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# DRAFT Responsible Dog Ownership Policy

July 2021

Policy No: CCC103

Policy owner:	Environmental Compliance & Systems Unit
Approved by:	
Date of approval:	DRAFT
Policy category:	Strategic
Content Manager No:	D#####
Review date:	DRAFT

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## 1. POLICY SUMMARY

- 1.1. This Policy has been developed in recognition of the high rates of dog ownership within the Central Coast local government area (LGA) and will be used to raise awareness of community expectations & requirements of owning a dog.
- 1.2. It aims to promote responsible dog ownership through education & compliance and mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all members of the community in relation to dogs.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1. The purpose of this Policy is to outline expectations in relation to responsible dog ownership on the Central Coast as well as guide, promote and manage responsible pet ownership in line with the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) and *Companion Animals Regulation 2018*.
- 2.2. The Central Coast LGA has the highest population of dogs in NSW, and with that, a number of issues relating to animal management, community safety & animal welfare. This Policy aims to define the expectations, requirements and responsibilities of dog owners to their dogs and the broader Central Coast community.

## 3. SCOPE AND POLICY DEFINITION

- 3.1. This Policy applies to the Central Coast LGA, including public parks and open spaces. It applies to all residents who own a dog or are considering becoming a dog owner.

## 4. GENERAL

Central Coast Council recognises the significant social and health benefits of dog ownership. These benefits, however, need to be balanced with compliance and animal management in accordance with the *Companion Animal Act 1998*.

Responsible dog ownership for the purposes of this Policy is defined as meeting the health and wellbeing needs of your dog and ensuring that your dog does not impact the safety and wellbeing of the broader community or other animals.

## 5. CARE AND WELFARE

- 5.1. Vaccinations are an important part of caring for dogs as they prevent or reduce the severity of infectious diseases such as canine distemper virus, canine adenovirus, and canine parvovirus, which can cause serious health consequences and even death. Dog owners must ensure their dog is vaccinated before entering a dog park or off-leash area on the Central Coast.
- 5.2. Desexing is a critical part of responsible dog ownership and has a variety of benefits, including;
- Prevention of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies and litters;
  - Reduced risk of certain types of cancers;
  - Reduced tendencies to roam;
  - Reduced aggression; and
  - Cheaper registration fees when desexed and registered within applicable timeframes.

Desexing a dog can reduce the likelihood of a dog being the aggressor in a dog attack.

- 5.3. All dogs should have the opportunity for regular and appropriate exercise and enrichment to promote good physical and psychological health. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to ensure their dog has regular exercise and enrichment, which prevents boredom and other behavioural issues which can reduce the likelihood of the dog being involved in a dog attack.
- 5.4. Early and ongoing training and socialisation are the responsibility of dog owners to ensure their dog behaves appropriately both at home and in the community.
- 5.5. Before purchasing a dog, potential dog owners should consider the training and socialisation needs of the dog, specific to the breed. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to continue training and socialisation throughout the dog's life to ensure the dog is well-mannered and is responsive to commands which enables the owner or handler to have effective control.
- 5.6. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to make certain that their dog does not impact the safety and wellbeing of other people or animals within the community. Remember that your dog is your responsibility, and the consequences of a dog attack can be significant.
- 5.7. Dog owners are legally required to ensure their dogs are kept secured within a yard. Roaming dogs can endanger themselves and others by causing accidents, becoming involved in a dog attack or becoming lost or injured. Roaming can also result in nuisance and territorial behaviour, which may result in territorial aggression.

Dogs found to be roaming will be seized by Authorised Council Officers and impounded under the *Companion Animal Act 1998*, which incurs a fee to the owner.

- 5.8. Dog owners must provide a clean, comfortable and safe environment for their dog that meets their behavioural and physiological needs. Outdoor dogs should be provided with a sheltered area to protect against the weather. Indoor dogs should be provided with a designated safe sleeping space. Children should not be left unsupervised with dogs.
- 5.9. Any concerns regarding the welfare or neglect of a dog should be reported immediately to the RSPCA or the Animal Welfare League NSW.
- 5.10. When a dog dies, dog owners must notify Central Coast Council within 28 days (or 24 hours in the case of a restricted dog, dangerous or menacing dog) of its death. Notification may be by telephone or in writing by email or letter. In the case of a restricted or declared dangerous dog, Central Coast Council requires you to provide documentary evidence from a veterinary practitioner that your dog has died in accordance with section 51 of the *Companion Animal Act 1998*.
- 5.11. Deceased pets and animals should not be placed in domestic bins. Dog owners can choose to bury their dog at home, contact a pet cremation service or take their dog to a Council Waste Management Facility.

