It will soon cost $70 to register your dog – and here's why

More than 10,000 cats a year are left at the RSPCA across Victoria, part of the reason for a 300% increase in pound management fees. Image: Stockimage.

The Terrier – Carol Altmann

WARRNAMBOOL ratepayers are in for a shock next year (2019) when it comes to putting out their rubbish and registering their pet, as the rising cost of our throwaway society starts to bite.

As has been reported elsewhere, garbage collection fees in Warrnambool are set to climb by $70 to $356 a year, while in neighbouring Moyne Shire the fee is rising by $21 to $493 a year*.

On top of this, pet owners in Warrnambool are expected to see dog and cat registration fees rise by up to almost 40%.

If the draft Warrnambool City Council budget goes ahead, in 2019 it will cost $70 to register your desexed dog and $59 for a desexed cat. (Last year it cost $52 and $41.)

The fee for a non-desexed dog will rise from $166 to $210 and a non-desexed cat will cost $177, up from $130.

And herein lies the problem, because these fee hikes are directly connected to the cost of keeping animals that are either discarded, given up, or need to be rehoused via the Warrnambool pound.

(I hasten to add that not all animals passed to the RSPCA are 'unwanted', including those that need to be rehoused due to changing personal circumstances such as illness or divorce.)

> *While WCC owns the Braithwaite St pound, it has for many years been out-sourced to the RSPCA and late last year the RSPCA dropped a bomb: it was no longer going to run its pound services at a loss and its fees were going up by 300%.*
>
> *300%!*

As council spokesman Nick Higgins explained, the WCC was paying around $112,000 a year, but under its new contract with the RSPCA this will almost triple to $328,632 in the next financial year**.

The following year it will rise to $413,016 and by 2020-21 it will be around $425,000.

This is getting close to half a million dollars a year to run the pound and, it appears, the cost will only keep rising.

So while it might be $70 to register your dog next year, by 2020-21 it could feasibly be $100.

There is no doubt it is expensive to humanely care for and re-house animals and the RSPCA says it had little choice but to reflect this in its fees.

RSPCA Victoria Head of Operations, Tegan McPherson:

> *"Over the past two years, RSPCA Victoria has been carefully analysing every council pound contract we tender for, and submitting tenders with a pricing structure that reflects the true cost of caring for animals admitted from each municipality and shire.*
>
> *This represents a change from our previous approach, which was to share the cost of care with councils.*
>
> *We are committed to ensuring that we run every council pound contract on terms that enable us to provide outstanding animal welfare on a cost-neutral basis. This way, we can ensure our limited funds are best invested in reducing cruelty and neglect, and cutting the number of surrendered and homeless animals right across Victoria."*

So what is the answer here?

Do we keep upping the fees and fines in Warrnambool each year to cover what will soon be a half million dollar a year operation, or do we look at this problem more broadly, and find other ways to encourage registration and de-sexing?

Recycling is no longer seen as a long-term solution to our growing waste problem, as international markets dry up. Image: ABC Radio

AT the moment, it seems, those who do register their pets will be seriously subsidising those who don't: animal registrations will bring in $270,000 this financial year and, with the fee increase, $445,000 in the next.

I can't help but see the parallels between our seeming inability – as a wider community – to value animals enough to ensure they don't end up producing litters of unwanted offspring or not getting a dog that we have no time to train, or buying a kitten that is ignored once it grows into a cat…and our producing increasing tonnes of garbage.

In both cases, we expect someone else to deal with what we discard.

Recently there has been a lot of talk about the recycling crisis and China refusing to take our recyclable plastics and paper.

To be precise, China has refused to take recyclables that are even slightly contaminated (ie.mixed in with other stuff).

But the question remains as to why we would want to keep relying on China, or any other country, to keep taking our waste? If they pull the pin, what do we do then?

The answer, which some states are taking more seriously than others, is to no longer see recycling as the God of waste management, but to stop the waste being produced in the first place.

Plastics are flooding our oceans and need to be stopped at the source by changing manufacturing and consumer habits. Image: Good Will Nurdle Hunting/Tangaroa Blue

THE WCC put out its waste management strategy last December, which reflects this idea and covers everything from reducing plastic bags to the simple act of picking up your dog's poop. It will also shortly start a trial of the organics composting service, FOGO, which is already up and running in Moyne Shire and Bendigo and elsewhere.

As the wheels grind slowly within government, the good news is that good stuff continues to happen at a grassroots, community level.

Colleen Hughson, who I wrote about recently in a piece on the plastic pollution spill at Shelly Beach, is now part of a

project involving the global environmental group Tangaroa Blue, and others, to look at the plastics turning up on our local beaches.

A series of public workshops will be held in Warrnambool and Portland from later this month to talk about where the plastics are coming from, and how we can help stop it at the source. You can find out how to get involved here.

Tackling environmental waste and animal welfare issues is not new, but the dramatic fee rises we are seeing at a local level provides a serious wake-up call that we all need to get involved with finding the solutions – or expect to pay a price.

** Less than half of Moyne's ratepayers use the garbage collection due to their remote locations. The higher cost compared to WCC reflects a wide geographic area with fewer customers.*

*** Moyne Shire used to share the cost of the WCC pound but, following a request from WCC to contribute significantly more from 2018-19, is now using the Southern Grampians Shire pound.*