



ACT
Government

Background to the Canberra Dog Model

Transport Canberra and
City Services Directorate

May 2019



INTRODUCTION

The Canberra Dog Model document is an evidence-based strategic guide for achieving best-practice dog management in the ACT that is tailored to the Canberra context. The principles, objectives and planned outcomes of the Canberra Dog Model will empower the community through responsible dog ownership for a safer, more pet-friendly Canberra.

Achieving the Canberra Dog Model will bring the ACT forward as a national and international leader in dog management, however this would not be possible without the significant work that has already been undertaken in the dog management space.

This document outlines the steps we have taken in establishing the right environment for the Canberra Dog Model to come into effect and the broader context of how the Canberra Model has come to be.

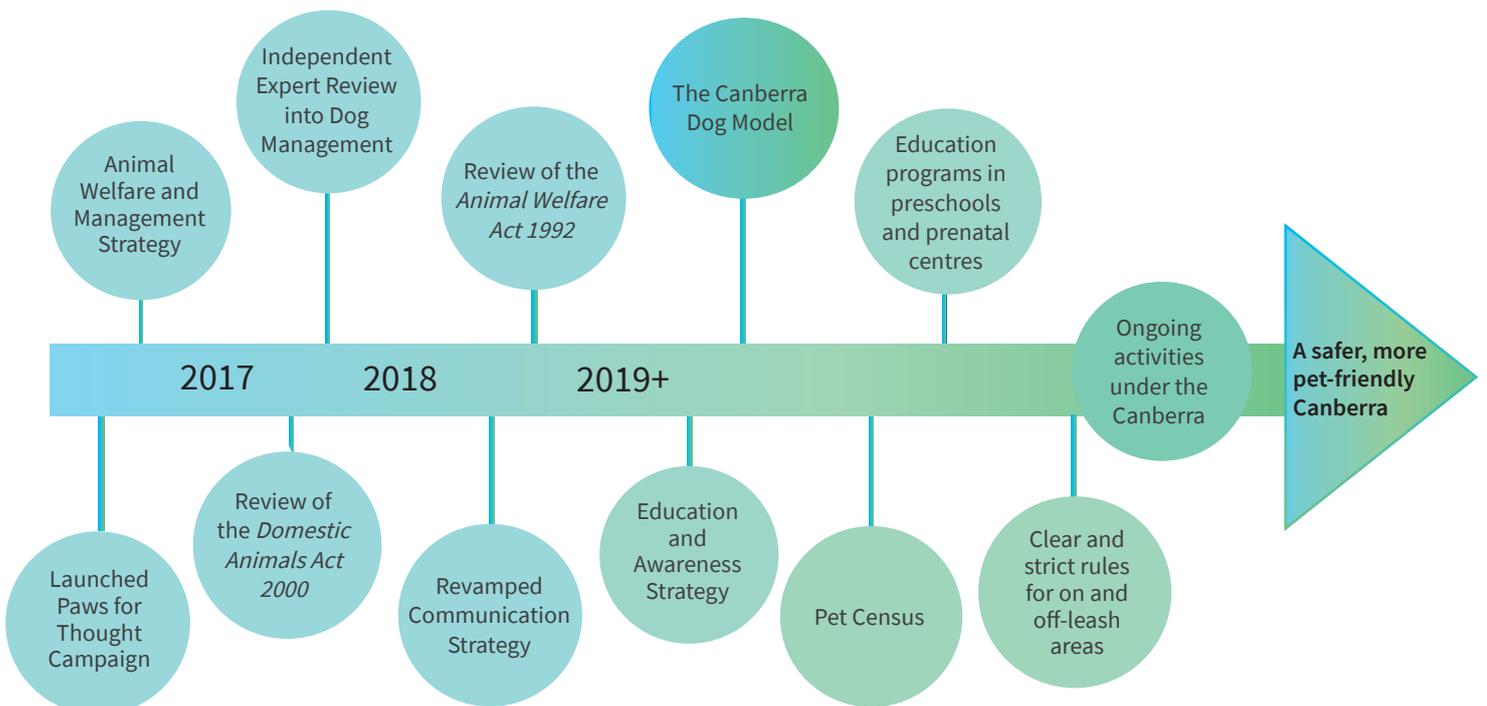
The Canberra Dog Model presents a number of immediate actions for 2019 and 2020. In addition to these short-term actions, the Canberra Dog Model uses overarching principles and objectives that will see long-lasting cultural change in dog management in the community and a reduction in dangerous dogs.