## 6. MICROCHIPPING AND REGISTRATION

- 6.1. Microchipping and registration are a legal requirement of dog owners, which supports Council staff reunite lost and roaming dogs with their owners. Central Coast Council undertakes an annual audit of the Companion Animals Register to identify animals that are not registered and will take action to ensure those animals are registered in accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998*.
- 6.2. Dogs must be microchipped by twelve (12) weeks of age or before being sold or given away.
- 6.3. Dogs must be registered by six (6) months of age. The registration fee is a once-only payment that covers the animal for life. Reduced registration fees are available where your dog is desexed and registered within the required time.

## 7. OUT AND ABOUT

- 7.1. Dog owners must ensure they are aware of their responsibilities when out in the community with their dog, so that everyone can safely enjoy public parks and shared open space areas.

- 7.2. Dogs must be on a lead in a public place at all times unless they are in a designated off-leash area.
- 7.3. When in a public place, dog owners must be mindful that not all people wish to be greeted by their dog; some members of the community are fearful or allergic and may not welcome an interaction.
- 7.4. When walking on a lead, it is the responsibility of dog owners to ensure their dog does not approach another person, particularly children or another dog, without the permission of the other person or dog owner.
- 7.5. Dogs are prohibited in the following public places in accordance with *the Companion Animals Act 1998*;
- a. Children's play areas (including within 10 metres of a children's play area);
  - b. Schools;
  - c. Childcare centres;
  - d. Food preparation areas;
  - e. Signposted recreation areas such as sporting fields;
  - f. Wildlife protection areas;
  - g. Beaches (unless designated by Central Coast Council);
  - h. Sport and recreation areas, such as sports fields, oval, pitches and courts (subject to Central Coast Council determination and signage); and
  - i. Shopping areas (subject to Central Coast Council determination and signage).
- 7.6. A person with a disability with evidence is entitled to be accompanied by an assistance animal into or onto any building or place open to the public, including public transport.
- 7.7. Central Coast Council provides a number of designated off-lead areas for dogs to exercise freely. Dog owners who use these areas are responsible for their dog and must ensure it does not impact the safety and wellbeing of any person or animal.
- 7.8. It is the responsibility of dog owners to ensure that their dog is well trained and socialised and can safely interact with other dogs without becoming fearful or aggressive. Dog owners must ensure their dog has good recall and is responsive to basic commands which support safe play and interaction with other dogs and people.
- 7.9. Dog owners who do not have effective control of their dog must not use shared designated off-leash areas, even if they are fenced. A dog is not considered to be under the effective control of a person if that person has more than four (4) dogs under his or her control.

7.10. Dog owners must ensure their dog is vaccinated before entering a dog park or off-leash area on the Central Coast.

7.11. When in a public place, dog owners are legally responsible for picking up their dog's faeces and disposing appropriately. A fine can be issued to a dog owner for failure to clean up after their dog.

## 8. DOG MANAGEMENT & CONTROL

8.1. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to make certain that their dog does not impact the safety and wellbeing of other people or animals within the community. Remember that your dog is your responsibility, and the consequences of a dog attack can be significant.

8.2. Nuisance dog behaviour can include; making persistent noise/barking, continual roaming, repeatedly defecating on private property, repeatedly running at or chasing persons/animals/vehicles or endangering the health of any person or animal, repeatedly causing substantial damage to anything outside of the property on which it is kept.

Reports of dog behaviour that may be considered a nuisance in accordance with section 32A of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* will be investigated by an Authorised Council Officer, and appropriate action will be taken where evidence of the nuisance behaviour exists.

8.3. Dog owners must ensure that their dog does not persistently bark which can be a nuisance for neighbours and the broader community.

8.4. Dog barking complaints from the community will only be considered if they are accompanied by a dog barking diary.

8.5. Where a barking complaint is substantiated through investigation, Central Coast Council may issue a nuisance dog order and a fine.

8.6. To address nuisance barking Central Coast Council will pursue positive and proactive approaches such as:

- a. Providing off-leash areas for dogs to exercise; and
- b. Providing community education and targeted information to dog owners on the causes of nuisance barking.

8.7. A dog attack is defined under the *Companion Animals Act 1998* as an incident where a dog rushes at, attacks, bites, harasses or chases any person or animal (other than vermin) whether or not an injury is caused to the person or animal.

