

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

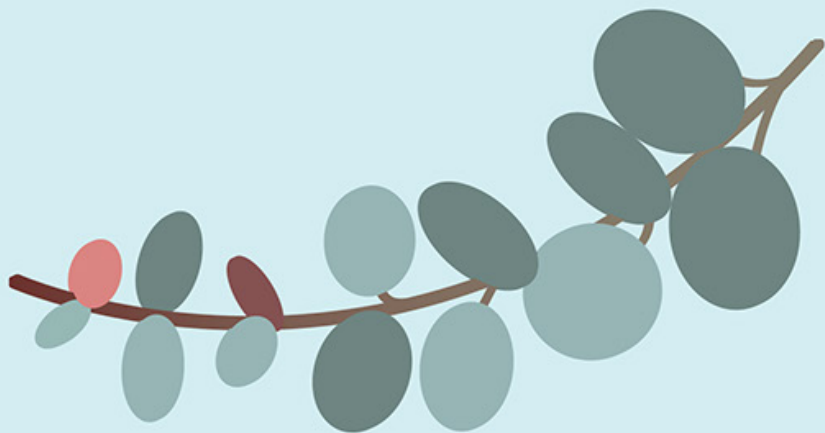
Draft Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026 - 2029



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.



Purpose of this document

This Plan is a key strategic document that outlines how people, dogs, and cats can live together safely and happily.



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Introduction

Under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, all Victorian councils are required to develop a new Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) every four years.

The DAMP outlines how Council promotes responsible pet ownership and manages domestic animals within the community. It sets clear actions and details the services, programs, and policies established by Council to administer the Act and address issues relating to dogs and cats.

As South Gippsland continues to grow, so too does its pet population. The DAMP reflects Council's ongoing commitment to adapting animal management practices to meet the needs of a diverse and expanding community.

Council recognises the important role pets play in health and wellbeing. The DAMP seeks to celebrate pet ownership while ensuring a balanced approach that considers the needs of both pet owners and non-pet owners, and provides appropriate services and amenities for all.



Our region

South Gippsland encompasses 3,296 square kilometres including extensive coastal areas and the spectacular Wilsons Promontory National Park. South Gippsland's population is 31,022.

South Gippsland Shire Council is located in coastal south-eastern Victoria, approximately 100 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. It is comprised of three wards: Tarwin Valley, Strzelecki and Coastal Promontory.

The original inhabitants of the South Gippsland area were the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people.

Much of the rural area is used for forestry and agriculture; with dairy, beef, sheep, and snow pea farming being the main agricultural pursuits. Fishing, viticulture and tourism are also important industries that contribute economic diversity to the region.



Our animals

South Gippsland is home to 4,814 registered dogs, 1,199 registered cats and six Domestic Animal Businesses.

In 2024/25, Council responded to 1,446 animal-related requests concerning dogs and cats. While these figures highlight the significant level of pet ownership in the municipality, the actual numbers are expected to be considerably higher, as not all animals are currently registered.

This underlines the importance of ongoing education around registration, which not only helps Council reunite lost pets with their owners quickly but also supports effective planning for animal management services across the community.

2024 Snapshot

| | |
|---|-----|
| Registered declared dogs (dangerous, menacing or restricted breeds) | 4 |
| Dog attack or rush | 66 |
| Number of registered Domestic Animal Businesses | 6 |
| Keeping of animals/excess animal permit issued | 36 |
| Number of infringements (Animal infringements & cautions included) | 73 |
| Number of successful prosecutions | 1 |
| Cat cage requests | 109 |
| Dogs impounded | 125 |
| Dogs euthanised | 7 |
| Cats impounded | 275 |
| Cats euthanised | 92 |
| Returned to owner | 118 |
| Re-homed | 28 |
| Surrendered | 91 |



Animal Management Services and Programs

South Gippsland Shire Council currently provides the following domestic animal management services and programs to residents:

- Ongoing maintenance of a dog and cat registration database.
- Response to customer complaints relating to animal management issues such as barking dogs, dog attacks, dogs at large and nuisance cats.
- Operation of Council's pound and animal shelter.
- Provision of an after-hours emergency service.
- Provision of dog litter bag dispensers at 15 locations throughout the Shire.
- Cat trapping program – supply of cat traps for trapping of feral and/or nuisance cats.
- Collection of stray or wandering dogs and cats, including surrendered animals.
- Provision of advice and information to residents relating to animal management issues.
- Promotion of responsible pet ownership through distribution of education material for all new animal registrations.
- Regular inspections of Domestic Animal Businesses to ensure compliance with the Act and relevant Codes of Practice.
- Regular inspections of restricted breeds, dangerous and menacing dog premises to ensure compliance with the Act and relevant Codes of Practice.
- Provision of animal management training opportunities for Community Safety officers.
- Quick responsiveness to dog attack complaints.
- Follow-up of animal registration renewals and proactive new-registration campaigns.
- Enforcement of non-compliance with Council's Local Law, the Act and relevant Codes of Practice.
- Investigation of animal welfare matters under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.
- Prosecution of offences under the Act and other regulations including Council's *General Local Law 2024*.

Community Engagement

Council undertook extensive engagement with community during development of the 2025–29 *Council Plan* and the 2024 *General Local Law*.

Insights from these engagements—along with survey results from the previous *Domestic Animal Management Plan* (DAMP)—have shaped the development of the actions featured in the DAMP.

The key issues that emerged reflect what we heard in previous consultations, confirming that community priorities have remained consistent since 2022. They also align with the experiences of Council officers in their day-to-day roles.

Here is a summary of what we heard:

2025-29 Council Plan Engagement (Shaping South Gippsland)

- 946 survey responses provided
- 1241 Council Plan suggestions

Requests related to animals were among the top 10 issues raised by community during the *Shaping South Gippsland* engagement. Residents highlighted the importance of balancing compliance and animal welfare with access to recreational spaces for pets.

Key community requests included:

- A stronger focus on animal re-homing initiatives.
- The creation of off-leash dog parks.
- Improved beach access for dogs.
- Better enforcement of signage related to dogs.
- Increased limits on the number of animals permitted.
- Strengthened local laws to address roaming cats and dogs.

Key animal concerns identified:

- Dogs being walked off-lead and not under effective control
- Dog aggression
- Impact on native wildlife
- Wandering animals
- Animals not being desexed
- Irresponsible breeding
- Dog waste
- Cost of living and access to affordable veterinary care
- Barking dogs
- Dogs harassing and attacking livestock



2024 Local Law Engagement

- 261 people surveyed

During the Local Law engagement, most participants (62 per cent) reported having no issues or concerns regarding animals or livestock.

Of the 34 per cent who did raise concerns and provided feedback, the majority focused on issues related to dogs—particularly the need for dedicated off-leash areas. Other commonly raised issues included limits on the number of dogs allowed and concerns about barking.

Cats were the next most mentioned, with participants expressing concern about cats being allowed to roam freely outside the home.

Guiding Principles and Actions



Domestic Animal Management Act

Under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, all Victorian councils are required to develop a new Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) every four years.

The Plan must promote responsible pet ownership and animal welfare, protection for the community and environment from nuisance caused by dogs and cats, and outline methods to evaluate whether Council's animal management services are effective.

Guiding Principles:

- Detail the training provided to Authorised Officers to ensure they are capable of administering and enforcing the Act.
- Promote and encourage responsible ownership of dogs and cats (including registration and identification of pets).
- Minimise the risk of dog attacks on people and animals.
- Address issues of overpopulation and high euthanasia rates.
- Minimise nuisance caused by dogs and cats.
- Identify dangerous, menacing, and restricted breed dogs, and ensure they are kept in compliance with the Act and Regulations.



Priority 1: Training of Authorised Officers

Council's animal management services are delivered by the Community Safety team.

This team is responsible for:

- enforcing animal-related laws
- registering pets
- managing stray and lost animals
- responding to nuisance and attack complaints
- promoting responsible pet ownership, and
- supporting re-homing and the care of impounded animals.

