



## CHARTER FOR RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP

Dogs are an important part of our society and many value their companionship. As with any animal there are standards of care and welfare that need to be observed. The views and concerns of neighbours and other members of the community also need to be considered.

Responsible dog ownership means accepting full responsibility for our dogs in terms of their needs and the standards for dog management that are expected by our community.

The *Charter for Responsible Dog Ownership* has been developed to help dog owners achieve responsible dog ownership goals. It is consistent with the requirements of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, the *Domestic Animals Act 2000*, the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs in the ACT and the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*. Please note that some provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act* do not come into effect until 21 June 2001, and may only affect pets born after this time.

The objectives of the Charter are to improve animal welfare and reduce the instance of community nuisance attributed to dogs. This will be achieved by providing information and guidance to dog owners and other members of the community. The Charter includes the responsibilities of dog owners to their dogs and to the community, and includes legal obligations and courses of action that may be taken where nuisance is alleged.

In this Charter, unless the sex of the dog has been specified, the term “dog” refers to both the male and female of the species.

### DOGS IN OUR SOCIETY

The importance of the human-animal bond is undeniable. Studies show that companion animals are beneficial to

humans psychologically, socially and even physically.

The human-dog bond stretches back into pre-history. Though the dog was probably domesticated for utilitarian purposes (hunting and protection) it didn't take long before humans began to value these animals for their companionship.

It is difficult to imagine human life without dogs. We take them for granted. They inhabit our landscape, permeate our cultural images, wander through our stories, take part in our conversations and even invade our language. Our lives would be very different if they weren't there. Dogs have evolved with us.

Whilst dogs are important companion animals in our society, there are also costs associated with them. These costs do not just relate to the monetary expenses of providing appropriate care, but may include neighbourhood inconvenience, nuisance, predation on both native wildlife and livestock, as well as animal welfare concerns relating to oversupply, homelessness and mistreatment.

The costs to the community can be minimised through widespread acceptance and practice of the principles of **RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP** as set out in this Charter.

### RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNERSHIP

When dogs are cared for in line with the principles of Responsible Dog Ownership, benefits are enjoyed by:

- dogs;
- owners;
- neighbours;
- the general community;
- wildlife;
- livestock;
- animal welfare groups; and
- the Government.

A dog owner is accountable and liable for the on-going care, actions and welfare of any dog under the owner's management and control.

**Before you get a dog think carefully about what is involved in dog ownership.**

The responsibilities of owning a dog are significant and long-term. ***Dog ownership should be considered a privilege and not a right.*** Acquiring a dog should not be the result of a spontaneous or unplanned action. It should be the result of careful planning and a clear understanding of all the legal and other responsibilities involved. Therefore the decision to own a dog should be an informed one, with acknowledgment by prospective owners of the commitment and responsibility involved in caring for dogs.

People thinking about obtaining a dog should carefully consider whether their lifestyle and finances are compatible with a considerable commitment of time, effort and money over a long period. Potential dog owners should consider the type of dog best suited to them.

A basic knowledge and understanding of the dog's origins, natural behaviours and habits together with the owner's ability to satisfy those needs are very important aspects of planning for the acquisition of a dog. Dogs derived from, and including, working breeds, large breeds and breeds with a history of aggression need an extra measure of responsibility to ensure they adapt correctly to suburban life and that their ongoing care is not going to be too demanding. Breeds with long or dense coats require more time and effort spent on their grooming requirements.

Breeds of dogs and individuals within breeds vary in their reactivity, aggressiveness and trainability. Advice should be sought on the type of dog suitable for your situation and on the amount of training and exercise required.

The more time and effort you are willing to invest in training and interacting with your dog the greater the reward you will receive as a responsible owner. Lack of training and socialisation frequently result in a destructive negative behaviour that makes

the dog less desirable as a pet. This is a common reason for many thousands of animals being euthanased each year.

