



Merri-bek
City Council

Animal Welfare in Emergencies Subplan

2026 – 2029

Version 2.1



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Document Amendments and Review

The Animal Welfare in Emergencies Plan is a subplan of the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.

Version number	Date of issue	Amendment	Amended by
Version 1	January 2023	New plan developed	Martha Martin
Version 2	October 2025	Updates and reviews	Martha Martin
Version 2.1	December 2025	Final updates and reviews	Martha Martin

Endorsement of the plan

This document has been adopted by the members of the Merri-bek City Council Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee as representatives and with authority of their agencies on the 17 February 2026.

Acronyms

AV	Ambulance Victoria
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change
DFFH	Department of Fairness Families and Housing
DH	Department of Health
EHO	Environmental Health Officer
ERC	Emergency Relief Centre
ERV	Emergency Recovery Victoria
CEOC	Council Emergency Operations Centre
IC	Incident Controller
ICC	Incident Control Centre
DH	Department of Health
MCC	Merri-bek City Council
MERC	Municipal Emergency Response Officer (Victoria Police)
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
MEMO	Municipal Emergency Management Officer
MRM	Municipal Recovery Manager
RFR	Register.Find.Reunite
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SITREP	Situation Report
SOG	Standard Operating Guidelines
VCC EM	Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry
VICSES	Victoria State Emergency Service
VICPOL	Victoria Police

Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Background

Animals play an important role in people's lives and can provide positive outcomes for physical and mental health. Pets are often viewed as members of the family and can be an important part of a person's recovery journey following an emergency.

Merri-bek City Council has 13,722 registered dogs and 8,607 registered cats as per 2024/25 registration records. It is also acknowledged people keep other animals as pets, i.e. birds, reptiles, rodents etc.

The Animal Welfare in Emergencies Plan is pursuant to Section 20 (1) of the Emergency Management Act 1986 and 2013 and has been developed to address domestic (companion animals) and wildlife arrangements during emergencies.

The Merri-bek City Council Animal Welfare in Emergencies is a subplan of both the Domestic Animal Management Plan and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan. This plan is also linked with the North West Metropolitan Emergency Relief Centre Standard Operating Guidelines which details the standard operating procedures to be utilised in an ERC.

The plan is also in line with the Victorian Animal Welfare Plan.

The Merri-bek Animal Welfare Plan will identify actions for domestic animals and wildlife. Merri-bek Council does not have rural properties where livestock are at risk during an emergency.

Animal welfare management during emergencies may arise in the following circumstances:

- Animals at Emergency Relief Centres (ERC)
- Displacement of animals during the emergency requiring temporary housing and sustenance
- Injured or sick animals requiring essential veterinary treatment or euthanasia
- Animals requiring relocation

The Merri-bek Animal Welfare in Emergencies Plan has been developed in consultation with the Merri-bek City Council MEMP Committee and other internal and external stakeholders. The plan is subject to review when:

- Following an emergency event where the plan has been activated
- Following a briefing or exercise that identified issues with the plan
- At least once every three years

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the plan is to define arrangements for the management of emergency animal welfare including:

- Ensure animals are protected from suffering during and immediately following emergencies
- Roles and responsibilities of key agencies and stakeholders
- Operational interactions between key agencies and stakeholders
- Resources (,personnel, facilities, equipment) to be utilised in the delivery of animal welfare services.

The plan also assists in ensuring resources to manage animals are quickly and easily accessible during an emergency.

Activation

The Municipal Emergency Management Officer (MEMO) will activate the plan following advice from the Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) if the following occurs:

- Activation of the ERC
- Requests for assistance with carcass disposal
- Requests for food or animal welfare assistance

In large scale emergencies, the Unit Manager Compliance Operations will oversee the implementation of the plan in consultation with the DEECA Animal Welfare Liaison Officer.

Roles and Responsibilities

Emergency Management and animal welfare is a shared responsibility. Animal owners who reside in Merri-bek City Council and care for animals are responsible for:

- Registration of their cats and dogs
- Consideration of animals when developing their household emergency plan including identification, safeguarding health records, accessing medication, bedding, feed, water, transportation, enclosures, veterinary care and ensure animals are kept safely.
- Vaccination

Agencies and organisations who are responsible for animal welfare include:

Agency	Responsibility
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change (DEECA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice to control and support agencies regarding the impact, or potential impact of an emergency on managed animal welfare, including risks and management strategies. • Liaise with councils and relevant animal welfare agencies and organisations to enable effective and timely delivery of managed animal welfare support services during an emergency. • Develop information for the public and media relating to the management of managed animals impacted by the emergency, for release through the Incident Controller. • Liaise with councils and animal welfare support agencies and organisations to ensure effective allocation of resources. • Identify and assess injured and affected animals (other than wildlife). • Provide advice on options for treatment, humane destruction, or emergency salvage slaughter. • Where necessary, assist with humane destruction of injured or affected animals. • Inform and coordinate animal welfare organisations, volunteer groups or community groups wanting to contribute. • Assess and report losses and damage to agricultural assets and animals and needs of affected persons and communities to government. • Investigate complaints relevant to animal welfare. • Liaise with Department of Health (DH) where emergencies impacting on human health may also have associated animal health issues. • Provide advice about feed planning and pasture management, water supplies including dam management, and animal health considerations, which will vary depending on the incident type (e.g., fly strike, foot rot).¹
Australian Veterinary Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify capacity of local veterinary clinics • Support DEECA with volunteer veterinary services and resources as requested • Maintain a database of veterinarians and nurses and provision this to the Incident Control Centre (ICC)

Agency	Responsibility
Environment Protection Authority (EPA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for ensuring appropriate disposal methods are adopted
RSPCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support agencies in animal welfare Secondary Impact Assessment for animal welfare Assist with triage for injured and sick animals – this is separate from the ERC and management with RSPCA vets Assist with accommodation for displaced pets Provide advice to pet and horse owners Manage the distributions of donations made to RSPCA Respond to appropriate requests for animal welfare resources
Wildlife Emergency Support Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides trained and accredited, wildlife rescuers, rehabilitators and wildlife transporters, general practice veterinarians and veterinary nurses, wildlife veterinarians and veterinary nurses and zookeepers to join DEECA staff in field assessment and triage teams

Further information on agency roles and responsibilities can be found via link: [Victorian Animal Welfare Plan 2024](#)

Merri-bek City Council

Merri-bek City Council is responsible for:

- Assigning a person to undertake the role of Animal Welfare Coordinator
- Assisting in the development of information for the public relating to the welfare of animals impacted by the emergency
- Ensuring stray or wandering animals are impounded or placed in a secure location
- Management of animals presenting at an ERC – if this exceeds council’s ability, DEECA can be contacted to arrange transportation of animals to an identified shelter
- Reunification of animals with their owners
- Environmental health management including disposal of deceased animals – domestic, native, and feral. (DEECA will provide technical expertise, and Council will undertake onsite work to dispose of animals)

Operational Arrangements

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, (DEECA) are the lead agency for coordinating animal welfare in Victoria and will undertake the initial response to all emergencies involving animal welfare. DEECA conduct field assessments only and will not attend the ERC except in a regulatory role to enforce protection against cruelty to animals.

As a support agency for animal welfare, Council’s primary focus and role is providing relief to the community. Councils are also primarily responsible for timely carcass disposal. Council can contact DEECA to request an escalated level of assistance, however in the first instance, council should request assistance from local community sources and businesses.

Non-major emergency

In a non-major emergency such as a house fire, response agencies will engage with Council’s MEMO if assistance is required. The MRM will be notified and arrangements made on a case-by-case basis to assist residents in securing care of their animals. In some cases, advice may be sought in relation to services from the Animal Management Team.



Mid-range emergency

A mid-range emergency such as flooding of houses in a street can affect a larger number of households. Depending on the level of coordination required, an Incident Control Centre (ICC) and Council Emergency Operations Centre (CEOC) may be activated. Any animal related requests from the response agency to Council will be forwarded via the MEMO to the Unit Manager Compliance Operations for action.



