, animal anxiety, the owner's living situation, relationship break ups, difficulties in caring or catering to the needs of the animal.

4. LOCAL LAWS TEAM OVERVIEW

The Local Laws functions sit within the Regulatory Services Department of Council. The Local Laws team comprises of two full time Local Laws Officers who are responsible for the animal management functions of Council. Key activities include:

- Providing education to the community on responsible animal ownership;
- Promoting and administering the domestic animal registration;
- Ensuring compliance with legislation and codes of practice pertaining to domestic animals and livestock;
- Investigating and managing complaints relating to domestic animals and livestock;
- Investigating animal welfare matters
- Impounding domestic animals and livestock
- Inspection and auditing of domestic animal businesses
- Providing after hours service for animal related emergencies.
- Investigating and prosecuting breaches of the *Domestic Animal act 1994*, *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994* and *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.

Council has two full time Local Laws Officers. In addition to the responsibilities under the *Domestic Animal Management Act* and this Plan, the Local Laws Team also is responsible for fire prevention, local law compliance and supporting other functional areas in compliance activities.

All enforcement officers are appointed Authorised Officers with relevant and delegated authority to perform the required duties.

4.1 TRAINING OF AUTHORISED OFFICERS

The key qualification for Local Laws Officers to effectively manage dogs and cats is the *Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation*. New staff in the Local Laws team are required to have or obtain the necessary qualifications in order to undertake the role.

A variety of training is available and provided to all Authorised Officers. Training opportunities and needs are reviewed annually to ensure that knowledge and skills reflect current practices. The training options include animal handling courses, investigation and statement taking, prosecution courses and other industry relevant training and seminars conducted by Agriculture Victoria, RSPCA, Municipal Association Victoria, Australian Institute of Animal Management and other relevant associations.

4.2 RISK BASED DECISION MAKING

Council takes a risk based approach to animal management and enforcement. Decisions are required to be made based on resource availability, risk, expected outcomes, and consistency of action.

4.3 FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Council has a pound facility in Bright, which has limited capacity for dogs and cats to be kept until a resolution is reached through rehoming, being reclaimed or euthanised. Council mostly relies on foster carers in the community and has an agreement under Section 84Y of the Act with the RSPCA facility in Burwood. The arrangement with the RSPCA is used primarily to house Dangerous or Menacing dogs that have been seized, but it can also be used for longer term housing and rehoming of other animals if required.

Council also has relationships with local vets to manage any domestic animals that require medical attention.

It is expected that as Alpine Shire's population grows, the number of dogs and cats registered will also continue to grow. This will place additional demands on Council's services, such as Local Laws Officers and the pound facility.

Council has two dedicated Local Laws vehicles that have the ability to transport dogs and cats safely.

5. Pet Registration and Identification

Under the Act, dogs and cats that normally reside within Alpine Shire must be registered with Council. The Act stipulates that registration is for a period of one year, and is due on 10 April annually.

Dogs and cats that belong to people who are normally reside in Alpine Shire must be:

- Registered with Alpine Shire Council;
- Wear a collar with their identification tag (provided by Council);
- Microchipped, with the identification number provided to Council.

Microchipping is required prior to registration and is the primary way that animals can be definitively identified and returned to their owners. Council has a database of microchip numbers for animals registered in the Shire and also has access to the full range of State and national databases as applicable (e.g. for impounded animals that are registered in other municipalities).

Alpine Shire offers discounted registration fees for desexed animals, and to pensioners, in order to support responsible pet ownership and to recognise the important role pets can play in the physical and mental wellbeing to members of our community. A current schedule of fees is available on Council's website.

6. Local Laws

The *Community Local Law 2019* includes requirements for keeping domestic dogs and cats within the municipal district. The following summarises the key requirements of Part 4 of the Local Law.

- Keeping Animals - No more than two dogs or cats can be kept without a permit in a residential area;

- Animal housing must be appropriate for the type and number of animals to be kept, provide housing of a sanitary and inoffensive condition, and protect neighbours from noise from the animals;
- Animal housing must be maintained in a clean and sanitary manner to the satisfaction of an Authorised Officer;
- The person in charge of an animal must remove any faeces deposited by that animal on Council land, or land occupied by another person;
- The owner or occupier of land must ensure that animals do not cause a nuisance by making noise; and
- The owner or person in charge of an animal must not allow the animal to wander from where it is normally kept.

The full version of the Local Law is available on Council's website.

6.1 PROPOSED ORDERS

Under Section 25 of the Act, Councils may make an order that makes it an offence for a cat to be found 'at large' – meaning it is away from the property where it is normally kept. This is commonly known as a 'cat curfew'. Council intends to make such an order on the adoption of this Plan. This would make it an offence for a cat to be outside of the property boundaries from where it resides.

