



ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER'S OFFICE (ACT)

Biodiversity and domestic animals

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*One of the most significant threats to urban biodiversity is domestic pets. The **Domestic Animals Act 2000** (ACT) provides a number of mechanisms that place controls on management of domestic animals which in turn minimise negative impacts on biodiversity. A key measure in this regard is cat curfews in suburbs abutting nature reserves.*

Domestic Animals Act 2000

The *Domestic Animals Act 2000* (ACT) (Domestic Animal Act) provides a number of mechanisms for the identification and registration of domestic animals as well as outlining the duties of owners, carers and keepers. These mechanisms in turn minimise the impact of domestic animals in ACT nature reserves.

What is a cat curfew?

The Domestic Animals Act empowers the relevant Minister, currently the Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, to declare a cat curfew if cats in a particular area are a serious threat to native flora and fauna [s.81].

The *Domestic Animals (Cat Curfew Area) Declaration 2004 (No 1)* DI2004–201 declares the suburbs of Bonner, Forde, Mulligans Flat, and Goorooyaroo as Declared Cat Curfew Areas.

This means that cats must be kept inside domestic houses or appropriate outdoor enclosures for 24 hours a day. The owner of a cat is in breach of the Domestic Animals Act if the cat is not confined to the premises of a keeper or carer, [s.82], and the fine for breach is \$1,100.

How are dogs and cats controlled?

The Domestic Animals Act provides for the registration of dogs [Division 2.1], the declaration of dangerous dogs [Division 2.3], and the compulsory microchipping of declared dangerous dogs [s.25(3)]. A code of practice setting out the procedures and obligations to be followed by a person who implants microchips in a dog or cat in the ACT has also been approved under the Act, the *Domestic Animals (Implanting Microchips in Dogs and Cats) Code of Practice 2008 (No 2)* DI2008–73. Generally dogs over six months of age and cats over three months of age must be de-sexed unless a permit is issued [s.74].

The aim of these provisions is to reduce the number of unwanted domestic pets, many of which the RSPCA euthanase each year, and to reduce predation of native wildlife in Canberra. Only three cats or dogs, with limited exceptions, can be owned without a multiple licence [ss.18; 84A].

Areas can also be designated as dog exercise and dog-on-leash areas (see *Domestic Animals (Dog Control Areas) Declaration 2005 (No 1)* DI2005–198).

What are the offences?

The Domestic Animals Act includes offence and penalty provisions ranging from 5 penalty units (currently \$550 for individuals or \$1650 for corporations) for minor offences (such as keeping an unregistered dog) to 50 penalty units (currently \$5,500 for individuals or \$27,500 for corporations) and imprisonment for 6 months or both for more serious offences such as failing to hold a multiple dog or cat licence if keeping 4 or more dogs or cats. Infringement notices can be issued under the *Magistrates Court Act 1930 (ACT)* and the *Magistrates Court (Domestic Animals Infringement Notices) Regulation 2005* SL2005–29.



Disclaimer

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