To carry out these duties safely and effectively, and inline with the requirements of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, Community Safety officers receive regular training in:

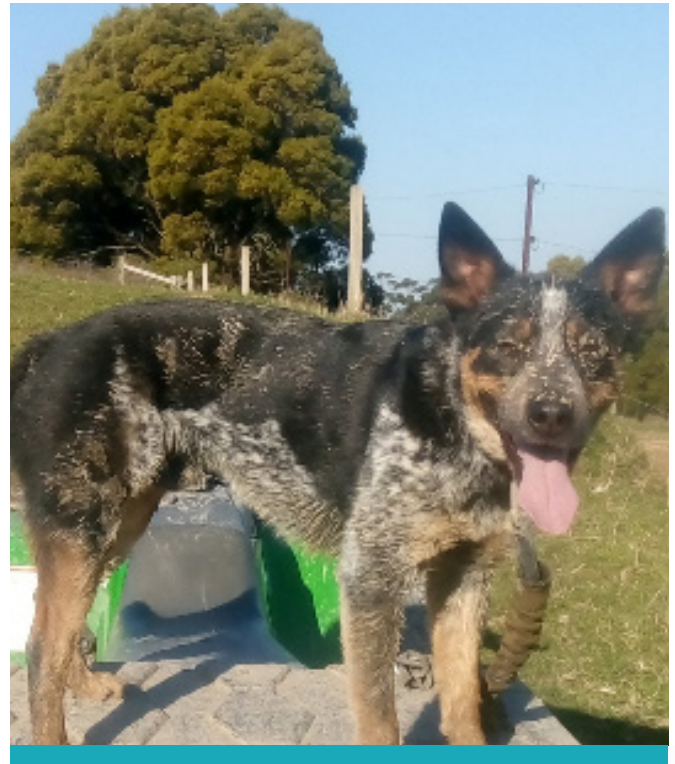
- animal handling—including managing aggressive animals
- animal welfare
- restricted breed identification
- first aid and
- communication.

The team collaborates with industry partners, government agencies, pet service providers and other key stakeholders to share knowledge, build relationships, and support community outcomes.

Ongoing professional development is a key priority, ensuring Officers remain skilled, up to date and supported in their roles.

All new Community Safety Officers are required to complete a thorough induction, which includes Council policies, processes and procedures.

Regular team training and refresher courses, and ongoing on-the-job training and coaching is provided. Personal Development Plans set the goals of each Officer and opportunities are identified based on need as well as career progression.



















Actions:

Current Situation:

All new Community Safety officers complete a comprehensive induction program covering Council's policies, processes, and procedures.

Ongoing professional development is supported through regular team training sessions, refresher courses, and continuous on-the-job training and coaching. Each officer also has a Personal Development Plan, which sets individual goals and identifies opportunities based on both organisational needs and career progression.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | Develop and maintain individual Personal Development Plans for each officer, including mandatory training in areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic animal and livestock handling - Animal behaviour, bite prevention, and restricted breed assessment - Situational awareness and complex conversations Provide additional training opportunities in areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigations and prosecutions - Mental health first aid - Further education and training - Microchipping implantation accreditation |  |  |  |  |
| 1.2 | Facilitate opportunities for officers to network with other municipalities, industry providers, and government agencies. |  |  |  |  |
| 1.3 | Ensure officers hold the appropriate authorisations and delegations to perform their duties. |  |  |  |  |
| 1.4 | Continually identify and implement further training opportunities to support the development of multi-skilled and highly qualified officers. |  |  |  |  |

Priority 2: Registration and Identification

Council promotes and encourages responsible dog and cat ownership through a range of communication and education initiatives.

Recognising the community's growing preference for online services and engagement through social media, Council has introduced online pet registration via the payments portal and launched a dedicated Facebook page for the South Gippsland Pound and Animal Shelter to support pet re-homing and strengthen community connections.

Responsible pet ownership includes:

- Animals being trained and exercised.
- Microchipping, desexing, and registration of pets.
- Compliance with signage and regulations.
- Awareness of the impacts pets can have in conservation areas.

The Community Safety team prioritises communication campaigns that promote these responsibilities, while also improving access to services and education.



Cr Hersey and Pickle

Fee Incentives

To further support responsible ownership, Council has introduced several new initiatives within its registration fees and charges schedule:

- Reduced fee for dogs under 12 months, aligning with veterinary advice on delayed desexing.
- Free initial registration for animals adopted from recognised rescue or rehoming organisations.
- Pay-on-time discounts for registration renewals.