In 2025 Council conducted an internal review of the potential benefits and issues with the introduction of a cat curfew. As a result of the review, and following the consistent feedback from a wide range of community groups and community members, Council has determined that a cat curfew is an appropriate management tool to be applied in Alpine Shire to achieve the following:

- Protection of native wildlife from predation by cats;
- Reduction in nuisance activity by cats;
- Protection of cats from becoming lost or injured due to wandering at large; and
- Reduction in unwanted litters of kittens.

Council recognises that the introduction of the cat curfew will impact on some cat owners, who may have to transition their cats to being indoor only, or construct a 'cat run' or enclosure to contain their cat(s).

Council is committed to undertaking proactive communication regarding the requirements of keeping cats confined to the owner's property at all times through:

- Providing verbal and written information to owners, and access to Council Officers for advice;
- Providing information relating to building cat enclosures to prevent trespass;
- Promoting the State Government's '*Who's for Cats?*' Campaign;
- Encouraging the de-sexing of cats to reducing straying; and

- Increasing engagement on responsible cat ownership through social media, signage and media articles.

Council will take an education focussed approach for the first year following adoption of the Plan, with a more compliance focussed approach to be applied in subsequent years.

7. Animal Offences under the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*

7.1 NUISANCE CATS AND DOGS

7.1.1 Barking Dogs

Council's standard procedure for barking dog complaints is as follows:

- Initial investigation to identify location and circumstances of the issue and identity of the dog(s) in question. This includes a discussion with all parties to see if the matter can be resolved by agreement, or if further investigation needs to occur.
- Providing the complainant with proforma Statement Sheets, Statutory Declaration forms and Barking Dog Log Sheets
- Establishing whether an offence has occurred, and taking appropriate action to resolve, potentially including issuing of Notices, Infringements or Court action.

7.1.2 Dogs and Cats at Large

It is an offence under the Act for a dog or cat to be wandering 'at large' away from where it is normally kept, unless it is under 'effective control' of its owner or person in charge.

Repeat offenders for roaming or trespassing cats or dogs are issued with an infringement notice and must pay the applicable pound release fee. In instances where repeated breaches occur, Council may take further action including through the Magistrates' Court.

Wandering cats can create a nuisance, and impact on native wildlife. It is not always clear whether a wandering cat is domesticated or feral. Council has cat traps available for community use. Any cats that are trapped are assessed by the Local Laws Officers to determine whether they are domesticated or feral, and then returned to their owner, rehomed or euthanised as applicable (refer to Release from the Pound procedure above).

Registered animals that are found at large are usually able to be reunited with their owners quickly, and for first time offences Council may choose not to penalise the owner or person in charge of the animal. However, often it is necessary to impound the animal while the owner or person in charge is found, or if no owner can be found then Council will attempt to rehome the animal.

In these instances, the animal will only be released from the pound once it is:

- Properly identified, registered and microchipped;

- On payment of the applicable Pound Release fee, which may include other charges if applicable (e.g. microchipping, registration, adoption or sustenance fees);
- Payment of any applicable penalty or fine.

7.2 DOG ATTACKS

Council Local Laws Officers treat any reports of dog attacks as a high priority and will investigate them as soon as possible. Evidence relating to the incident is collected through witness statements, vet / medical reports, photographs and any other relevant evidence. The incident is assessed as to whether an offence is likely to have occurred, and if necessary Council can take further action, which may include the following:

- Animal Management Agreements
- Mediation between parties
- Issuing infringements
- Declaring the dog(s) Menacing or Dangerous under the Act
- Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court
- Seeking the surrender of the dog(s) to Council for destruction

The approach to reports and incidents of dog attack is supported by the draft Dog Management Policy and procedure.

7.3 DANGEROUS, MENACING AND RESTRICTED BREED DOGS

The Act details how all Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted breed dogs in the municipality need to be kept and identified. In Alpine Shire, there are no registered Restricted Breed Dogs, three Registered Declared Dangerous Dogs and 24 Registered Declared Menacing Dogs.

In general, a dog can be declared Menacing if it has rushed or chased a person, or bitten a person causing a non-serious injury. It can be declared Dangerous for repeated offences, or causing a serious injury, or if it has been trained as a guard dog. Dangerous and Menacing dogs must be leashed and muzzled at all times when outside their premises. There are additional fencing and signage requirements for Declared Dangerous Dogs.

The Act defines Restricted Breed Dogs as the following breeds:

- Japanese Tosa
- Fila Brasileiro
- Dogo Argentino
- Perro de Prasa Canario (or Presa Canario)
- American Pit Bull Terrier (or Pit Bull Terrier).

Any person wishing to keep a Restricted Breed Dog in the Alpine Shire must abide by the requirements of the Act.

