



# Domestic Animal Management Plan

2026-2029





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## Introduction

Under Section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act), Council is required to prepare and implement a Domestic Animal Management Plan (the Plan) every four years. The Plan deals with strategies and services that Council must provide with regards to dogs and cats, which are the only domestic animals identified and dealt with by the Act.

The purpose of the Plan is to evaluate and monitor if Council animal management strategies and services are meeting community needs and adequately addressing the requirements of the Act and the Domestic Animal Regulations 2015 (The Regulations).

Benalla Rural City Council wants pets and people to live safely and happily together. This Plan explains how we will manage dogs and cats from 2026 to 2029. It focuses on safety, responsible pet care, and animal welfare. This brochure provides a brief overview of the Plan, which contains full details and is available on our website or at the Customer Service Centre.



## Demographics and Animal Statistics

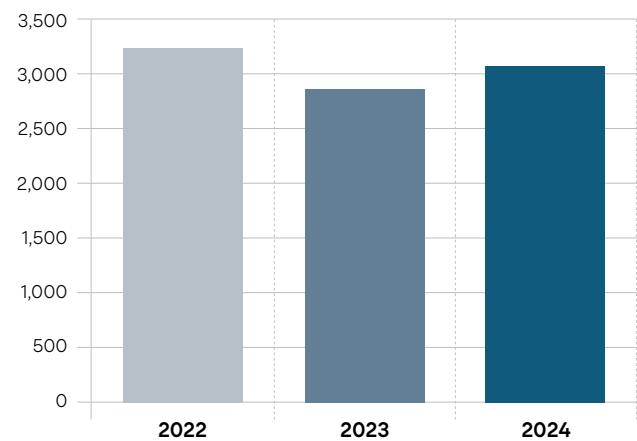
Benalla Rural City covers 235,000 hectares and includes 41 localities. About 14,600 people live here, most in Benalla town. The area is mainly rural with farms and open spaces. Our median age is 51.5 years. We have around 3,000 registered dogs and cats each year.

Registration figures for dogs and cats dipped slightly from 2022 to 2024, likely due to cost-of-living pressures and the aftermath of the global pandemic which limited Council's ability to make follow up enquiries by doorknock or conduct face-to-face engagement activities.

Registration numbers are expected to rise for the 2025 period as Compliance Officers continue to follow up renewals and educate the community through portable signs, vehicle decals, social media, phone calls and doorknocks.

Dog euthanasia rates have dropped from 14 per cent to 5 per cent whilst cats (including feral) remain constant around 23 per cent. Dog reclamation and adoption rates have risen over the last 4 years, whilst declining cat reclamations are offset by adoptions increasing to 71 per cent.

**FIGURE 1: ANIMAL REGISTRATIONS 2022-2024**





## Training of Authorised Officers

Our Compliance team includes a Coordinator and three Officers. They handle animal issues, dog attacks, and after-hours emergencies, amongst other legislative enforcement responsibilities. We train Officers in animal handling, investigation, and community engagement. They also attend industry seminars and conferences.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Develop and maintain a training register to enhance and maintain skills and knowledge.
- Develop existing Authorised Officers to multi-skill to ensure adequate backfilling or additional staffing when necessary.



## Responsible Pet Ownership

We promote responsible pet care through informative pamphlets through the Customer Service Centre, social media, signs, and community events. We provide after hours emergency animal service, poo bag stations, investigation and enforcement service and share tips online. Council orders, under the Act, require cats to be contained on their property at all times and dogs to be on a leash in public when not securely contained to their property. We encourage owners to clean up after pets and keep them under effective control at all times.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Reduce the number of compliance actions and complaints by educating the community about their legislative obligations.
- Encourage dog owners to clean up after their pets and maintain effective control when in public areas.



## Overpopulation and Euthanasia

Impounds have increased due to better record keeping and increased surrenders due to cost-of-living pressures. We aim to reduce stray animals through education, enforcement and promotion of desexing. We offer discounts on registration for desexed pets and continue to explore grants for subsidised and low-cost microchipping programs for our community. We run cat trapping programs when necessary due to feral cat infestation and/or wildlife predation and share Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife resources.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Encourage desexing of animals and facilitate affordable desexing programs.
- Reduce number of impounded unregistered cats and reports of wild/unowned cats.