Registration fees currently set for the 2025/2026 financial year are as follows:

| Category | Fee | Applicable Pension | |
|--|-------|--------------------|------|
| Full Fee | \$180 | Eligible pension | \$90 |
| Reduced Fee* | \$60 | Eligible pension | \$30 |
| Dog under 12 months | \$60 | Eligible pension | \$30 |
| Dog or cat purchased from recognised re-homing organisation | \$0 | | |
| Dog or cat transferred from another Victorian Council | \$0 | | |
| Guide Dog (seeing or hearing), Government Dog, Assistance Dog (criteria apply) | \$0 | | |
| Declared dog** | \$371 | | |
| State Government levy *** | \$9 | | |

* Reduced fee applies to desexed animals, animals registered with and to a current financial member of an applicable organisation, animals registered to a domestic animal business, dogs kept for farm working purposes and animals over 10 years of age.

** Declared Dangerous, Menacing or Restricted Breed. Pension discounts do not apply.

50% pro-rata applies from 11 October each year on all new proactive registrations, except declared dogs. Full fees will still apply to late renewals and unregistered impounded animals.

Applications for refund of registration fees, in full or part, will be considered within three months of registration or renewal.

***State Government levy is set by the State Government each year and will be applied to each registration.


































Actions:

Current Situation:

All dogs and cats receive a lifetime registration tag upon initial registration, which is replaced at no cost if lost. Registered animals are sent a renewal notice prior to the due date each year, with follow up text messages and a supporting media campaign.

Community Safety Officers undertake door-knocking activities to follow up non-renewal of registration and work with owners to achieve compliance before escalating to enforcement action.

Impounded animals must be microchipped and registered prior to be released back to owners. Community Safety Officers provide education on the benefits of having your animal microchipped and registered, so if found they can be returned home as quickly as possible.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|--|---|---|---|---|
| 2.1 | Develop an educational communications campaign in relation to responsible pet ownership, including the benefits of pet ownership, being active with your pet and what it means to have your dog under effective control. |  | | | |
| 2.2 | Continually update Council's website with relevant information and links to partner agencies and authorities. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.3 | Provide new owners who purchase animals through Council's animal shelter with an information pack. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.4 | Have a presence at markets throughout the year to promote responsible pet ownership. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.5 | Deliver a pet expo to celebrate responsible pet ownership, contingent on the successful development and approval of a business case. | | |  | |
| 2.6 | Develop an educational communications campaign to demonstrate the benefits of microchipping and registration. |  | | | |
| 2.7 | Offer discounted microchipping opportunities at markets and other events. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.8 | Explore options with veterinary partners and other industry partners to offer discounted microchipping opportunities. | |  | | |
| 2.9 | Continue to follow up un-renewed animal registrations, through education and compliance activities. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.10 | Develop a campaign to increase new registrations, through education and targeted door knocking activities. |  | | | |
| 2.11 | Seek grant funding opportunities to support discounted microchipping activities. |  |  |  |  |
| 2.12 | Investigate options for reduced registration fees or initiatives to support community compliance. |  |  |  |  |

Priority 3: Nuisance

Nuisance typically refers to barking dogs and wandering dogs and cats.

Under the Act, an animal nuisance exists if the keeping or behaviour of an animal causes a condition, state, or activity that constitutes:

- Damage to property owned by a person other than the keeper.
- Excessive disturbance to a person other than the keeper because of noise.
- Danger to the health of an animal or a person other than the keeper.

Council recognises that dogs will bark to some degree when alerting or during general play. However, we encourage responsible pet ownership by asking residents to manage their pets in a way that:

- Protects the health and welfare of the animal.
- Maximises the companionship benefits of pet ownership.
- Minimises potential nuisance or harm to others.



















