

Management of Feral and/or Infant Animals Policy

Date Adopted: 16 September 2025

Version: 3.0

Policy Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for managing feral animals, which may pose a risk to staff, as well as very young animals that are unable to survive independently and require continuous intensive care.

Policy Scope

This policy provides the framework for consistent decision making on the management of feral and/or infant animals. The policy applies to Maitland City Council and contracted service providers.

Policy Statement

This policy aims to provide a consistent and transparent approach in dealing with feral and infant animals which come into Council's care (and in turn Council's contracted service provider) under the provisions of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*.

1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (from here on simply referred to as "the Act"), that a person who seizes a Companion Animal under the provisions of the Act, must cause the seized animal to be returned to its owner, delivered to the Council pound, or surrender the animal to an Authorised Council Officer within a reasonable time. The Act then provides for procedures in dealing with the animals including statutory holding periods.

In some cases, the animals which have been seized are feral, and in other cases an infant animal is of such a young age that it cannot support its own life. In these cases the Act Section 64(2) requires Council to have a policy which provides a clear direction on how these animals are to be managed, including alternatives to euthanasia, and euthanasia where alternatives are not available, or where it is considered cruel to keep the animal caged for any nominated statutory period as defined in Section 64(1) of the Act. The standard holding period currently stands at seven days for unidentified animals and 14 days for identified animals.

2. Feral Companion Animals

If the animal is determined to be feral and reasonable efforts to identify it have been made, and keeping the animal confined for the required statutory holding period is deemed cruel, the Council may authorize euthanasia of the animal before the completion of the standard holding period.

3. Infant Companion Animals

Animals accepted into Council’s pound facility identified as being infant animals must be assessed by a veterinarian and the results of the assessment documented and signed off by the respective veterinarian to validate that the animal is assessed as ‘infant’.

Should the infant animal be of such a size and age that survival in the long term would be remote, then Council may authorise the euthanasia under this policy.

Should the infant animal be of such a size and age that survival is possible through intensive care external of the pound, or it is in the best interest of the infant animal to warrant early release, then Council authorises the release of the infant as an alternative to euthanasia, subject to the early release conditions as outlined within this policy. If suitable alternatives to euthanasia are not available at the time, then Council may authorise the euthanasia of the infant companion animal.

3.1 Early release as an alternative to euthanasia

Companion animals identified as being an infant may be released on a permanent basis prior to the expiration of the statutory holding period as an alternative to euthanasia, or on the basis that such action is in the best interests of the animal’s welfare.

Early release is subject to the animal only being released to the following organisations:

- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals NSW (RSPCA)
- An approved rescue organisation

4. Conclusion

This policy authorises the euthanasia of feral and/or infant companion animals provided that the framework and processes described are followed.

Euthanasia must only be considered after reasonable consideration has been given to alternatives and must be carried out in accordance with industry standards.

Prior to euthanasia a veterinarian must undertake an assessment, document and sign-off on the recommended course of action.

Policy Definitions

Council pound facility	Includes any pound facility operated by Council’s contracted service provider
Feral animal	Means a dog or cat whose owner is either identified or unidentified and has been living as a wild animal in undomesticated circumstances and, demonstrates such wild behaviour that handling the animal would pose a risk to staff and be seen as cruel to keeping the animal caged for any length of time than deemed necessary
Infant animal	Means a dog or cat in the first stage of existence and refers to an animal that is not able to feed and fend for itself or is of such age that keeping it within a pound facility would place the animal’s welfare at risk
Unidentified animal	Means a dog or cat that has no form of identification contained on its being, such as a microchip or collar and tag containing owner’s details

Policy Administration

Business Group:	City Planning
Responsible officer:	Director City Planning
Council reference:	Ordinary Council Meeting 16 September 2025 - Item 11.8
Policy review date:	Three (3) years from date of adoption
File number:	22/1
Relevant legislation	Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW) Companion Animals Regulation 2018 (NSW)
Related documents	Code of Conduct

Policy History

VERSION	DATE APPROVED	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES
1.0	27/10/2015	New policy adopted
2.0	10/02/2020	Policy reviewed, no changes required. ELT approved policy renewal as is
3.0	16/09/2025	Reviewed and updated to reflect amendments to the Companion Animals Act 1998 and Council adoption of policy