Through a commitment to evidence-based decision making and by staying aligned with community expectations, the ACT Government has brought Canberra closer to best-practice dog management and will continue moving forward in this space.



TIMELINE

The below diagram outlines the process that has been undertaken and the immediate next steps to be actioned under the Canberra Dog Model.



ANIMAL WELFARE AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2017-2022

In 2017, the ACT Government released the Animal Welfare and Management Strategy 2017-2022, which committed to a set of immediate and longer-term actions for improving the welfare and management of all animals in the ACT, including animals used in industry, domestic animals and wildlife.

The Strategy acknowledged that the ACT Government, non-government organisations, community and industry all have a responsibility to work towards achieving better animal welfare and management outcomes in line with community expectations and best-practice.

Unlike the Strategy, the Canberra Dog Model has a narrower scope, focusing solely on dog management in Canberra and the steps we will take to ensure the ACT is a national and international leader in dog management.

We received significant feedback on the draft Strategy following consultation in early 2017. When it comes to dogs, we know from this feedback that Canberrans want to see:

- tougher penalties for animal welfare abuses;
- stronger enforcement of existing legislation;
- greater education and awareness of responsible dog ownership; and
- a reduction in dog attacks.

All of these themes are represented in the Canberra Dog Model.



Some of the steps taken since release of the Strategy

-  **Review of the *Domestic Animals Act 2000*** – the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* was reviewed in late 2017 and a comprehensive suite of Government amendments implemented in December 2017 and April 2018, particularly around dangerous dogs. A snapshot of these amendments is below.
-  **Review of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*** – a full review of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* took place in 2018. The legislation is proposed to be amended in 2019 to ensure that the ACT has a best-practice, contemporary and effective regulatory system that protects and promotes the welfare of animals, prevents and deters cruelty to animals and responds appropriately to animal welfare abuses.
-  **Launch of the Paws for Thought education and awareness campaign** – the ACT Government’s education and awareness campaign for responsible dog ownership in 2017-18 involved community information stalls, radio interviews and online educational clips that promoted key actions such as registration, microchipping, desexing and containment of dogs. This work will be renewed in 2019.
-  **Independent Expert Review into the Management of Dogs in the ACT** – the ACT Government convened a panel of local and international experts to conduct an independent review into the operational and administrative processes of DAS regarding domestic dogs in 2018. The Review commended DAS on its application of the legislation and overall regulatory framework and on its commitment to be the best.
-  **New DAS structure** – the DAS team is committed to working with the community and other stakeholders to improve animal welfare and management in Canberra. In early 2019 changes to the organisational structure of DAS were implemented to maximise efficiency, allowing for more Rangers on the ground more often to help keep our suburbs safe and promote responsible dog ownership to the community.

LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

Government amendments to the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* and proposed Government amendments to the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* will bring the ACT in line with national and international best-practice in animal welfare and management.

It was an immediate action under the Animal Welfare and Management Strategy for both Acts to be reviewed, which has since been completed. The amendments to these two key pieces of legislation are based on what the data and evidence from around the world tells us and were intended to bring the regulatory framework in line with community expectations on how animals should be managed and cared for in the ACT.



The Animal Welfare Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 proposes for the ACT to be the first state or territory in Australia to recognise the sentience of animals. This provides for a degree of care and consideration by people in how their animals are cared for and managed.

The Government amendments to the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* introduced greater powers for the ACT Government to manage dangerous dogs, with community safety remaining the highest priority.

Since these changes were introduced, significantly higher numbers of dangerous dogs have been removed from the community and humanely euthanised and high numbers of strict control orders have been issued to owners of high-risk dogs to ensure they do not pose a risk to the community.

It will take time to evaluate the overall effectiveness of these changes to our dangerous dog laws, but early indications show the tougher laws are highly successful. Further work around compliance and education and awareness will continue into 2019 in addition to enforcing the dangerous dog laws.