- 8.8. In accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, the owner of the attacking dog is liable for the offence unless the dog is under the control of another person; in that case, the person in charge of the dog at the time of the attack is liable for the offence.
- 8.9. Central Coast Council adopts a zero-tolerance approach for dog attacks with mandatory penalties where an attack has led to the fatality of another dog unless there are extenuating circumstances and they are reviewed by an Enforcement Review Panel led by a Council Executive.
- 8.10. Dog attacks should be reported to Central Coast Council as soon as practicable so that they may be investigated. Evidence of the dog attack, which may include a statement, is required in order for appropriate enforcement action to be undertaken.
- 8.11. Central Coast Council is authorised to seize a dog in accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998* for the following reason;
- a. A dog roaming in a public space;
  - b. Within 72 hours of a dog attack, if the dog cannot be adequately contained on its property; and
  - c. Where a dog owner is not complying with the requirements of an Order.
- 8.12. The *Companion Animals Act 1998* details the requirements and actions which must be taken if the behaviour of a dog is considered to be menacing or dangerous. Owners of dogs that are declared dangerous or menacing must comply with the control requirements and housing for the dog. Failure to do so will result in the issuance of a fine, and repeated failure to comply may result in the seizure of the declared dog.
- 8.13. Annual permits are required for dog owners of restricted dog breeds and dogs declared dangerous. Dog owners must pay the annual permit fee to Central Coast Council. This fee supports Central Coast Council staff to carry out annual property inspections to ensure declared dogs are kept in accordance with the control requirements.
- 8.14. Dog owners of a declared menacing or dangerous dog may apply after twelve (12) months to Central Coast Council to revoke the declaration. Applications will be reviewed on a case by case basis, and any revocation is at the full discretion of Central Coast Council's Enforcement Review Panel led by a Council Executive.
- 8.15. There are a number of breeds that are deemed restricted dogs for the purposes of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*; these are listed within section 55 of the Act.



- 8.16. Where an Authorised Council Officer suspects a dog of being a restricted breed, a Notice of Intention to Declare (NOI) the dog restricted will be issued to the dog owner. On receipt of the notice, the owner must undertake a breed assessment using an approved Government Breed Assessor. If the breed assessment is not undertaken or the dog fails, the dog will be declared a restricted breed, and the owner must comply with the control requirements as per the legislation. Failure to comply with the requirements will result in a penalty infringement notice being issued. Repeated failure to comply may result in the seizure of the dog.
- 8.17. If a dog goes through the restricted breed and temperament assessment process and passes the assessment, the order will not be issued, and there will be no restrictions placed on the dog.

## 9. LOST AND IMPOUNDED DOGS

- 9.1. Where an Authorised Council Officer seizes a roaming dog, all efforts will be made to return the dog home prior to it being impounded at a Council Animal Care Facility.
- 9.2. Dog owners are responsible for ensuring the owner contact details are up to date to support Council staff with reuniting lost pets with their owners.
- 9.3. All dogs are required under the *Companion Animal Act 1998* to wear a collar and tag with contact details. Fines can be issued for failure to comply.
- 9.4. Any resident that has secured a roaming dog is required to take the dog to a Council Animal Care Facility or an approved premises within 72 hours of securing the animal. An approved premises for the purpose of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* is any premises operated by an approved animal welfare organisation such as a vet or any person that has access to information contained in the NSW Companion Animals Register (CAR). These organisations can access the CAR for the purposes of identifying the owner of a lost animal.
- 9.5. Impounded dogs must have their impound fees paid and must be registered prior to release as required under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. Animals that are not collected by their owners within 14 days will become the property of the rescue organisation operating the Council Animal Care Facility. The rescue organisation may rehome the dog if it is deemed suitable and safe for rehoming.

## 10. ANIMAL CARE FACILITY

- 10.1. Central Coast Council Animal Care Facility is managed by contracted animal rescue organisations. The purpose of the Animal Care Facility is for the provision of impounding stray or roaming animals brought in by Authorised Council Officers or members of the community. The Animal Care Facility is also used for the purposes of housing abandoned companion animals for the purpose of rehoming.
- 10.2. Central Coast Council Animal Care Facility also provides temporary housing for animals seized in relation to a dog attack.
- 10.3. Central Coast Council does not offer a surrender service. The rescue organisation operating the facility may accept a surrendered dog at their discretion which will incur a surrender fee. This fee is used to support the care and rehoming of the surrendered animal.
- 10.4. Central Coast Council is not authorised to accept animals seized under *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*. The RSPCA or Animal Welfare League NSW should be contacted in this instance.

