Stray Dog Management for Island Nations and Other Countries in the Australasia /Oceania Region

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Introduction

The Urban Animal Management (UAM) Advisory Group (UAM AG) of the Australian Veterinary Association has convened a national UAM conference each year in Australia since 1992. UAM is a discipline that endeavours to see community pet benefit maximised through the minimisation of public pet problems. The UAM AG involves the active participation of representatives from the veterinary profession, local government, the animal care industry in Australia and the AVA itself. Over the last 14 year period, through its unbroken series of annual conferences and by a process of consultation and analysis, the UAM AG has striven to help define and promote best practices in UAM service delivery.

The UAM AG is happy to share its observations with anybody interested because, after all, why would anybody want to be walking straight into the same holes that we have been climbing out of for so long now?

The summary of this paper is as follows:

> *In animal owning societies, the animals have a major impact on quality of life, environmental sustainability and economic security. This is the triple bottom line – the summary of what government is there for, to promote and protect.*

> *Where human population pressure is creating social stress, this stress can be either ameliorated or exacerbated by the presence of accompanying animals. It depends on how the animals are managed. Good municipal government these days includes good animal management.*

> *Animal management programs <u>can</u> be successful, provided they are properly detailed in the first instance and then both sanctioned <u>and</u> supported by the communities they are intended to serve.*

Animals are us

At the Canberra UAM Conference in 1994, David Paxton delivered an elegant and thoughtful paper on the subject of the evolutionary relationship between people and their dogs([1]). In some ways the effects of humans living with animals can be negative eg. compromised social amenity, health and safety. In other ways it can be positive eg. companionship, protection, recreation etc. If it were not or the great preponderance of advantages over disadvantages, human society would have abandoned the keeping of animals long since. Getting the best balance of advantages over disadvantages does require management - The better the management, the better the outcomes and vice versa.

Animal management programs appear at first glance to be about controlling animals, but the animals are just the foreground of the picture. The complete composition must also include all the people that make up the background. The more animal intensive a community is, the more this is so. Every animal management undertaking should *always* start from an appreciation of this reality, but they seldom do and this is the biggest error that can be made.

> Community dog management is a surprisingly complex undertaking. This complexity is a consequence of the fact that animal management (stray dog management in this instance) involves the coordinated management of animal behaviour *and* human community behaviour. Each of these is a science in its own right and the combination of the two makes a uniquely demanding mix.

Silver bullets

When the going gets tough (as it reliably does) with stray dog management programs, clutching at straws can sometimes take the place of grasping the nettles that have to be grasped. A steady, well-structured process of change requires finesse, patience and discipline in deployment. Those who seek easy yards can reliably be expected to opt for one of many traditionally popular "quick fix" "symptomatic" remedies that always seem so tempting. The shakers and movers come and go but the nettles tend to remain.

With stray dog management, a standard range of "silver bullet" remedies have been tried over and over in the past, all around the world, for this very reason. Perhaps the silver bullet remedies persist in part because their shortcomings can be relatively easily glossed over by those who have wasted the resources that have been consumed and wasted by them…. And then moved on.

> Dependence on random (non strategic) measures, will inevitably be disappointing.

While various popular initiatives such as charitable neuter schemes, concessional registration policies, the application of microchipping identification technology etc etc might seem like useful options, historically, they have been very disappointing. Some may indeed have merit in animal management, but when used in *isolation* (as one shot remedies) *outside* the framework of complete, carefully prepared, community based, strategic planning, they will reliably deliver little.

> Author's note: I think it is true to say that people will not care for things that they do not value. Animals acquired casually are likely to have little value and therefore receive little care. I'm not sure that charity assistance from others who *are* concerned for the welfare of these animals can alter this. Perhaps animal health and welfare charity creates more dependence than it does independence for the recipient. Perhaps it is best to avoid being there.

Any initiative that seems anything less than a *directly* and *obviously* part of a properly planned stray dog management program, should *not* be included until they have earned their place by proven test and trial at first hand. It can be argued that innovative measures can do more harm than good when they fail to make the kind of difference they promised. There is nothing like unrealised expectations to undermine public trust and confidence. Innovation is good, but it is also risky when resources are scarce and the innovation unproven.