*These two are the opposite of a nuisance.
They are demonstrating good kitty behaviour.*

Actions:

Current Situation:

Council continues to educate and promote responsible pet ownership, including the importance of containing pets to their owner's property and the benefits of desexing to reduce wandering and prevent unwanted litters. A cat-trapping program is provided to help reduce the number of feral cats within the municipality, while dog waste bag dispensers are available at 15 locations across South Gippsland to support community amenity. In addition, all nuisance complaints are investigated, with officers working closely with pet owners to achieve resolution.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.1 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to barking dogs. | | |  | |
| 3.2 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to cats trespassing and wandering at large. | |  | | |
| 3.3 | Continually explore new ways of managing barking dog complaints, through improved reporting, recording and management techniques with dog owners. |  |  |  |  |
| 3.4 | Advocate for additional support for councils to manage surrendered and unclaimed cats and dogs. |  |  |  |  |
| 3.5 | Seek funding opportunities to support Council's efforts in rehoming surrendered and unclaimed cats and dogs. |  |  |  |  |
| 3.6 | Introduce a dog on leash order across South Gippsland Shire and identify areas that would be suitable to exclude as off leash. | |  | | |
| 3.7 | Introduce a 24 hour cat containment order across South Gippsland Shire. | | |  | |

Priority 4: Dog Attacks

Council understands that dog rushes and attacks can be highly distressing and prioritises responding to all reports as a matter of urgency.

A dog rush refers to an incident involving a person, while an attack may involve people, dogs, livestock, or other small animals. All reports are thoroughly investigated, with possible outcomes ranging from infringements to prosecution or declarations, depending on the severity and circumstances.

All rushes and attacks, regardless of seriousness, should be reported to Council. This is important to ensure that community risk can be minimised.

Rushes and attacks can be reported to Council at any time, via Council's 24-hour emergency line and will be responded to by a Community Safety Officer at any time.

In 2024/25 there were 66 dog attacks/rushes reported.

















The only attacking baby Willard does is to shoes!

Actions:

Current Situation:

All dog attack reports are responded to promptly and investigated thoroughly and educational resources are distributed to raise awareness of preventing attacks both in the home and in the community. Council also provides information to both victims and dog owners about the investigation process and the possible outcomes.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4.1 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to dog attacks in both the home and the community. | |  | | |
| 4.2 | Continue to follow thorough and consistent investigation and prosecution processes in relation to dog attacks. |  |  |  |  |
| 4.3 | Share the outcomes of dog attack matters through media channels to promote Council action and raise awareness. |  |  |  |  |
| 4.4 | Continually review information provided to both victims and dog owners involved in a dog attack incident, to ensure currency and relevancy. |  |  |  |  |
| 4.5 | Consider and document options for declaration of dogs involved in dog attack incidents. |  | | | |

Priority 5:

Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dog

The Act allows councils to declare dogs either menacing or dangerous following incidents of rushes or attacks.

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* allows councils to declare a dog to be dangerous if:

- The dog has caused serious injury or death to a person or animal.
- The dog is a menacing dog and its owner has received at least two infringement notices for failing to comply with restraint requirements.
- The dog has been declared dangerous under corresponding legislation in another state or territory.
- For any other reason prescribed.

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* also allows Council to declare a dog menacing if:

- The dog has caused a non-serious bite to a person or animal.
- The dog has rushed at or chased a person.

The declaration of a dog as menacing or dangerous is never undertaken lightly, and the process is followed to ensure safety of the community.

Officers are trained in restricted breed identification and can declare a dog to be a restricted breed if it meets the standard set.

Declared dogs are recorded on the Victorian Declared Dog Registry (VDDR) which all councils have access to ensure accurate records of declared dogs are maintained. Declarations transfer across municipalities and owners must ensure they notify Council of any change of address either with the same municipality or to a new one.


















Actions:

Current Situation:

Officers conduct annual inspections of all declared dog properties and work closely with owners to promptly address any non-compliance issues. Where necessary, dogs may be seized and held until required works are completed to ensure community safety.

The Victorian Declared Dog Registry is regularly updated with information on all South Gippsland declared dogs and monitored to identify any changes.