### **Be Aware of your Responsibilities**

The principles of responsible dog ownership include:

- planning for a dog suitable to the owner's budget, lifestyle and property size;
- understanding and meeting the needs and habits of that particular dog and providing a lifestyle which satisfies and enriches the dog's life;
- undertaking correct husbandry practices relating to diet, exercise and grooming;
- Training and socialisation of the dog to ensure the development of appropriate behaviour;
- following a preventative health care program;
- ensuring veterinary care is provided when necessary; and
- desexing of male and female dogs if you do not have a permit to keep a dog entire.

A dog owner or carer must comply with the regulatory requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* from 21 June 2001 by ensuring that the dog is:

- registered by 8 weeks of age;
- wearing its registration tag;
- identified. This need only be through a registration tag, but other forms of identification are encouraged;
- desexed unless the owner has a permit to keep the dog entire;
- confined to the owner's or carer's property when not accompanied by the owner or carer;
- on leash when walking in public places except in designated off-leash areas where dogs must be under effective control at all times; and
- kept out of prohibited areas.

**It is an offence under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* for a dog owner to fail to comply with the above provisions.**

A dog owner or carer must also comply with the requirements of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, and ensure that the dog is provided with appropriate and adequate:

- food;
- water;
- shelter;
- exercise;
- companionship; and
- health treatment including annual vaccinations from a veterinary surgeon.

Guidance regarding this can be found in the *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs in the ACT*.

It is illegal under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* to abandon or release a dog.

Dogs may be re-homed through family members, friends, neighbours, public advertisements, shelters such as the RSPCA and the ACT Pound. If efforts to have a dog re-homed have been unsuccessful an owner may decide to have the dog euthanased. Euthanasia may only be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

## REPRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Thousands of dogs euthanased each year by the RSPCA and local veterinarians due to irresponsible breeding.

Unless specifically intended for breeding or exhibition, all dogs must be desexed by the time they are six months old, unless you have applied for, and obtained, a permit to keep the dog entire.

The *Domestic Animals Act 2000* imposes penalties for allowing an entire female dog on heat in a public place. An exception to this requirement is if you own an entire female dog which is being exhibited at a dog show.

Desexing your dog will result in:

- fewer unwanted puppies;
- fewer dogs being euthanased and a lighter load on animal welfare organisations;
- the likelihood that your dog will live longer; and
- reduction in registration fees.

In addition, desexing your dog may result in a reduction in the dog's desire to roam and the prevention of common, serious canine diseases, such as breast cancer, uterine infections and prostate disease.

It is commonly thought that dogs should be allowed to mate and female dogs should have a litter. However, these activities will not add to a dog's personality or quality of life.

The *Domestic Animals Act 2000* imposes a legal responsibility for dog owners to have all their dogs desexed unless a permit has been granted by the Registrar of Domestic Animals to keep the dog entire.

## REGISTRATION

Under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* all dogs in the ACT must be registered at eight weeks of age.

There are two exceptions to this. If the dog is being kept for less than four weeks or the keeper of the dog has been a resident of the Territory for less than four weeks registration is not required at 8 weeks. Registration must be renewed on 30 September of every year.

An annual registration tag will be issued upon renewing a dog's registration. The registration tag must be attached to the dog's collar.

Dog owners will receive a significant reduction in registration fees if:

- their dogs have been desexed; or
- their dogs have been obedience trained.

Keepers must notify Domestic Animal Services within 14 days of any changes to the details concerning the registered dog.

Changes include:

- the address of the keeper or where the dog is housed;
- the actual keeper of the dog;
- whether the dog is now desexed; or
- whether the dog has died.

The contact for dog registration and keeper's licensing is Domestic Animal Services.

People who want to keep four or more dogs must apply to the Registrar of Domestic Animals for a Home Kennelling licence

and comply with all conditions required in the *Domestic Animals Act 2000* pertaining to the keeping and kennelling of multiple dogs.

## **IDENTIFICATION**

The *Domestic Animals Act 2000* makes provision for the compulsory identification of dogs. This can be achieved through a registration tag only, but other forms of identification are encouraged.

It is also advisable to include the owner's contact details. This will allow the person who finds the dog the option of contacting the dog's owner so that the dog can be returned without needing it be taken to the ACT Pound or the RSPCA.

