

Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2027-2029

Stage 1: Community engagement summary

Why we engaged:

The Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) helps Council support responsible pet ownership, improve compliance and respond to emerging animal management issues. It is a requirement under the Domestic Animal Management Act 1994.

With the current DAMP nearing the end of its planning cycle, we are reviewing it to reflect changes in community expectations, legislation, and animal ownership patterns. The new DAMP will ensure Council's approach remains evidence-based, compliant and responsive to emerging trends.

When we engaged:

Community and stakeholders were invited to share their experiences and insights over seven weeks, from **10 March to 30 April 2026**.

How we engaged:

We promoted the opportunity through:

- A QR code linking to the survey was included in 32,000 animal registration letters
- Facebook and Instagram, with a combined 17,144 views
- Articles included in three editions of the Yarra Ranges Local e-newsletter, received by over 11,000 emails
- Posters in key community locations, such as dog parks
- Postcards distributed to veterinary clinics and other animal-related businesses
- Officer attendance at three community events/festivals

How people got involved:

We heard from the community through:

- 1,295 people visiting the Shaping Yarra Ranges project page
- 548 people completing the survey
- One training industry focus group, with representatives from three organisations
- One community online discussion session
- Three drop-in sessions at Community Links

What you told us:

Pets matter

Pets play an important role in people's lives across the Yarra Ranges. They provide companionship, improve wellbeing and help people connect with others.

- 75% of people said pets help them connect with more people
- 50% said they have more to do with their neighbours because of their pets.

All about dogs

Top issues regularly witnessed by respondents

- Dog litter left in public places
- Excessive barking
- Dogs off-lead in on-lead areas
- Dog aggression and attacks

Issues nominated as priorities for Council

- Reducing dog litter
- Addressing barking
- Improving compliance with leash rules
- Preventing attacks on people, pets and wildlife

Themes from open responses and focus group

- Many people shared concerns about poor owner behaviour and dogs not being properly controlled.
- Dog parks and off-leash areas are valued, but concerns were raised about dog and owner behaviour and safety, poor fencing and design, and lack of owner supervision.
- Feedback from trainers specifically highlighted increasing behavioural issues in dogs, particularly since COVID-19, alongside gaps in owner knowledge, expectations of dog behaviour and the need for more consistent, ongoing training.

All about cats

Top issues regularly witnessed by respondents

- Cats entering private properties
- Stray cats
- Impacts on wildlife

Issues nominated as priorities for Council

- Affordable desexing programs
- Stronger cat containment education and enforcement

- Reducing stray cat numbers
- Trapping and rehoming stray cats

Themes from open responses

- Many people shared concerns about the impact of cats on local wildlife.
- A gap in awareness exists, particularly among non-cat owners, regarding Council's 24/7 cat curfew, which mandates that cats must be contained within their owner's property boundary at all times.

Additional insights from open responses

- Concerns were raised about the cost and transparency of registration fees, particularly among cat owners who keep their cats indoors. There is a lack of understanding about how these fees are used to benefit animals and the broader community.
- Enforcement was a recurrent topic, with mixed views expressed. Some respondents called for stricter enforcement and penalties for non-compliance, while others preferred a more relaxed approach that allows for personal responsibility.

What happens next?

Community feedback, together with service data, industry best practice and legislative requirements, will be considered to inform the development of the draft DAMP.