

Dog Controls Review 2022 - FAQs

This FAQs aim to help people understand the changes to our dog controls, and how these may affect them.

Council would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views with us on the proposed changes to our dog controls. All feedback was considered by Council during deliberations.

There was general support to adopt a more pragmatic approach to applications for more than two dogs on urban properties and enforcement of nuisance barking, and to apply a 12-month qualifying period for responsible dog owners to be eligible for discounted dog registration fees.

Council also considered feedback from affected rural dog owners, and has now included a new registration class for working dogs (which includes those used primarily for stock-herding).

Taking all submissions and other considerations into account, on 3 August Council agreed to adopt an amended dog control policy and bylaw, which include the following key changes:

- Amend the process for assessing a permit for more than two dogs on certain properties,
- Amend the process for the enforcement of dog barking offences,
- Remove the registration fee class for “Rural’ dogs”*, but include working dogs,
- Include a 12-month qualifying period for “Responsible Dog Owners”* to be eligible for the discounted registration fee.

NOTE: changes to these registration fees* will come into effect from 1 July 2023, and will be applied automatically.

A copy of the [Policy](#) and [Bylaw](#) can be found on our website.

69% of people supported the proposal to modify the process for Council to assess whether owners can have more than two dogs on a property (other than on a rural-zoned property over 1,000m²).

Under both the current and proposed processes, neighbours can have their say, and the Council assessment will consider all relevant factors, including whether or not neighbour’s objections are reasonable and justified.

The change to our policy - is that neighbours will no longer be able to automatically block an application.

89% of people supported the proposal to modify the process for how certain instances of barking will be enforced under the policy.

Under both the current and proposed policy, owners are ultimately responsible for their dogs causing any undue nuisance to their neighbours through activities such as incessant barking or howling.

The change to our policy - is that a one-off incident of barking or howling will no longer automatically be an enforceable offence, but Dog Control Officers (DCOs) will consider all relevant factors and assess as appropriate.

56% of people supported the proposal to remove the registration fee class for ‘Rural dogs’.

Registration classes are structured, in part, to recognise that some dogs and their owners (such as neutered dogs or Responsible Dog Owners) pose a lower risk than general dog registrations or dangerous dogs. This is a best practice approach used by most councils, as it also provides some financial incentive for owners to transition to lower-risk dog behaviour and better compliance with the Dog Control Act 1996, such as:

- Neutering is widely known to reduce aggression if performed at the appropriate time, plus it reduces roaming behaviour and unwanted pregnancies.
- The responsible owner category is for those owners who have demonstrated that they are low risk, as they do not come to our attention for compliance or enforcement matters. They self-regulate and don't cause us dramas. They are the model that we want owners to aspire to.

Under the previous Dog Control and Hydatids Act 1982, all dogs living on rural-zoned properties had to pay additional vet bills to regularly treat their dogs for hydatid tapeworms, as these could be passed to livestock. To help these owners, Council charged a reduced registration fee. However, this act was superseded by the Dog Control Act 1996, but the reduced registration fee has remained in place ever since.

We heard from several people who felt or assumed, that 'rural dogs', 'farm dogs' and 'stock-herding dogs' were the same thing. There are around 6,500 dogs in Upper Hutt today, with approximately 1,100 dogs living on rural-zoned properties, but very few dogs are registered as being principally stock-herding "[working dogs](#)".

The overall cost to manage and deliver the dog control programme is primarily paid for by the [dog registration fees](#). The costs incurred by Council to administer, manage, investigate, enforce and control dogs in rural areas are unlikely to be lower than those in urban areas. At times, they may be higher due to increased travel time, fuel usage, and a requirement to have an off-road vehicle for Dog Control Officers to access these areas.

There are now two changes to our policy -

- Owners are now be able to register their dogs as "other [working dogs](#)" if they meet this definition in the Dog Control Act 1996 e.g. "*working dogs.....kept solely or principally for the purposes of herding or driving stock*". (NOTE: Council already has a registration class for Disability Assist Dogs and Police Dogs which are both specific types of working dogs).
- The discounted registration fee for Rural dog owners is no longer be available. Prior to next year's dog registrations being due on 1 July 2023, Rural dog owners can either apply for the discounted "Responsible Dog Owner" fee (if they meet the criteria. Note: this is currently the same amount as that for Rural dogs -), register as a working dog (if applicable), or pay the general dog registration fee,

72% of people supported the proposal to require that owners must have met the "Responsible Dog Owner" (RDO) criteria for the preceding 12-months to be eligible for this discounted registration fee.

Under the current policy, an owner who meets the RDO criteria may technically be eligible for a discounted registration fee, effective immediately.

The change to our policy - is that from 1 July 2023, owners will need to have met the criteria for the preceding 12 months. This is similar in some ways to a '*no claims discount*' when insuring a car.

NOTES:

- ✓ An initial RDO assessment is based on the owner completing an application form, a Dog Control Officer inspecting the premises for suitability, plus checking Council and national database records for any previous infringements or offences.
- ✓ Any owner who is already a registered RDO, will automatically be eligible for this discount from 1 July 2023 (unless they have breached any of the criteria, at which point they will default to paying the general registration fee until they are once again eligible).
- ✓ The dog registration year runs from 1 July to 30 June.
- ✓ If an owner is already a registered RDO for one (or more) dog(s) and gets another dog, the discount will be applied to the second/subsequent dog.
- ✓ Former "Rural dog" owners are welcome to apply for the RDO discount if they want to.

A number of people expressed their views about a proposal under the draft annual plan to consider creating a fenced-off, dedicated dog park to allow owners to socialise and exercise their dogs off-leash.

Whilst this topic was not part of the dog controls consultation, as part of the Annual Plan review **Council decided not to proceed with the dog park at this time**. This may be considered again in 2024.

A number of people expressed their views or concerns about how some owners and their dogs use public places and parks - in particular owners who allow their dogs off-leash, or do no clean-up after themselves.

Owners are responsible for their dogs in any park or public space (which would include owners using the above park, if it had been agreed to). This includes cleaning up after their dog, keeping their dog on a leash in certain parks, and controlling boisterous behaviour, rushing or attacks – these are all part of the [responsibilities of being a dog owner](#). Council welcomes any members of the public to report dog behaviour they may find concerning.