Microchipping is a new form of identification. This is a minor procedure that involves inserting a microchip, about the size of a grain of rice, by needle into the back of the dog's neck. Microchipping will enable the dog to be identified if found straying or if it is lost, stolen or injured so that it can be quickly returned to its owner.

A dog owner must ensure that contact details are updated with both the microchip registry database and Domestic Animal Services every time there is a change residential address.

## **HOME KENNELING / KEEPING CONDITIONS**

Dogs must be provided with the following basic requirements:

- human contact for a reasonable length of time each day;
- adequate exercise;
- accommodation designed to suit the dog's age, anatomy and behavioural patterns;
- adequate protection from rain, wind, direct sunlight and extremes of temperature;
- bedding and sleeping quarters; and
- protection from other animals and humans if contact with them is likely to cause distress or injury.

In addition to the above, dogs with indoor access should be provided with adequate and appropriate:

- ventilation; and
- lighting.

Tethering dogs for long periods or on a regular basis is not recommended.

Dogs should be provided with a raised sleeping area that insulates them from cold surfaces. Examples that may be considered are trampoline beds or wooden pallets. Bedding materials such as a blanket or a sheepskin should be provided. The bedding material should be kept clean and dry.

Winter in the ACT can be quite severe for dogs kept outdoors. Extra consideration must be given to the bedding materials and warmth of the kennel with regard to the condition of the dog, including age, length of coat and health.

Kennels must be selected to suit the size of the dog. Allowance must be made for the dog to stand, turn around and lie down with limbs extended. The kennel must provide adequate protection from rain, wind, direct sunlight, and extremes of temperature. Uninsulated metal shelters or kennels are not sufficient for most breeds of dogs during ACT winters.

When outdoor enclosures are used for more than 3 or 4 hours at a time, the enclosures should include a sleeping area and a run.

Floors of enclosures should be made of an impervious material to assist cleaning and drainage.

Grassed or landscaped sections may form part of large outdoor runs but must be adequately maintained to reduce the risk of pests, parasites and disease.

When dogs are confined in outdoor enclosures they must be exercised, preferably for at least one hour daily. Dogs must also be provided with human contact for a reasonable length of time each day.

## **NUTRITION**

Dogs require a healthy, well-balanced diet. Dogs benefit from a range of foods that should contain all the proteins, fats, carbohydrates, fibres, vitamins and minerals to maintain good health. This may be provided by complete commercial dog food. Quantities and type of food to be fed vary according to the age, size, stage of growth and activity of the dog. Dogs living outside may require additional food in winter. Overfeeding of dogs can cause obesity, and create serious health problems.

A sufficient supply of fresh, clean drinking water must be available at all times.

Sick dogs should be fed in accordance with veterinary advice.

## **HYGIENE**

Food and water bowls should be maintained in a clean condition.

Bedding should be changed at least weekly, or more often if soiled or damp.

The dog's environment should be maintained in a clean state. Faeces should be removed daily.

Cleaning and disinfecting agents for enclosures and kennels should be chosen on the basis of their suitability, safety and effectiveness.

## **REMOVAL OF FAECES**

When a dog defecates in a public place, the keeper or carer of the dog is responsible for the immediate removal and hygienic disposal of the faeces.

Under the *Domestic Animals Act 2000*, keepers or carers are required to carry such items as necessary to facilitate the removal of the faeces. On the spot fines may be issued for failure to carry such an item.

## **HEALTH CARE**

It is the responsibility of the owner to monitor a dog's health and to seek veterinary advice where appropriate.

Some basic preventative measures are:

- a program of vaccination against canine distemper, parvovirus, infectious hepatitis and kennel/canine cough carried out annually. (Puppy vaccinations should begin at six to eight weeks of age);
- an effective gastrointestinal worm control program with appropriate medication. (Puppies should be treated each fortnight up to 12 weeks of age. Dogs older than 12 weeks should be treated at three monthly intervals);
- heartworm prevention;
- control of external parasites, such as fleas, lice and ear mites; and
- dogs should not be fed raw offal from cattle, kangaroo or sheep due to the risk of hydatids.

