

Dogs in Society Position Paper

The responsible care of dogs

Background

ACAC believes that owners should be responsible for their dogs' general welfare and behaviour, both in public environments and at home. ACAC is committed to establishing an environment where dogs are carefully selected, properly cared for, supervised around children, socialised and trained.

Dog owners have a responsibility to ensure that the rights and interests of everyone in the local community are respected. ACAC supports broad community education programs that encourage owners to look after the physical and social requirements of their companion animals.

ACAC also supports fair and enforceable companion animal laws that encourage compliance and impose penalties on irresponsible owners.

Physical care

ACAC believes that owners are obliged to provide adequate food, water and shelter for their dogs, appropriate for their age and breed, and the environmental conditions. Dogs also require regular exercise and companionship, and a comfortable, safe place to sleep.. Dog owners are also responsible for their dogs' safety whilst being transported in vehicles.

Veterinary care

Dog owners should take measures to control parasites on their pets, and seek veterinary treatment for conditions that cause pain or distress to the animal. ACAC recommends that all dogs should have an annual veterinary examination.

Identification

Owners of dogs should be encouraged to ensure their pets are identified at all times. Advantages of widespread identification include the ability to rapidly reunite companion animals with owners and the ability to trace the owners of 'nuisance' animals.

The most workable identification system should encourage a high degree of compliance by being simple, inexpensive and flexible. A collar and ID tag fulfil these objectives. Other methods such as tattoo and microchip identification could be an option where cost and technological development and a centralised database make them feasible.

Training and Socialisation

ACAC supports programs that educate the general public about dog training and socialisation techniques. A well-trained dog is not only a pleasure to be around, but is less likely to be a nuisance in the local community. Dogs are pack animals by nature, and need consistent discipline in order to feel secure and to understand their place in the "family pack". Dogs are inherently motivated to please the pack leader. Learning and responding to commands, reinforces on the dog that the human owner is the pack leader and is to be obeyed.

A dog that has been taught basic obedience is more likely to become a well adjusted and well behaved family pet. Puppies should be taught basic manners and rules of the household as soon as they arrive in a new home. Importantly, young dogs should be taught to socialise in a positive manner with other dogs and humans.

Desexing

Dog owners who do not intend to breed from their dog should consider having their dog permanently sterilised subject to veterinarian's advice. Sterilisation may also be performed for health reasons. Those pet owners who choose not to have their dog desexed must, as a consequence of this decision, fulfil extra obligations to ensure that their dogs do not produce unwanted offspring.

Control in public places

ACAC believes that dogs should be kept on a leash and under effective control whilst in public places, except in designated "off" leash areas.

Confining Dogs

ACAC believes that dogs should not be allowed to wander the streets or other public places without supervision, and when at home should be kept confined within their owner's property by a dog-proof fence. Dog owners should also ensure that the right of way access to their front door is maintained.

Barking Dogs

ACAC believes that owners should take measures to prevent excessive barking by their dogs. Barking dogs are a nuisance and are a major source of discontent between neighbours. Constant barking usually means the dog is bored, lonely or frustrated. Plenty of exercise and companionship, a comfortable, safe and enclosed place to sleep, and the use of behavioural enrichment aids will alleviate barking in many cases.

Obedience training can help stop dogs barking, but if previous attempts have failed, there are established services available that will provide professional advice on preventing behavioural problems such as barking.

Dog faeces

ACAC believes that owners should always clean up after their dogs, This can be easily done by using a scooper, plastic or paper bag to remove and dispose of dog faeces. Many Local Governments provide these facilities in local parks.

Dog owner education

ACAC supports a proactive responsible dog ownership strategy that includes education campaigns directed at dog owners, children and the wider community. The focus of these education campaigns should be on:

- developing increased awareness of dog management and care;
- community understanding of dog behaviour;
- teaching safe and sensible human behaviour in the presence of dogs;
- owner responsibility, and
- compliance with legislation and regulations concerning dog ownership.

Information about different aspects of responsible dog ownership is available to the public from many sources, including: State and Local Government authorities, veterinary clinics, dog obedience clubs, dog breed societies, animal welfare groups, professional animal trainers, the

Petcare Information and Advisory Service, the Delta Society, the pet food industry and veterinary product manufacturers.