This will have a positive impact on improving the safety of Canberrans and their pets. A basic outline of these changes is displayed below.

Snapshot of the new dangerous dog laws in 2017

-  A general public safety consideration in how the Registrar for Domestic Animal Services exercises discretion in dealing with any dog that could be dangerous.
-  Three new classes of responding to a dog attack with proportionate powers to act.
-  The introduction of a 'dog control order' as a new intermediate measure to impose restrictions on a dog that is more than a nuisance dog and is not a dangerous dog (almost 80 issued by February 2019).
-  Increased fines and penalties for non-compliance.
-  Refusal or cancellation of registration for irresponsible dog owners.
-  Greater restrictions on the breeding, sale or ownership of non-desexed dogs.
-  Greater restrictions on owners of dangerous dogs and increased fees for dangerous dog licences.
-  Greater enforcement powers for acting on nuisance, harassing and dangerous dogs, including an offence provision for provoking a dog attack and the issuing of precautionary control orders, which have proven successful internationally.

INDEPENDENT EXPERT REVIEW INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF DOGS IN THE ACT

An Independent Expert Review into the Management of Dogs in the ACT was commissioned to report on the processes, procedures and administration of the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* by DAS in 2018. The Review presented a number of recommendations, one of which was to develop the Canberra Dog Model.



The Review was conducted in 2018 by a panel of local and international experts in fields relating to dog management and regulation and identified the ACT Government's strong points in dog management as well as areas for improvement.

The Review concluded that DAS has made a concerted effort to improve dog management in the ACT and has the will to be the best.

A common reference in the Review was to the city of Calgary, Canada, which has been used as a case study for successful dog management reform by many jurisdictions around the world.

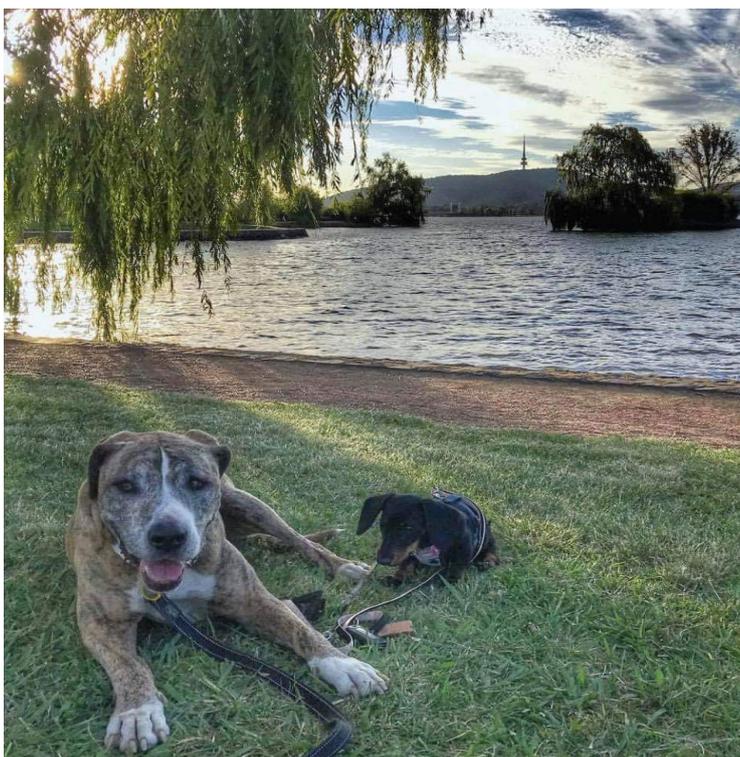
The Calgary Model has demonstrated significant progress in the prevention of dog attacks through a combination of regulation and community education and awareness of responsible dog ownership. Calgary is also known for having a very high dog registration compliance rate mainly through incentivisation, annual licensing (registration) and education and awareness.

Whilst these are positive outcomes that the ACT is also working towards, the Review acknowledges that what works for one city may not work for another, which is why the Review recommended the development of the Canberra Model for dog management.