FIGURE 2: DOGS 2022-2024

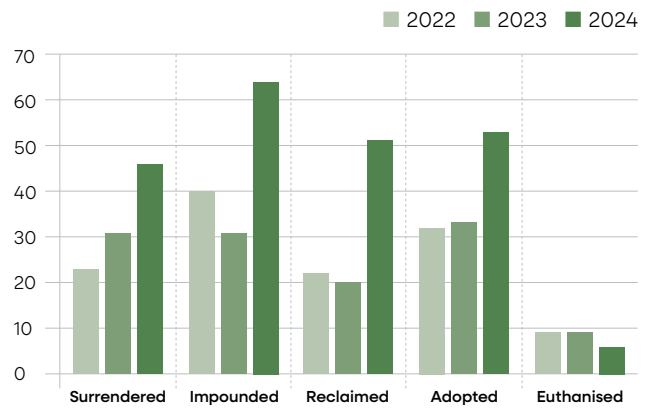
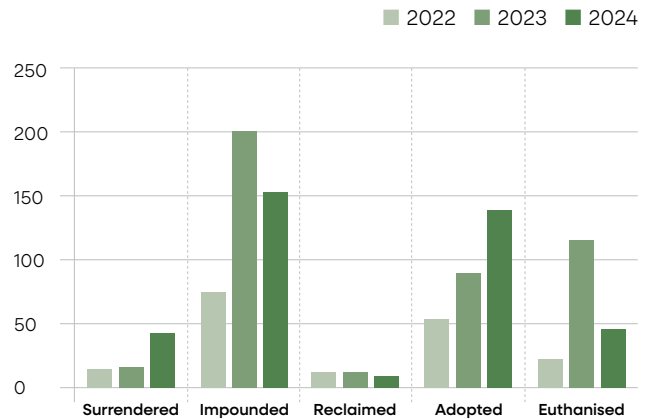


FIGURE 3: CATS 2022-2024





## Cat Curfew

Under Section 25 of the Act, all cats in Benalla Rural City must stay safely on their owner's property at all times. This means cats cannot roam outside their home's boundaries.

### **What happens if my cat is found wandering?**

Our procedures are designed to help you get your pet back quickly.

When a cat is found, our officers first check for registration and microchip details.

If your cat is registered: We will try to contact you directly to collect your pet. Registered cats can be returned once per registration year without penalty.

If your cat is unregistered or can't be identified: It will be taken to the RSPCA Victoria facility in Burwood and held for eight days. If unclaimed, it may be put up for adoption.

Owners reclaiming their pets may face penalties for offences such as failure to register or failure to contain their cat. For repeat offenders, Council may take further action to ensure the property is secure.

### **Trapping on Private Property**

Residents can hire an approved cat trap from Council, free of charge, to catch cats trespassing on their property.

When a cat is trapped, an officer will check for a microchip and registration tag:

- *Identified cats:* Will be returned to their owner with a reminder about containment rules.
- *Unidentified cats:* Will be impounded. We may post a photo on Council's social media to help find the owner.
- *Injured or unwell cats:* Will be taken for a health assessment.

### **Surrendering a cat**

Council must accept any cat surrendered by its owner within the municipality. Owners must complete a surrender form, which transfers ownership to Council.

#### **Our Plan requires that we:**

- **Promote Education:** Increase public awareness about cat containment, desexing, and microchipping.
- **Strengthen Compliance Measures:** Ensure cat owners comply with regulations by conducting regular patrols, responding to complaints, and enforcing penalties for breaches.



## Registration and Identification

Sect 10 (1) of the Act requires that all dogs and cats over three months must be microchipped and registered with Council. Registration must be renewed by 10 April every year and helps reunite pets with their owners and funds animal services. Council remind owners through mail, signs, and social media. We audit properties and enforce registration laws.

The registration of animals provides Council with an understanding of the level of pet ownership in the community and in turn helps Council plan for services, information and programs associated with pets in particular areas of the community.

Registration fees help fund the services provided by the Council in relation to animal management and Animal Welfare Victoria (AWV) responsible pet ownership campaigns and programs provided within the municipality.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Minimise the number of properties required for the desktop and door knock audit and increase numbers of registrations and renewals in the municipality.
- Facilitate registration for lower socio-economic areas and increase awareness among culturally and linguistically diverse communities of pet registration requirements.



## Domestic Animal Businesses

The Act requires all domestic animal businesses, such as pet shops, boarding establishments, breeding and rearing establishments, dog training establishments and dog and cat shelters and pounds, to be registered with Council.

We register and audit pet businesses annually, checking compliance with codes of practice and investigating welfare concerns.

Council has a short-term animal holding facility in Benalla and RSPCA Victoria is contracted to provide pound services for Council from its Burwood premises. As part of the contract additions, RSPCA Victoria transport impounded animals from Benalla to Burwood and returned animals to Benalla for delivery to their owners upon reclaim.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Ensure Domestic Animal Businesses are compliant with relevant legislation and codes of practice.



## Nuisance

Council’s current policies and procedures regarding nuisance animals encourage a community-based resolution before Council enforcement. Nuisance barking complaints are required to discuss the issue with neighbours or utilise a dispute settlement service, prior to reporting the matter to Council.

