

Communication Strategy

Domestic Animals Amendment Bill 2006

Introduction

This Communication Strategy is designed to outline how the Government will consult on and promote the new provisions resulting from its Domestic Animals Amendment Bill 2006 (the Bill) which introduces new measures regulating domestic animals and to build community, stakeholder and industry awareness.

Background

The *Domestic Animals Act 2000* (the Act) and the Domestic Animals Regulation 2001 (the Regulation) have been in force for five years since commencement. Prior to 2003, Environment ACT commenced development of an Issues Paper. In 2005 the Department of the Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) announced the commencement of a Review of the Act and the Regulation.

In 2005, TAMS continued development of the Issues Paper within the Department incorporating issues raised by Domestic Animals Services (DAS), the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC), the Australian and New Zealand Companion Animals Working Group (ANZCAWG) and in Ministerial correspondence. The ACT Government's Exposure Draft Bill incorporates amendments addressing the issues of the Review and the Issues Paper.

The Bill provides for:

- lifetime dog registration;
- compulsory microchipping of dogs at point of sale;
- progressive introduction of compulsory microchipping of all dogs over a three year period;
- improved regulation of dangerous dogs;
- tightening dog seizure and return provisions;
- cat de-sexing before age of first breeding;
- guidelines for animal nuisance;
- codes of practice for the keeping of animals;
- licensing the keeping of multiple cats; and
- declaration of dog prohibited areas by disallowable instrument.

Strategy Objectives

The outcome of the Strategy is to obtain community, stakeholder and industry acceptance of the amended domestic animals legislation.

The Strategy has two key objectives:

1. *Ensure key stakeholders and the industry are aware the new legislation has been introduced;*
2. *Ensure the broader Canberra community is aware of the new legislation and what their rights and responsibilities will be.*

There are two stages to the Communication Strategy: **Introduction** and **Implementation**.

Introduction

The Bill will be introduced as an Exposure Draft Bill in November 2006 to facilitate stakeholder and community comment on the Bill's provision for at least a six week consultation period prior to amendment of the Bill, if necessary. Debate on the Bill is scheduled for the March 2007 Assembly sittings.

Following introduction of the Bill, targeted public comment will be obtained from the public by means of a website allowing written feedback on a Summary of Issues and Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about the Bill's provisions. This material has been prepared in conjunction with TAMS' Community Engagement Unit.

Key stakeholders are represented on the ACT Government's Animal Welfare and Advisory Committee (AWAC). They will be invited to comment on the Bill during the public consultation commencing after the Bill is tabled in the Assembly.

Implementation

After the Assembly passes the Bill, the communication focus will shift to the ACT's community of domestic animal owners, predominantly those owning dogs and cats. The Bill's provisions will be explained throughout the implementation process.

Threats and Opportunities

Positive Messages

Lifetime dog registration The cost of compulsory lifetime registration although an initially higher once-only cost for new dog owners, will be much less costly than compulsory annual renewal of registration throughout a dog's life. In the first year of implementation, already-registered dogs will be entitled to lifetime registration at the current cost of annual renewal. This change brings the ACT in line with NSW.

Registration of cats is not being implemented.

Compulsory microchipping of dogs Microchipping allows lost dogs to be rapidly reunited with their owners. Compulsory microchipping of dogs at point of sale and progressive introduction of compulsory microchipping of all dogs by 2010 treats dog owners the same as cat owners, for which the same rules apply.

Dangerous dogs Compulsory microchipping of dangerous dogs makes sure they are readily identifiable in the ACT and when they arrive from interstate.

Tightening dog seizure and return provisions Increased powers preventing return of seized dogs to their owners until certain conditions are met and increased time to undertake remedial action will help dog owners ensure their dogs do not re-offend.

Cat de-sexing before age of first breeding Requiring cats to be de-sexed at 3 months of age rather than 6 months of age has no negative effect on the health or well-being of a cat. Given that some female cats can breed at 5 months of age, de-sexing by three months of age will help reduce the number of stray cats and kittens requiring re-housing and reduce the number of unwanted cats which are euthanased by RSPCA-ACT each year. More effective control of cat breeding will help reduce the numbers of stray and feral cats which are significant predators of endangered native wildlife in Canberra' nature reserves.

Guidelines for animal nuisance Explicit animal nuisance guidelines will define the procedures for handling animal nuisance complaints by ACT Government and provide greater certainty with regard to people's rights and responsibilities.

Codes of Practice for the keeping of animals Where regulatory gaps exist, the Codes of Practice will make explicit people's rights and responsibilities in keeping particular animals.