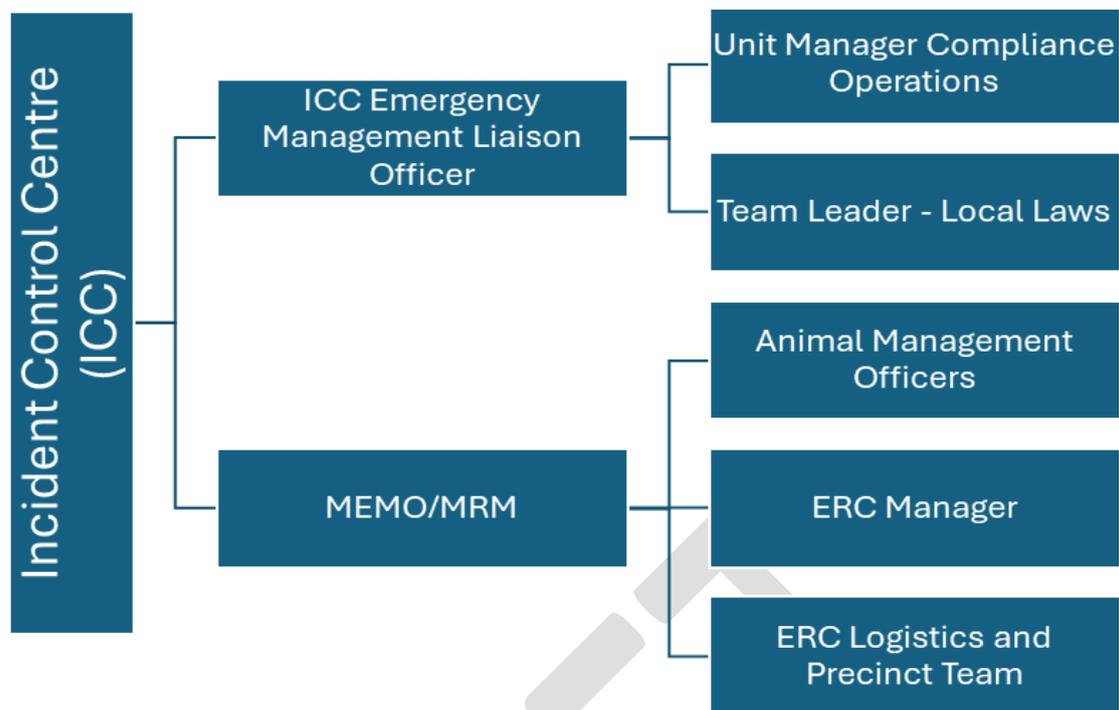
Large emergency

Large scale emergencies can affect a substantial proportion of the community and often requires detailed and complex considerations for the community. In this situation an ICC and CEOC will be activated.

DEECA is the lead for animal welfare and may send referrals of requests for assistance through to the ICC to the MERC or MEMO. The MEMO will record the requests and then contact the Unit Manager Compliance Operations to action these requests.

In lieu of animal welfare requests from the ICC it is important that Animal Management Officers are on standby or activated should the need for animal welfare assessments and support arise. Officers can directly liaise with DEECA officers, however all correspondence and requests must be recorded and relayed to the MEMO and CEOC.

If the ERC is activated, Animal Management Officers will be required to staff the animal management area. The MRM will coordinate the activation of animal management staff to the ERC. Officers will work with the ERC Logistics Officer who will liaise with the MRM to obtain equipment and resources for the animal management area.



Recovery

Once the response phase of the emergency is over the MRM is responsible to coordinate recovery with the community. The Unit Manager Compliance Operations will assist with advice in relation to animal recovery planning.

Once the area has been declared safe by the control agency, animal owners may return to their property. Animal Management Officers will contact all owners of animals who are accommodated at the ERC or in other shelters to advise the owners to collect their animals. In some circumstances, animals may need to be transported to their owners, and this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. If a person is unable to return home, the MRM may assist them to access services including accommodation for both them and their animals.

Emergency Relief Centre Animal Management Areas

Merri-bek Animal Management Officers will assess the need to open an Animal Management Area at an ERC. Their decision will be based on several factors including:

- Number and type of animals requiring shelter
- Availability and capacity of council's resources
- The expected time the ERC will be functional

Animals presenting at the ERC may be relocated to Council's animal shelter area or directed to a suitable location away from the emergency. This will be advised by Animal Management team on site.

Any animal accepted into the ERC should have access to urgent basic welfare provisions including shelter, food, water and emergency veterinary services.

Management of Companion Animals at Emergency Relief Centres

Emergency Relief Centres can house animals for short-term relief only (under 12 hours).

If the emergency displaces people for a period of longer than 12 hours, residents will be encouraged to make other arrangements for animals if possible. If this is not possible, companion animals will be transferred to the wat jerring Animal Facility or to nearby boarding facilities that have an MOU with Council.

Animal Management Officers will be responsible for the care of companion animals at Relief Centres.

Advertise suitable alternative and short-term accommodation options to encourage owners to plan.

Council will not accept:

- Aggressive dogs
- Declared Dangerous Dogs
- Declared menacing dogs
- Guard Dogs
- Restricted breed dogs
- Uncontained cats
- Feral cats

If required, these animals may be transported to Council's pound, but they will not be held at an ERC

Animals will not be able to stay inside the ERC due to several concerns including community and staff wellbeing, allergies, and resource management.

Any assistance animals will be able to stay with their owners. Staff are to assist the owners to meet the needs of these animals.