The declaration process is applied, where required, following dog-related incidents to safeguard the community. Owners of dogs proposed for declaration are provided with clear information about their obligations to ensure compliance with requirements.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5.1 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to declared dogs. | | | |  |
| 5.2 | Continue to conduct annual inspections of all properties with declared dangerous or restricted breed dogs to ensure compliance. |  |  |  |  |
| 5.3 | Monitor the Victorian Declared Dog Registry to identify any new animals that have moved to South Gippsland Shire. |  |  |  |  |
| 5.4 | Continually review information provided to owners of declared dogs, to ensure currency and relevancy. |  |  |  |  |
| 5.5 | Continue to follow up reports of suspected restricted breed dogs. |  |  |  |  |

Priority 6:

Over population and high euthanasiation

Council's Pound and Animal Shelter is a safe environment where animals found wandering can be housed. Council's priority is always to get animals home as quickly as possible, and accurate microchip and registration details assist officer's in achieving this.

The facility is audited annually against the Code of Practice and is cleaned daily, including weekends. Officers provide care 365 days a year, ensuring animals are fed a premium diet and receive daily enrichment. All necessary veterinary care is provided during their stay, supported by service agreements with local veterinary clinics.

Suitable unclaimed and surrendered animals are re-homed, either via transfer to another re-homing organisation under a84Y agreement, or directly via Council's online PetRescue profile.




















Council's priority is always to achieve positive outcomes for both the community and animal welfare. In some cases, however, euthanasia may be the most appropriate option to protect animal welfare or community safety. These decisions are never made lightly, and all possible alternatives are carefully considered before an outcome is determined for each animal.

Actions:

Current Situation:

Council's animal management services include accepting surrendered animals from owners who are no longer able to care for them, providing a cat-trapping program to help manage the feral cat population across South Gippsland, and partnering with Victorian-based rehoming organisations to achieve the best outcomes for animals suitable for rehoming.

Council also maintains close relationships with local veterinary clinics to ensure prompt and professional care for all animals in its facility and is committed to operating a compliant and functional pound and animal shelter.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6.1 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to over-population of semi-owned and feral cats across South Gippsland Shire. | | |  | |
| 6.2 | Continually review the cat trapping program to ensure it is meeting the needs of Council and the community. |  |  |  |  |
| 6.3 | Advocate for additional support for Council to manage feral cats. |  |  |  |  |
| 6.4 | Seek funding opportunities for Council to deliver discounted desexing of cats with partner agencies. |  |  |  |  |
| 6.5 | Investigate ways to help owners who are struggling to care for unwell or aggressive pets by providing access to humane euthanasia options or referrals, reducing the need for owners to surrender animals to Council. |  |  |  |  |
| 6.6 | Explore the option of introducing a mandatory cat desexing order across South Gippsland Shire. | | | |  |
| 6.7 | Introduce an applicable fee for the surrender of animals to Council, to assist with the veterinary and daily care costs associated with rehoming or euthanasia. |  | | | |

Priority 7:

Domestic Animal Management Businesses

Under the Act, certain animal related businesses must be registered with Council and audited against Codes of Practice to ensure animals being managed by the business are safe.

Domestic Animal Businesses include:

- Breeding businesses (cats and/or dogs).
- Training facilities for dogs.
- Pet shops.
- Animal shelters.
- Dog or cat rearing premises.
- Animal pounds either run by Council or a Council contractor.
- Boarding establishments.

In 2024/25 there were six Domestic Animal Management Businesses registered in South Gippsland.













Senior boy 'Jack' has seen it all. He thinks he would be a very capable Animal business manager.

Actions:

Current Situation:

All registered domestic animal businesses are audited annually against the relevant Codes of Practice, with Officers working with business owners to rectify any identified non-compliances in a timely manner.

Officers respond to reports of suspected unregistered domestic animal businesses to achieve compliance and registration. All existing and prospective new businesses are provided with copies of the relevant Codes of Practice to ensure businesses are kept informed and operated to standard.

| Actions | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 |
|---------|--|---|---|---|---|
| 7.1 | Develop an educational communication campaign in relation to the benefits of using a registered domestic animal business for your pet's needs. | | | |  |
| 7.2 | Continue to conduct annual inspections of all registered domestic animal businesses. |  |  |  |  |
| 7.3 | Identify, and respond to reports of, potential unregistered domestic animal businesses and work with the owners to achieve compliance. |  |  |  |  |
| 7.4 | Look to list all registered domestic animal businesses on Council's website. |  | | | |

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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South Gippsland
Shire Council