The Review suggested six steps to developing the Canberra Model that can be tailored to the Canberra context:

1. Identify issues
2. Engage the community
3. Develop regulatory processes that work
4. Educate the community
5. Demonstrate the consequences of non-compliance
6. Measure and undertake continuous improvement activities

The next page summarises how these steps have and will be addressed in the ACT.



STEPS TO DEVELOPING THE CANBERRA MODEL

The Independent Review recommended steps towards developing the Canberra Model for dog management that can be tailored to align with the Canberra lifestyle and environment.

Engage with the community and identify issues

Substantial feedback from various engagements in recent years has helped to identify what matters to Canberrans, particularly through comments received on the Strategy in 2017 and the draft Animal Welfare Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. Common themes related to the importance of education, desexing, registration, and stronger regulation and enforcement of existing laws, particularly regarding animal welfare offences and dangerous dogs. The Better Suburbs Citizen's Forum also came together in 2018 to develop the Better Suburbs Statement 2030, which recommended changes such as more education and enforcement, more regular registration and cooperation with stakeholders.

A major component of the Canberra Dog Model is continuous improvement, which will include various future consultations with the community and other stakeholders over time to ensure the Canberra Dog Model remains aligned with stakeholder and community expectations and best-practice and can be updated regularly.

Develop regulatory processes that work and demonstrate the consequences of non-compliance

The ACT Government's legislative and regulatory framework was significantly strengthened in December 2017 and April 2018. Options are currently being explored to incentivise the community to engage in responsible pet ownership practices.

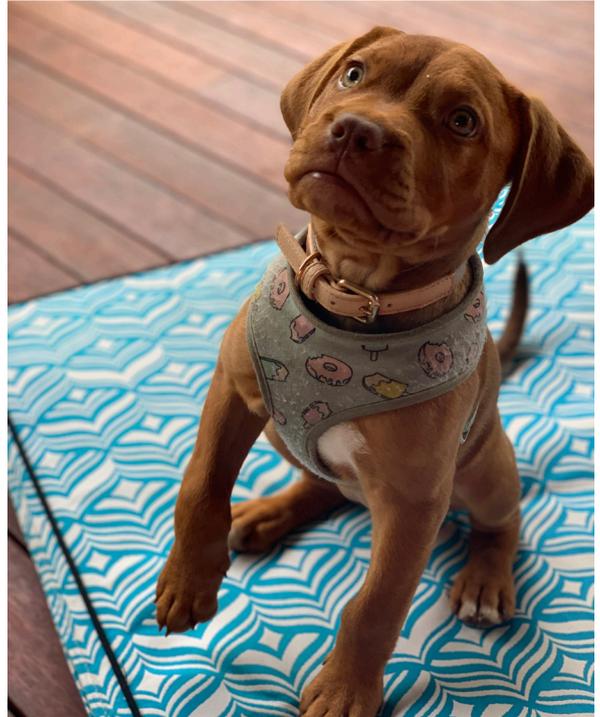
DAS has also recently implemented new processes that place a greater focus on responsive and proactive compliance action to hold people who do not manage their dogs responsibly accountable and to communicate these consequences through the education and awareness campaign. A dedicated compliance team will also be established in 2019 to conduct targeted compliance action around Canberra.

Educate the community

The Paws for Thought education and awareness campaign for responsible pet ownership was launched in 2017 and continued into 2018 using public information stalls and online materials. Significant work is now underway in early 2019 to rebrand the education campaign in line with the new Education and Awareness Strategy. For example, preschool and prenatal centre programs to teach children and parents how to live safely with dogs and prevent dog bites, comprehensive marketing, increased signage around Canberra and a Pet Census to reinforce the importance of responsible pet ownership and inform further evidence based work.

Measure and undertake continuous improvement activities

The Review encourages the use of good baseline data to measure progress against. New database systems are currently being explored for DAS to better capture data in areas such as infringements for non-compliance and dog registration. The 2019 Pet Census will also provide good baseline data on Canberra's dog population and key indicators of responsible dog ownership. The ACT Government will remain flexible to changes in best-practice, technology and community expectations to ensure the Canberra Dog Model is adaptive and evolving. The Canberra Dog Model will be updated accordingly.





Transport Canberra and City
Services Directorate

May 2019