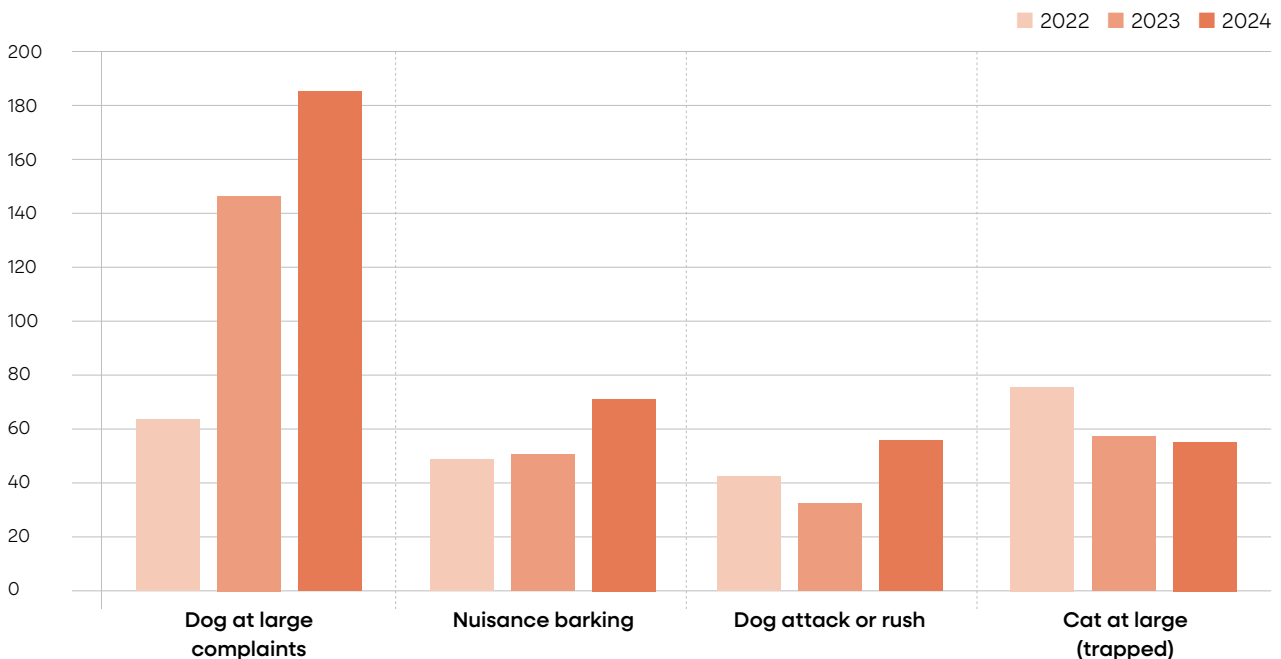
Council offers a 24/7 call out service for collection of lost and wandering dogs and will return registered dogs and cats to their owners without penalty once a year, in order to encourage prompt registration and renewal.

We patrol parks and streets to prevent roaming pets. Cat containment and leash laws reduce nuisance animals and keep pets safe.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Educate dog owners within the Municipality regarding Council Order pursuant to Section 26 of the Act relating to the control of dogs in public places.
- Educate and enforcement of cat containment order pursuant to Section 26 of the Act.

**FIGURE 4: NUISANCE COMPLAINTS 2022-2024**





## Dangerous and Menacing Dogs

We monitor and enforce the requirements of the Act in relation to declared dangerous and menacing dogs and inspect properties to ensure compliance with the Act.

Owners must follow strict rules for housing and controlling these dogs, both inside and outside of the property. Council must register all dangerous/menacing/restricted breed dogs with the Victorian Dangerous Dog Register (VDDR). This is a database that records all declared dogs for all relevant parties to see. Any dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dog entered into the VDDR is declared for the life of the animal and cannot be revoked by Council.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Develop a policy that is fair and non-biased to assist in declaring a dog as dangerous or menacing.
- Ensure declared dogs are compliant to relevant legislation and regulations.



## Dog Attacks

Incidents of dog attacks and dog rush in Benalla Rural City are lower than other Victorian Councils and have remained constant over the last three years. Dog attacks are considered where a dog has physically contacted another person or animal, generally causing some kind of injury as a result. Dog rush is where there has been no contact or injury. Most attacks involve other animals or livestock.

We respond quickly, investigate, and educate owners about leash laws, effective control and confinement.

### Our Plan requires that we:

- Provide targeted education and compliance campaigns in areas where data reporting shows incidents of dog attack against stock and other animals.
- Minimise the incidence of dog attacks in the community.



## Annual Review

Under section 68A(3) of the Act, Council must review its Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and, if appropriate, amend the Plan. Council must provide the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions Secretary with a copy of the Plan, including any amendments, and publish an evaluation of the Plan's implementation in its Annual Report.



# benalla.vic.gov.au

**Phone:** (03) 5760 2600

**Email:** [council@benalla.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@benalla.vic.gov.au)

PO Box 227, Benalla VIC 3671

**Customer Service Centre**

1 Bridge Street East

Benalla VIC 3672