The depriving face

People resent interference in how they run their own lives. Brendan Bartlett addressed the issue of what he called "the depriving face of control" with particular reference to the business of animal control at the Brisbane UAM conference in 1992. He explained how even simple official constraint, eg. A council officer requiring that somebody should keep their dog from barking excessively, is

going to be a deprivation for that person if he/she would prefer the freedom of leaving the dog to bark as it wishes.

Regulation (control), by its nature, deprives people of freedoms in the interest of the common good eg. we drive our cars on the left side of the road rather than any side we feel like. Those, for whom the common good is of no interest, will reliably find *all* regulation depriving.

An understanding of significance of the depriving effect of control that Brendan Bartlett referred to as "an awful chain of negatives" is perhaps best captured by the following brief extract from the paper he gave at that conference.

> *"I think Animal Control Officers should know that deprivation will always elicit a non-accepting or negatively-adaptive behaviour from the one deprived. A sense that the deprivation is just, and therefore acceptable, may come with time, if that time allows for appropriate changes in what is known, understood and can be handled.*
>
> *Education strengthens the possibility of change. It does not ensure it. Nor, does it make it happen immediately. Unfortunately we cannot wait for a better educated public with an anticipation that any one of its members will become more pleasant on an initial contact.*
>
> *Animal Control Officers will always find the person confronted by the depriving function of their work, initially reactive. And, the depriving function is an unavoidable and major part of their work. Our officers must understand this and build-in some useable coping mechanisms.*
>
> *Just as their own reactions in the face of real or perceived withdrawal or withholding of support for them in the field from bosses, allied services and community, exemplify this phenomenon, so too the "normal" reactions of people informed of a complaint, or issued with a warning, or otherwise visited by a depriving officer, will be negative ([2])."*

The keeping of dogs as pet or assistant animals is an activity that has a well earned reputation for being a passionately personal business. Ethical perceptions about the ownership, welfare and control of these animals can vary greatly in any community and extreme attitudes to these things are commonly encountered. There are direct social, cultural and sometimes even spiritual implications bound up in the business of keeping pet animals. This is the rule, not the exception, even in those situations where the dogs themselves may seem to be badly neglected and poorly cared for.

People respond to unpopular animal control as they do to particularly close kinds of personal intrusion. Animal control always seems to draw a *very* vocal chorus of complaint from some sections of the community. Politicians have a tendency to avoid causing public disquiet without looking into the who and the why behind it. Because of this, with animal control, they are prone to just go through the motions in such a way that no one is likely to be upset. This can result in "nothing" initiatives that have just the two principal qualities of sounding nice and having a realistic expectation of being received with universal popularity.

It has always been something of a mystery why animal management has traditionally been so difficult to push over the line from theory into practice – and why less purposeful initiatives seem always to be preferred by government over the more rational and more necessary ones that should

have priority. Looking back to Brendan Bartlett's paper from right back at the beginning of UAM in 1992, it seems we may have been sitting on a good part of the explanation all along. Failure to understand, appreciate and manage the depriving face, makes animal management risky for politicians.

Animal control *does* have a depriving face – that is a fact - this is how it *has* to be – but, the depriving face *can* be managed, and managed successfully.

The depriving face of animal control can't be avoided like some sort of fairy tale, but it can be managed as Brendan Bartlett explained. The secret is to help the public appreciate the justification for the controls (personal deprivations) that have been deemed necessary. As a consequence and as a matter of simple respect for the subject, any agency undertaking any kind of animal management program must *firstly* establish that the objectives they seek and the measures they propose are acceptable to and comfortable with the majority of the community they seek to serve. If they are not (understood and accepted), then animal management is reliably going to be *all* depriving and *all* up hill until public attitudes can be shifted more favourably.

In summary on the depriving face:

➢ Animal management *can* deliver when the measures used are realistic and when the program has been well explained, understood and enjoys an environment of majority community support

➢ Adequate compliance *can* realistically be expected provided dog owners *understand* what is being proposed *and* agree with the necessity ([3], [4])

➢ Enforcement, if /when necessary, is more likely to be seen as assistance rather than intrusion if the community has been *actively* and *positively* engaged in shaping the regulations in the first place

➢ Education and regulation are *both* essential, are interdependent and are mutually supportive ([5])

➢ Voluntary public compliance creates an environment of *community self-regulation* that can *minimise* the need for regulatory intervention

➢ The public respond positively to an *effective regulatory presence* when they are supportive of the program in the first instance - if laws are deemed necessary, they should be enforced ([6])

If a community majority does *not* accept the needs or the methods proposed, then it is probably best to change tack or wait until public attitudes change in favour. Both options are realistic.