## **GROOMING**

Regular grooming should be carried out to maintain a healthy coat and skin and assist in detection of external parasites and other health problems.

## **EXERCISE AND BASIC TRAINING**

Dogs must have the opportunity for adequate exercise to promote good health, to provide mental stimulation by change of environment, to maintain muscle tone and fitness and to give them contact with humans. Both on-leash and off-leash exercise areas are provided in the ACT and owners should familiarise themselves with these areas in their neighbourhoods.

Obedience training is a major factor in sound dog management and when properly carried out, results in an improved relationship between the dogs, their owners and the community. Dog behaviour and safety is the responsibility of the owner. Obedience training assists owners in managing behaviour of dogs. Positive reinforcement is the recommended method of training.

## TRANSPORT

Dogs must always be transported in a manner that avoids injury, escape or undue stress. Crates or containers must be of an appropriate size for the dog, have adequate ventilation and protection from the elements and temperature extremes. Dogs being transported long distances should have access to fresh drinking water and food.

Very old and very young dogs are especially sensitive to changes in temperature and may require provision of heating or cooling. In warm weather no dog should be left in a parked car or in a container that is exposed to direct sunlight.

When being transported by private motor vehicle, it is suitable for dogs to travel in the car with the owner or carer, or in an enclosed trailer that is insulated and properly ventilated. Dogs travelling in the car may be restrained by a safety harness to minimise injury in the event of an accident. Ventilation must be sufficient to avoid dampness and draughts, and minimise noxious odours. Dogs are not to be exposed to the vehicle's exhaust emissions. Faeces, urine and vomit should be removed promptly. Water should also be provided at regular intervals.

Under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, it is an offence not to properly secure / contain dogs on / in vehicles.

When travelling on the back of utility vehicles and trucks, dogs must be in a secured container or on a lead short enough to prevent their hind legs reaching either side of the truckbed. The length should not allow the dog to climb onto the cabin.

If a lead is used, a swivel at both ends of the lead prevents the lead from becoming tangled. While in a car, they must be contained in a way to prevent them from falling or jumping out.

Dogs should not be carried on the back of utility vehicles or trucks during weather extremes unless there is provision for protection from the elements.

## ADDRESSING A DOG NUISANCE IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

If a dog is causing an unreasonable nuisance for you, there are several things that you can do. Initially, it is suggested that you discuss your concerns with the owner of the dog.

This can often produce a positive response as in many instances the dog owner may not be aware of a problem with their dog and they are then able to rectify the issue.

Neighbours may consider certain dog behaviours a nuisance. Constant barking often leads to complaints to the Registrar. Barking is a natural way for dogs to communicate. A dog barking may indicate boredom, illness or distress. A dog barking may indicate an owner's neglect or mistreatment. It is important that this issue is identified as quickly as possible for the welfare of the dog.

If the nuisance continues or approaches to the owner of the dog have not resulted in the cessation or reduction of the nuisance you may write to the Registrar of Domestic Animals outlining the nature of the nuisance. After investigation, should the Registrar have reasonable grounds for believing that a nuisance exists then an abatement notice maybe issued to the keeper of the dog believed to be causing the nuisance.

Failure to comply with an abatement notice may result in prosecution.

Roaming or stray dogs should be notified to Domestic Animal Services who will respond and remove the dogs.

## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

There are many sources of information and help for dog owners and aspiring dog owners. The following list may be a useful guide:

- ACT Canine Association Incorporated and its affiliated Breed and Group Clubs
- Obedience Clubs including the ACT Companion Dog Club, Belconnen Dog Obedience Club; German Shepherd Dog Club of the ACT and

Tuggeranong Dog Obedience  
Club.

- Petcare Information and Advisory Service
- Pet shops;
- Registered breeders;
- RSPCA (ACT) Incorporated; and
- Veterinarians.

To find out more, you can visit the  
Environment ACT website:  
[www.act.gov.au/enviro/pets](http://www.act.gov.au/enviro/pets)  
You can also call  
Domestic Animal Services: (02) 6207 2424  
Or the  
Environment ACT Helpline: (02) 6207 9777