

7.2.10 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN ELEMENT 10: DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Introduction

There is evidence of stray or feral cats and dogs in the study area. It is likely that some cats are wandering into the study area from existing housing developments to the west of the site (one cat was seen during spotlighting – see Section 5.2.1). Cats and dogs have been a management issue in the area for some time and pets have been known to wander as far as Point Impossible from nearby residential areas (S. Cameron, Surf Coast Shire Council, pers. comm.). Currently, many local residents walk or run their dogs in the study area, the adjacent saltmarsh and Whites Beach. There are currently no restrictions on domestic pet access to Whites Beach, although a ‘Dog Free Zone’ exists within the Shire along the beach from Darian Road, Torquay, to the Bird Rock car-park at Jan Juc (T. Doueal, Surf Coast Shire Council, pers. comm.). The proposed development will most likely increase the density of dogs and cats within the study area. Domestic pets are an integral part of modern society, and their management needs to be approached with flexibility and appreciation for both community and environmental needs.

Cats

Impacts of the feral, stray and domestic cat (*Felis catus*) on fauna have been investigated widely in the Australian scientific literature (Bezuijen and McMahon 1999; Webb et al. 1995; Barratt 1995, 1997, 1998; Paton 1993). It is generally acknowledged that cats may prey on a range of native and exotic mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs. Impacts on native fauna by cats are thought to be most significant in undisturbed habitat adjacent to new residential developments (Barratt 1997, 1998).

Predation of native wildlife by cats is listed as a Threatening Process under Schedule 3 the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. Action Statement No.80 (Seebeck and Clunie 1997) has been prepared under this Act to help ameliorate the adverse impacts of cats. Predation by cats is recognised as one of a suite of processes threatening native fauna populations. Others include habitat loss and fragmentation, edge effects and disturbance, climatic variation, competition and other predators (e.g. foxes) (Bezuijen and McMahon 1999). It is therefore difficult to quantify effects of cat predation *per se*, although several conclusions are possible:

- The introduction of domestic cats (and dogs) as a result of a new residential development can introduce or modify a range of degrading processes impacting directly or indirectly on flora and fauna, including predation;
- Domestic cats play a contributing role in the decline of many mammal, bird and reptile taxa; and
- Domestic cats appear to selectively prey upon small mammals, particularly nocturnal ground- and tree-dwelling species. After mammals, birds appear to be the most preferred prey (Bezuijen and McMahon 1999).

Dogs

Domestic dogs can also pose a threat to native wildlife, although more often via indirect processes rather than direct predation. Dogs exercised irresponsibly may cause individuals or flocks of foraging or roosting birds to take flight. They may also flush birds from nests during breeding. This is an important issue for ground-nesting birds, particularly the Hooded Plover, as well as birds that forage along beaches, mudflats and other aquatic habitats (e.g. Fairy Tern, Masked Lapwing, Red-kneed Dotterel, Red-capped Plover). Sightings of the Hooded Plover have been observed to decrease in frequency along Thompson Creek and the associated saltmarsh at Breamlea during summer when the peak of dog recreation and horse riding occurs (S. Howlles, Geelong RAMSAR Awareness Committee, pers. comm.).

This EMP recommends in the interests of bird conservation that dogs should be prohibited in the sand dunes between White Beach and Point Impossible except at approved entry and exit points.

PLAN ELEMENT 10	Domestic Animals	Responsible Parties	Timing or Frequency
<p>Objectives</p> <p>Implementation Actions</p>	<p>To minimise impacts of domestic animals on native flora and fauna</p> <p>To exclude or restrict access of domestic animals (cats and dogs) in environmentally sensitive habitats, such as the saltmarsh, Beach/Shoreline and the Moonah – Coast Wirilda Shrubland Conservation Zones (managed by Council).</p> <p>To provide a framework to accommodate pets in appropriate parts of the Golden Beach (Torquay Sands) development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibit keeping of domestic cats in all parts of the development east of a north-south line approximately 200 m from Whites Road which bounds the western edge of the development indicated by the 10th, 11th and 18th Fairways. Only residents fronting or in the vicinity of the Whites Road end of the development will be permitted to keep cats. Apply Surf Coast Shire Council's current domestic pet regulations and the <i>Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Body Corporate Surf Coast Shire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At all times At all times

PLAN ELEMENT 10	Domestic Animals	Responsible Parties	Timing or Frequency
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote responsible pet ownership and public education about the negative impacts of pets on wildlife and amenity values. • All dogs within the Golden Beach (Torquay Sands) Development must be restrained by leads. • Community consultation (e.g. Council questionnaire/survey) to understand and consider the needs of local pet owners. This will ensure the most appropriate management decisions with regards to potentially controversial legislation, such as night curfews and exclusion zones. Include responsible ownership information in the 'new resident kit'. • Restrict the keeping of domestic cats and dogs to the residential zone not more than 200m wide at the western edge of the development (along Whites Road) • Only allow domestic dogs on leash in development area, and remove stray dogs and stray and feral cats from development area when (and if) they appear. • Encourage confinement, registration of pets and de-sexing, especially of cats. • Erect regulatory signage advising 'On-leash Areas' at appropriate sites and exclusion from other areas (e.g. Council Conservation Zones). • Provide and maintain specific bins, "Doggy Loos" or "Pooch Patches" (Harlock and Jackson Pty Ltd 1995) in public areas to encourage and enable responsible removal of dog faeces. This will also help avoid nutrient-enrichment problems. • Enforce fines on owners of unrestrained dogs and cats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surf Coast Shire • Surf Coast Shire • Surf Coast Shire • Body Corporate • Body Corporate / Surf Coast Shire • Body Corporate • Developer • Developer / Body Corporate • Surf Coast Shire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • At all times • Ongoing • At all times • At all times • At all times • 2001 • 2001 • At all times

PLAN ELEMENT 10	Domestic Animals	Responsible Parties	Timing or Frequency
	Considering feedback received from the local community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a night curfew on cats in areas where cats are permitted in accordance with the Surf Coast Shire 173 Agreement (1999a) • During the Hooded Plover nesting season, August to February (Schulz 1992), extend the existing 'Dog Free Zone' from Darian Road to Point Impossible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body Corporate • Torquay Foreshore Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At all times • Annually
Performance Measures and Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decrease in unrestrained and wandering domestic pets. • A decrease in dog faeces in public places. • Random patrolling of management measures to evaluate effectiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body Corporate / Golf Course Manager • Body Corporate / Golf Course Manager • Environmental Management Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six monthly inspections