The title of this paper started out as Stray Dog Control etc. For the word *control*, the author has substituted the word *management.* There is a world of difference in the meaning of these two words. The semantics are significant in the context of this paper because sensitivity to connotations of deprivation is so important.

The significance of community

Community expectations are important in animal management for deeper reasons than just the quest for simple regulatory productive efficiency. Hugh Mackay in his book "Reinventing Australia"[7] discussed in depth the meaning of the term "community" itself. Understanding the

sequence of steps that explain the importance of community in the context of this paper has (for the author at least) been something of a damascene revelation. It goes like this:

1. Ethics is a social sense. It is based on the recognition of the mutual obligations between each person and every other person in a given community. It is a sense that implies taking the rights, the needs and the welfare of others into account – (author's comment: *perhaps this includes the rights, needs and welfare of attendant animals as well).*

2. Social values are the outcomes of our sense of ethics. They are what we learn from living in community with others. They are about understanding the difference between right and wrong.

3. When community morality (our overall sense of underpinning community values) is compromised, insecurity and uncertainty results. When this happens, there is an urgent wish by society to regain control and more regulation often seems the best way to patch over the cracks.

4. The big risk with pro-regulation, however, is that with this approach individuals are likely to even *further* lose their sense of "connectiveness" (the essence of community) because their obligations and duty are seen to be more anchored in the *impersonal* state than in their own *personal* community.

In societies where "tribal connections" and "the village" are still literal concepts, it would seem like a huge error to unnecessarily undermine the integrity of existing (established and trusted) ethical culture. It has been well argued that the "village system" for protecting social values is in many ways a better model than ours.

Following the Hugh MacKay philosophy about the merit of community connectiveness, it is probably fair to say that people who feel they do *not* belong to the community in which they live are unlikely to be responsive to the needs and welfare of those around them. In situations where sense of community has been severely compromised, such "disconnected" people might even tend towards *active* non-compliance and intentional obstructiveness. In situations where there seem to be epidemiological clusters of irresponsible behaviour in dog ownership behaviour, it might be useful to investigate the socio-economic characteristics of the people involved to see if this kind of causal linkage can be established.

Respecting the culture of others

At the Caloundra UAM conference (2003)[8], Stephen Cutter discussed a rabies control program on Flores in the Greater Sunda Group of islands in Indonesia. Central to the social culture of the people of Flores is a tradition of eating dogs. Special wedding occasions on Flores involve the giving of dogs for feasting and celebration purposes. Many conference delegates were horrified by this revelation which reflected a difference of cultural belief between our society and that of the people of Flores. In western society, issues pertaining to animal welfare, animal rights and animal ethics have a high public profile. These are seen as a big part of the west's framework of cultural values. That it is "right" to eat pigs, chickens, sheep etc. but not dogs, is a cultural value of ours. Though not particularly rational, there it is. This belief on our part, however deeply felt, does not preclude others from having different though still legitimate points of view. We do not have the right to tell others what's right when their social values are different to ours.

At the same conference, Phil Donahoe also spoke of the distress that had been caused by dog control measures in a Northern Territory aboriginal community where he had been involved. In that

situation, measures put in place by authorities for health and welfare reasons, had inadvertently cut deeply into important community spiritual beliefs and caused profound grief.

Since the1970s, a conscious effort has been made by the Australian government to move away from the old "dependency" methodology in delivering aboriginal community health and welfare services. The paternalistic approach, marked by the notion that "authorities" know best and aboriginals need to be treated like dependent children, has proven unsatisfactory. The "lost generation" story is perhaps the best commonly known example of this. Paternalism is now being replaced by a new vision that emphasises self determination and self management ([9]). There is no reason to expect that animal control should be approached any differently.

When dealing with intimate social matters like dog control, perhaps we need to remember (as explained in the cited text), that Hugh Mackay's values are not necessarily the same for different nations. It is difficult to justify the imposition of western cultural beliefs about animal care ethics and ownership obligations on other people who traditionally have seen things differently. So doing might risk damaging the social belief structure that binds these communities together.

What are we actually on about?

Before progressing any further with this discussion, we need to pause a little to reflect on what it is that we are really talking about here. The title of this paper is: `Stray Dog Management for Island Nations and Other Countries in the Australasia /Oceania Region.` But...