Further roles and responsibilities can be found in the NWMR ERC Standard Operating Guidelines – [Document Link: D25/553911](#)

This document has further details on the following:

- Animal Management – Staff Health
- Animal welfare processes
- Setting up animal shelters at an ERC
- Animal admission facilities at an ERC – Admission Form - [Page 91](#)
- Owner information sheet – [Page 92](#)
- PPE Equipment
- Animal Management Officer Position – [Page 43](#)

Identification of affected animals

In an emergency, information will be recorded on a register to allow the tracking of affected animals and monitor welfare issues. Information regarding dogs and cats will be recorded at relief centres including microchip numbers and Council registration numbers. Victorian law requires that dogs and cats be registered with their local council and are microchipped to ensure they are permanently identified. If an animal is not currently registered or microchipped, officers need to take down details of the animal and ensure animals are correctly tagged with the owner's name and contact details.

During this time, it is not advisable to issue infringements to animal owners who have not registered or microchipped their pets. Officers can follow up as part of the recovery process to ensure owners have followed regulations.

Veterinary Treatment

Veterinary treatment for animals should be sought by the owner through local veterinary services or the RSPCA. If the owner of an animal is unable to arrange this or if the owner is unknown the welfare and health of the animal is paramount, and council officers should seek veterinary care as required. Unknown animals may be taken to the council pound.

Financial Measures

When council is activated for an emergency, financial arrangements are put in place to record expenditure specific to the response, relief, and recovery phases of the incident. All financial expenditure is to be allocated to the designated cost centre.

All requests and resources are to be logged via Crisisworks to allow cost data to be reported. The following information needs to be collected:

- The requesting officer's name
- The requesting officer's position – E.g. Incident Controller, Commander etc
- Date and time of the request
- Description of the request
- Costs incurred

Wildlife

DEECA is the primary agency for wildlife welfare during an emergency. Animal welfare needs will be assessed and determined by wildlife rescue teams and decided if the animal requires any intervention or treatment. Depending on the scale of the emergency, wildlife rescue teams will deploy, rescue and transport injured wildlife to local veterinary clinics, authorised wildlife rehabilitators or established wildlife care organisations.

Council's role is to assist with communications to the community with information about what to do to assist and who to contact if they observe or have concerns regarding injured wildlife.

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Animal Admission Owner Information Sheet

Welcome to the Emergency Relief Centre. We hope your stay here will be as short and as comfortable as possible. The (Council Name) has arranged emergency shelter and welfare for pets and companion animals evacuated as part of this emergency.

Your role

- Feed and exercise your animal.
- Keep your animal confined or on a leash at all times.
- Do not let your animal cause harm or discomfort to people or other animals.
- Ask the person in charge of the animal area before you move your animal from their crate/pen.
- Understand that housing animals at the ERC is only short term and you should discuss other options with the Animal Team Leader in charge.
- Understand that animals are held at the ERC at your risk.
- Discuss with our staff if you have any concerns about your animal.
- We are here to help and assist; however, there are many demands on our staff so please have patience. We will do our very best to help.

Our role

- Feed and exercise your animal if you are unable to do so.
- Provide fresh water for your animal.
- Secure your animal and provide the best care we can.
- Provide any immediate First Aid and after discussion with you, we may arrange for your animal to see a veterinarian.

Animal Management – Individual Registration Form

Part A: OWNERS DETAILS								
Name:		Telephone:						
Address:		Mobile:						
Alternate contact:								
Current Veterinarian:								
Part B: ANIMAL DETAILS								
No.	Name	Type	Breed	Description (colour/sex)	Collar	Identification (tag/microchip)	Photo No.	Special needs/comments (diet/medication/history/temperament)
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
Animal received from:		Date:		Signature:				
Part C: EMERGENCY HOUSING CONTACT DETAILS								
Name:		Telephone:						
Address animal located:		Mobile:						
Part D: ANIMAL RELOCATION DETAILS								
Relocated to:		Telephone:						
Address:		Mobile:						
Received by:		Date:		Signature:				
Part E: RETURN OR COLLECTION DETAILS								
Relocated to:		Telephone:						
Address:		Mobile:						
Received by:		Date:		Signature:				

Please ensure copies of form are provided to ERC Administrative Officer at end of shift

References

State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) [State Emergency Management Plan](#)

Emergency Management Act 1986 & 2013 [Emergency Management Act](#)

Victorian Animal Welfare Plan [Victorian Animal Welfare Plan 2024](#)

Merri-bek City Council Domestic Animal Management Plan [Merri-bek City Council Domestic Animal Management Plan](#)

North West Metropolitan Region Emergency Management Collaboration – Emergency Relief Centre Standard Operating Guidelines [D25/553911](#)

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