## 11. BREEDING

- 11.1. Dog breeders are bound by animal welfare-related legislation, including the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*, the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (General) Regulation 2006* and the *Animal Welfare Code of Practice – Breeding dogs and cats*.
- 11.2. Breeding of dogs by non-registered breeders or backyard breeders is strongly discouraged. Backyard breeders or dog owners that have unplanned litters are often unaware of the standards of care and legal requirements associated with breeding and selling puppies.
- 11.3. The *Companion Animals Regulation 2018* defines a recognised breeder as a person who is a member of a recognised breeders' organisation (within the meaning of Part 9 of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*) for the species of a companion animal.  
This includes:
- a. the Royal New South Wales Canine Council Limited (trading as Dogs New South Wales; and
  - b. any other body approved by the Deputy Secretary for the purpose of this definition.
- 11.4. Central Coast Council encourages prospective dog owners to consider adopting a dog from a reputable rescue group or Central Coast Council's Animal Care Facility.

## 12. KEEPING OF GREYHOUNDS

- 12.1. Racing greyhounds must be kept and managed in accordance with the *NSW Greyhound Welfare Code of Practice* that sets out the standards for the keeping, treatment, handling and care of greyhounds.
- 12.2. From 1 July 2019, pet greyhounds are no longer required to wear a muzzle once they have been registered on the NSW Companion Animals Register.
- 12.3. All requirements for dogs under the *Companion Animals Act 1998* apply to pet greyhounds; however, all greyhounds must be muzzled in an off-leash area unless they have undergone an approved retraining program. Green collars and 'proof of completion' cards are provided to greyhound owners once their dog has completed the approved training course.

## 13. DOG KENNELS

- 13.1. Animal boarding or training establishments require development consent from Central Coast Council in accordance with *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979*.

## 14. COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- 14.1. Education and awareness are vital in achieving responsible pet ownership and community harmony. This will be achieved by a dynamic range of education initiatives and programs that focus on current responsible pet ownership issues within the community.
- 14.2. Each year Central Coast Council will identify focus areas and develop an education plan to deliver responsible pet ownership outcomes in consultation with the community and relevant stakeholder groups.

## 15. COMMUNITY SAFETY PATROLS

- 15.1. Central Coast Council is responsible for promoting compliance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998* and *Companion Animals Regulation 2018*.
- 15.2. To support responsible pet ownership in the community, Central Coast Council staff will carry out planned, proactive patrols of our shared public spaces such as beaches, parks and reserves. The purpose of these patrols is to gain the compliance of dog owners through education and enforcement when appropriate.

## Review

This Policy will be reviewed at least once every term of Council to ensure the Policy continues to align with relevant legislation, Central Coast Council policies and strategies.

## Records management

Staff must maintain all records relevant to administering this Policy in a recognised Council recordkeeping system.

## Definitions

Central Coast Council refers to Central Coast Council as the local government organisation, not the Council (being the elected Councillors or an Administrator), and may indicate that functions associated with this reference are determined by appropriately authorised staff.

Surrendered refers to a dog owner transferring ownership of a companion animal to the Council Animal Care Facility or Rescue Organisation for the purposes of rehoming.

## Related resources

1. Legislation:
  - a. [Companion Animals Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#)
  - b. [Companion Animals Regulation 2018 \(NSW\)](#)
  - c. [Animal Welfare Code of Practice - Breeding Dogs and Cats](#)
2. External webpages:
  - a. [Office of Local Government - Dogs and Cats](#)
  - b. [RSPCA](#)
  - c. [Animal Welfare League NSW](#)
  - d. [Greyhound Welfare & Integrity Commission](#)

## History of revisions

Amendment history	Details
Original approval authority details	Chief Executive Officer / Council <remove as required >
	XX/XX/20XX <insert Council Meeting date and minute number of resolution adopting the Policy <remove if not needed>
	<i>State reasons for creation of Policy</i>
Version # <remove if not needed>	XX/XX/20XX <insert Council Meeting date and 'minute number' of resolution adopting the Policy <remove if not needed>
	CM document number
	<i>State reasons for amendments</i>
Version # <remove if not needed>	XX/XX/20XX <insert Council Meeting date and 'minute number' of resolution adopting the Policy <remove if not needed>
	CM document number
	<i>State reasons for amendments</i>

*Note: delete lines or add in additional lines as required*