1. Are we talking about *stray dog management* … or is it, *the management of straying dogs*?
2. Are we talking about stray dog *management*… or is it, stray dog *welfare*?
3. Are we talking about *urban*… or is it… *rural* stray dogs… or both together?
4. Are we talking about *indigenous* culture or *European* … or both together?

Perhaps some of us are at cross-purposes before we even start.

Strategic approach

The basic dog control package that seems to be delivering for Australian urban communities includes the following components operating under an overarching process of good public awareness with an active regulatory presence in the field:

1. 2 dogs per household maximum
2. Leashed when exercised in public places
3. Fenced in while at home
4. All tagged, registered /recorded
5. Noise management (excessive barking)
6. Litter management (dog faeces)

The Australian communities that are enjoying better standards of UAM, don't have stray dog problems any more. But then we are 20 years down this particular track now and there was a stage (about five years after the UAM AG started in 1992) when we nearly gave up because our advances were so few and any progress was proving so hard to win. On looking back there is little doubt that we would have been much better served had we started out with the kind of strategic approach described here below. Benefit of hindsight.

As a matter of pragmatic reality (and as has been said already) it is necessary to accept, from the start, that stray dog control is always a difficult undertaking and it is long term condition. This reality never seems to fail to be a surprise for those who set out to try to do it. If stray dog control needs doing, then of course it should be done… but, before all else, <u>no matter what,</u>… stray dog control programs <u>must</u> be planned strategically – for the long term – and from the beginning.

Strategic planning elements for stray dog management should at least consider the following framework:

- **Project title**: Define the task…. consider whether or not the project title is actually an appropriate description of what is intended (needed) – if not, then redefine the task. Be sure the title refers to the scope of the undertaking ie. identify (define/describe) the localities / districts / regions being targeted

- **Define key terms**: start with these two components first
    1. Define "stray dog" in the context of this endeavour
    2. Define "control /management" in this context also
    3. Other

- **List dog ownership assets** – describe what community dog ownership benefits can be identified and evaluate (give priority to) each of these attributes

- **List dog ownership liabilities** – what community dog ownership problems can be identified and evaluate these attributes also

- **Motherhood statement**: Summarise the balance of ownership assets (social capital) and liabilities (social detriment) associated with dog ownership in these Pacific Island nations as things now stand

- **Summary of benefits**: What goals are expected to be achieved from this "stray dog" "control" program in context of the definitions agreed to above - give a relative value (prioritise) the stray dog control program benefits that have been identified

- **Methodology**: Describe clearly what specific (regional/ local) methods of approach are proposed for the program. These might include some of the following eg.:

    1. Make contact with the local authority in the community in question – might be head man or tribal elders or Mayor / elected councillors
    2. Ascertain that this authority is supportive of a stray dog control program
    3. Explain exactly what measures are being proposed and explain how they are justified
    4. Reassess options and priorities on the basis of feedback from this initial community leadership contact
    5. Firm up a statement of tasks & goals
    6. Complete a community survey (if the local authority deems that appropriate) to "fine tune" the "local" assets and liabilities equation and to see if the remedial measures suggested are in keeping with this
    7. Review methods (treatment options) available

> Author's note: I think it is true to say that the more simple the program, the easier it is to explain and the less expensive it is to run. The fewer the ifs, buts and maybes, the better. Modest but gettable goals are better than those more grand and less attainable. Smaller, more affordable steps will still get you there so long as the direction is right.

> ➢ Consider some form of tagging to differentiate owned from stray …and what with?… eg conventional collars & tags, large numbered coloured cattle ear tags on a neck chain, microchips?
>
> ➢ *Consider* limiting dog numbers per household eg 2 dogs per residence perhaps
>
> ➢ *Consider* options for culling "unowned/stray" dogs eg. shooting, clubbing, euthanasing, eating etc
>
> ➢ *Consider* perhaps issuing a limited number (say one or two) registration tags to the head of each residence ie. create a permanent residential allocation system - allow replacement dogs to wear the same tags
>
> ➢ *Consider* creating a reliable dog /owner registers eg by village or locality or region – how will this be done & who will be authorised to do it
>
> ➢ *Consider* preventing roaming eg by fence and leash – This may be a fundamental stumbling block in some communities and require much discussion by the community. "Straying" may actually be acceptable for some communities as long as the dogs do not cause a nuisance.
>
> ➢ *Consider* an active selection program for breeding placid, minimal impact dogs?
>
> ➢ *Consider* setting target levels of animal health care eg rabies / parasitism etc
>
> ➢ *Consider* arranging an annual dog head count (perhaps at the community level) with a reporting method giving an overview of compliance as well as a population data dissection for key indicators eg age, sex, health, size etc.
>
> ➢ *Consider* the employment of trained and qualified regulators and educators – what is needed – what will the community accept and where should they be placed (locally, regionally, capital city?)– what authority might be encouraged for "senior" members in the community itself?
>
> ➢ *Consider* establishing a health and amenity reporting system eg attack and disease reporting
>
> ➢ *Consider* undertaking measures intended to maintain desired dog population eg. desexing and/or breeding techniques
>
> ➢ *Consider ... OTHER OPTIONS....*