Keeping multiple cats Requiring keepers of more than three cats to obtain a multiple cat licence would treat dog and cat owners equitably. Licensing the keeping of multiple dogs and cats helps ensure animals are kept under optimum conditions.

Declaration of dog prohibited areas by disallowable instrument Mapping declared dog prohibited areas in a disallowable instrument will better communicate the areal extent of these areas to the public.

Negative messages

Lifetime dog registration The cost of lifetime dog registration of dogs is more expensive to first time dog owners.

Compulsory microchipping of dogs The cost of microchipping is an unwelcome added cost to dog owners in addition to dog registration.

Dangerous dogs The cost of microchipping is an unwelcome added cost to the owner of a dog which has been declared dangerous. Increased maximum penalties for offences committed by attacking and dangerous dogs are unlikely to affect dog behaviour.

Tightening dog seizure and return provisions Longer periods of time for which dogs may be impounded and greater powers to impose conditions on a dog's return will result in additional costs to dog owners.

Cat de-sexing before age of first breeding Early age de-sexing will impact on my cat's health and well being.

Guidelines for animal nuisance Guidelines for determining animal nuisance are unnecessary.

Codes of practice for the keeping of animals Given that the keeping of dogs and cats is well catered for by existing legislation, including the animal welfare codes of practice, codes of practice for the keeping of other animals are unnecessary.

Keeping multiple cats The ACT Government should not be limiting the number of cats kept. Cat breeders will be disadvantaged by this provision.

Declaration of dog prohibited areas by disallowable instrument This provision is unnecessary because dog prohibited areas must be identified by appropriate signage.

Responses to negative messages

Lifetime dog registration The one-off cost of lifetime dog registration is much less expensive than the total cost of annual renewal throughout a dog's life.

Compulsory microchipping of dogs Microchipping is a once-only cost which permanently identifies an animal for the rest of its life ensuring lost animals can be rapidly re-united with their owners at all times. The cost of microchipping covers the cost of implanting the microchip and the cost of retrieving the contact details of the owners of scanned animals. Dog registration contributes to the cost of ACT Government providing its complaint handling, regulatory, advisory, animal shelter and dog re-homing services it supplies to the Canberra community.

Dangerous dogs Microchipping is a once-only cost which permanently identifies an animal for the rest of its life ensuring lost animals can be rapidly re-united with their owners at all times. Increased penalties for the owners of dangerous dogs which re-offend may encourage owners to take steps to prevent their dogs from re-offending a second time.

Tightening dog seizure and return provisions There will be greater incentive for dangerous dog owners to prevent their dogs re-offending and impacting upon public safety. Dangerous dog owners will be more likely to avoid the costs of their dogs offending a second time.

Cat de-sexing before age of first breeding There are no negative effects on a cat's health and well-being attributable to early-age desexing.

Guidelines for animal nuisance Guidelines for making animal nuisance complaints and determining animal nuisance have been requested by Domestic Animal Services officers and members of the public.

Codes of practice for the keeping of animals The Act and the Regulation have only limited provisions covering the keeping of other domestic animals other than dogs or cats. Domestic Animals Service rangers are regularly asked to give advice on people's rights and responsibilities regarding the keeping of domestic animals such as rabbits, pigeons, bees, pigs and horses. Codes of Practice for keeping these and other animals would be developed only when a significant gap in the existing legislative framework exists.

Keeping multiple cats The ACT Government is not limiting the numbers of cats which may be kept by this provision. The Government is requiring keepers of more than three cats to apply for a multiple cat licence. This requirement will allow regulation through licence conditions on how multiple cats are kept to ensure animal welfare and housing requirements are met. Cat breeders wishing to keep more than three cats will be required to have a multiple cat license which will help ensure animal welfare and housing requirements are met. Breeders of dogs and cats which keep undesexed animals for breeding purposes are required to apply for a permit under section 76 of the Act.

Declaration of dog prohibited areas by disallowable instrument Signage alone is insufficient to define the boundary of a dog prohibited area for enforcement purposes. Mapping the boundary of a dog prohibited area by disallowable instrument will better inform enforcement officers and dog owners as to the spatial extent of these areas.

Opportunities timetable

Opportunities to promote the provisions of the Bill include:

- Introduction of the Exposure Draft Bill into the Assembly, October/November 2006.
- ‘Round Town events in parks. Two ‘Dogs Day Out’ events are scheduled each year. Next scheduled event is: 19 November 2006. Lake Ginninderra.
- Symonston Animal Shelter Open Day, Domestic Animals Services. Once per year.
- The National Desexing Network promoting early age desexing of dogs and cats in Australia sets September each year aside as National Desexing Month. September 2007 will be an opportunity to promote the Act’s new provision requiring compulsory cat desexing by three months of age before the age of first breeding.
- Introduction of final Bill and commencement of debate on the Bill in the Assembly, scheduled for March 2007.
- Date of passage of the Bill by the Assembly.
- Commencement date of the amended Act and the Regulation.
- Amendment of the Regulation and Codes of Practice to provide for regulation of the microchipping of dogs in the Territory, Autumn sitting of the Assembly, 2007.
- Commencement date for the amended fees and charges under the Act when compulsory lifetime registration of dogs is introduced in the Territory, June-July 2007.
- Static displays in shopping centres, libraries communicating the changes to domestic animals law and the regulations.