Council is legislated to inspect the premises where Restricted Breed, Dangerous and Menacing dogs are kept, to ensure that they are identified, confined and managed in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

The Alpine Shire has the following declared dogs currently registered within the municipality as of 1 July 2025:

Registered restricted breed dogs	0
Registered declared dangerous dog	2
Registered declared menacing dogs	23

8. Overpopulation and population control

Council supports desexing of domestic animals through reduced registration fees for desexed animals, and participation in 'desex your pet month' whereby residents may be eligible for discounted vet fees to get their pets desexed. Council's participation in this initiative is dependent on the availability of funds in Council's annual budget.

The 'cat curfew' is also a key measure to prevent unwanted breeding by domestic cats and may allow for more effective identification and removal of feral cats from the environment.

9. Domestic Animal Businesses

There are three registered Animal Businesses in Alpine Shire, including Council's pound facility.

10. Our Plans

10.1 OBJECTIVE 1: TO MAXIMISE THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED AND IDENTIFIABLE DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Activity	When	Evaluation
Educate residents of animal registration by erecting animal education signage outside the Shire office and on vehicles; sending reminder notices to all registered pet owners; and posts on social media.	February – April annually	Level of engagement with social media posts; and number of registrations still outstanding after due date.
Follow up of animal non-renewal registration from previous year's record	June every year	Record number of animals found unregistered but in possession of owner.

Ensure all seized and impounded animals are registered to their owner prior to release.	Prior to every release	Review number of dogs and cats being seized and impounded who are not registered to their owner. No animal to be released unless registered and microchipped
Run an education campaign on the importance of registering and microchipping	Annually	Review increases in registration numbers and microchipping numbers. Use social media as the main tool to achieve compliance

10.2 OBJECTIVE 2: REDUCE THE DAMAGE DONE AND NUISANCE CAUSED BY STRAY DOMESTIC AND FERAL CATS

Activity	When	Evaluation
Support the availability of cat traps to the community to assist with the capture of stray and feral cats	Ongoing	Council has nine traps which are available from the libraries and the Shire office. Use of these cages is consistent with most, if not all out any given time.
Commence consultation with the community to introduce a cat curfew.	April 2026	Review similar guidelines and policies implemented by other Victorian Councils.

10.3 OBJECTIVE 3: ENSURE DECLARED DOGS ARE COMPLIANT TO RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS.

Activity	When	Evaluation
Random property inspections of declared dogs to ensure compliance.	Ongoing	Number of properties compliant with requirements.
Prosecute repeat offenders or serious breaches detected.	As required	As required.
Educate community about what is a declared dog.	Ongoing	Community awareness of what defines a declared dog.

11. Annual Review and Reporting

Under the Act, Council must prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years, review the Plan annually, and publish an evaluation of its implementation of the Plan in its annual report.

The key areas for annual evaluation of the Plan are:

- The adequacy of Council's domestic animal control services to meet the requirements of the Act;
- Whether the training, facilities and other resources provided to Authorised Officers is suitable to safely and effectively meet the requirements of the Act;
- Assess whether the Local Laws or any Orders made under the Act (for example the cat curfew) are appropriate and effective for dealing with domestic animal management issues in the Shire;
- Assess the impact of domestic animal management on vulnerable groups in the community, such as culturally and linguistically diverse, disabled or elderly people.

12. Roles and responsibilities

The following positions are responsible for the management of all aspects of Council's domestic animal requirements under the Act:

Responsibility	Role / Position
Overall responsibility for Plan	Manager Regulatory Services
Responsible for investigations and conduct of prosecutions	Local Laws Officers
Pound operations	Local Laws Officers
Animal registration	Local Laws Officers / Customer Service Officers

13. Human Rights Charter compatibility

This policy has been assessed as being compatible with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 [Vic]*.

14. Gender Impact Assessment

The implications of this policy were assessed in accordance with the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

16. Supporting Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other relevant, Council policies and procedures, as well as relevant legislative requirements.

RELATED LEGISLATION

- *Domestic Animals Act 1994 [Vic]*
- *Local Government Act 2020 [Vic]*
- *Alpine Shire Council Community Local Law 2019*

RELATED GUIDELINES, OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES OR POLICIES

- Emergency Animal Welfare Management Plan (Draft)
- Dog Incident Policy

RELATED PROCEDURES

- Animal Pound Operational Manual
- Animal Registration Procedure
- Investigation Procedure (Draft)

17. Approval

THE COMMON SEAL OF THE
ALPINE SHIRE COUNCIL was
hereunto affixed this 30 day of June
2026

in the presence of:



COUNCILLOR

John Anderson

COUNCILLOR

GARETH GRAHAM

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

WILL JEREMY

The Domestic Animal
Management Plan 2026-2029
was adopted at the 30 June
2026 Ordinary Council
Meeting.

The signed copy is held in
Council's records.