8. Tighten up this "option list" into protocols for regulation, self regulation and education
9. Establish a starting point for the project by recording basic relevant dog population parameters eg numbers, longevity, roles, gender, types/breeds, state of health etc
10. Describe how progress towards achieving the benefit goals can be measured/quantified and then benchmarked between regions, localities and separate communities
11. Define the time frames that are considered acceptable in reaching agreed outcome stages
12. Other …

- **Identify resources**:
  - What finance, material, knowledge, expertise etc is available?
  - What program management training is available and where from
  - What will be necessary to execute (and continuously maintain) the program planned (above)?
  - What parts of the program will have to be modified or cut as a consequence?
  - Where they will be sourced?
  - Where can they be shared in the overall (regional vs. district or local) delivery process?

- **Review**: Having looked at resources available, go back to the top and reassess each stage in terms of its realistic credibility. Bear in mind that this strategy should aim to become locally "owned" and self sufficient so that self determination is not unacceptably compromised by outside interference.

Recap

Stray dog management is actually not about *stray* dogs at all. It is about *general* dog management and *general* community management. Stray dog problems are a symptom of inadequate *overall* dog management. To effectively address stray dog problems it is necessary to better manage the general dog populations from which they come. This centrally involves better managing the attitudes of dog owners and the community in general. "Symptom" remedies will always lack durability simply because they are just that - symptomatic.

Any stray dog control project in any community will have its best chance of success if each of the following steps have been given proper consideration:

1. Official (local authority) assessment that there *is sufficient justification* for the program in the first instance

2. Agreement by both community *and* local authority that the proposed control *measures have been understood* and are accepted by all and sundry as both necessary *and* sufficient to do the job

3. Assessment that sufficient resources *are* available to sustain the program *for the long term*

4. Guarantee that due care *has been taken* to minimise negative cultural impacts and avoid creating dependence

5. Assurance that effective measures are in place *to properly benchmark* those population characteristics that best reflect progress towards the desired outcomes

6. Assurance that pathways towards best practices *are also in place* by allowing for these benchmarks to be shared and compared and analysed on a regular and permanent basis

7. Appreciation that the program has *real prospects* of being community self managed and locally owned as far as possible

That's the way of it … and that's the shortcut. Any delegates who fails to think about this subject for themselves and in the context of their own circumstance, knowledge and experience, will be a disappointment.

Workshop format

Provided things go reasonably to plan, this workshop will attempt to produce the outcomes necessary to create a generic "template" for dog control.

It should tack into each generic theme a full range of variables to accommodate differing needs in different situations

The idea is that this "template" might then be used as a guide in the development of individual tailor made programs to suit separate (regional) situation and needs.

About the author

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Dick is a veterinarian who practices in Townsville, North Queensland. He graduated from UQ in '73 and has been heavily involved with the Urban Animal Management (UAM) movement in Australia for much of the time since then. His MSc (JCU) was on the subject of urban animal management and his membership of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists is as part of the Animal Behaviour Chapter of that organisation.

Dick was awarded the Gilruth Prize by the Australian Veterinary Association and the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2004 for service to the veterinary profession and the community, largely to do with his work with the UAM Advisory Group of the Australian Veterinary Association.

He is willing to share his ideas with delegates at this 11th Commonwealth Veterinary Association's Regional Workshop. Time constraints have precluded this paper from being formally considered for endorsement by the UAM AG itself.

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- The UAM website can be found at www.ava.com.au/uam
- Contact with the UAM Advisory Group by email at uam@ava.com.au
- *People and Pets* is the quarterly newsletter of the UAM AG – subscription is free

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