Methods of Communication

Communication will be initiated with the introduction of the Exposure Draft Bill into the Assembly and the accompanying Presentation Speech.

Targeted feedback from the public and key stakeholders will be sought during a formal public consultation process coinciding with the period commencing with the tabling of the Exposure Draft Bill in the Assembly and concluding with commencement of debate on the Bill. Issues and Frequently Asked Questions and Answers will be displayed on a website providing a framework and forms for written response by the public and stakeholders.

Media releases will be issued at key stages in the legislative process and key stakeholders will receive copies of the legislation together with explanatory

documentation. Stakeholders represented of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee will be included in this process.

Individual Members of the Assembly may request detailed briefings on the legislation and stakeholder briefings will be conducted to ensure understanding of its new provisions.

In preparation for commencement and implementation of the amended Act and the Regulation, a Fact Sheet detailing its provisions will be prepared. This Fact Sheet will be made available on the Environment and Recreation website and mailed to key stakeholders, including Domestic Animals Services, the veterinary profession, domestic animal registries, the retail pet industry, RSPCA-ACT, and the cat and dog breeding societies.

Opportunities to brief journalists on articles for *The Canberra Chronicle* and *The Canberra Times* will be sought.

A key component to ensuring understanding of the new legislation and adherence to its requirements will be effective communication with the various land managers in Parks, Conservation and Lands. Canberra Connect will be briefed on the changes.

Project Management

Environment and Recreation and the TAMS Community Engagement Unit will be responsible for implementing the Strategy.

The primary contact officers for the Department are:

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Stakeholder Management

The key stakeholders include the Minister, Members of the Assembly, ACT Government land management agencies, Domestic Animals Services, RSPCA-ACT, veterinary surgeons, the retail pet industry, domestic animal registries, cat and dog breeding societies, the ACT community including domestic animal owners, particularly owners of dogs and cats.

The table below outlines the proposed methods of ensuring appropriate and timely communication with key stakeholders.

Stakeholder Management

<u>Stakeholders</u>	<u>Issues</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Timing</u>
MINISTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate and timely advice Requires information to respond to media inquiries as requested. Minister’s advisers to be kept fully informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Policy and Programs Community Engagement and Communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefs and QONs as required on specific issues Responses to be prepared for media inquiries 	Ongoing
MLA’s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the implications for the community and dog and cat owners? What will the general public be required to do? What will it cost the Territory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister’s Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure Draft Bill released for comment Issues, Frequently Asked Questions and Answers available on Internet Briefing to be available to MLA’s 	Immediately following introduction to Assembly
RELEVANT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES (Parks Conservation and Lands, Domestic Animals Services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the legislation impact upon their operation? Detail of policy and its implementation What will they be required to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Policy and Programs Domestic Animals Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings to be offered on the provisions of the Bill Liaison regarding operational arrangements Information Fact Sheet to be readily available online. Briefing of Canberra Connect. 	Ongoing during consultation on the Exposure Draft Bill and leading up to passing and commencement of the amended legislation.
BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY (RSPCA-ACT, retail pet industry, domestic animals registries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the legislation impact upon business? Detail and effectiveness of policy What will the cost implications be? What will business be required to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Policy and Programs Domestic Animals Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings to be available to relevant business groups or individual businesses Information Sheet to be readily available online. 	Leading up to and following the commencement of the amended Act and the Regulation.
COMMUNITY GROUPS & GENERAL COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will the legislation impact upon the community, particularly dogs and cat owners? Detail and effectiveness of policy What will the cost implications be? What will dog and cat owners be required to do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Policy and Programs Domestic Animals Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Briefings to be offered to relevant community stakeholders including relevant interest and lobby groups e.g. Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, RSPCA-ACT 	Briefings to relevant groups and further communication during implementation as required
MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the implications for the community? What will the general public be required to do? What will be the cost implications for dog and cat owners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Policy and Programs Domestic Animals Services Community Engagement and Communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media information through releases and opportunities for interviews. Release of a Fact Sheet online. Briefings of newspaper journalists 	At key points in the legislation development and consultation timeline.