



Call for dog owners to take responsibility

Murrindindi Shire Council Community Safety Officers have reported a spike in the number of complaints about excessively barking dogs.

Murrindindi Shire Council Mayor Sandice McAulay said excessively barking dogs can quickly become a source of annoyance to neighbours. Often, these complaints can be resolved in no time at all just by having a chat with the barking dog's owner and explaining your frustration calmly. Dog owners often don't realise their pet is upsetting anyone.

"Dogs tend to bark when they're bored from lack of exercise or lack of interaction with their special humans, if an unfamiliar person passes by the area they're protecting or if they're uncomfortable," Cr McAulay said.

"Providing appropriate care for your pet is every pet owner's responsibility. Ensuring your furry friend is getting enough exercise, play time, food, water and shelter from the weather are the basics. It's also really important that you're aware if and when your dog is prone to barking.

"There's lots of ways you can take steps to minimise other people's stress from your dog's barking. Try putting your dog inside at night or during the times of day when it tends to bark – like when children are walking to school or rubbish bins are being collected – this is what I have to do with my fluffy little barkers. If your dog is barking at people or noises on the other side of a fence, move it to another part of the yard. If your dog is barking at people it can see passing by, try blocking its view. Citronella collars have also proven to be a successful learning tool for some dogs being trained.

"We understand that dog owners might not always be aware that their dog's barking is a nuisance to other people – maybe you can't hear the barking from some areas of your house or you're a very sound sleeper and don't wake up when the dog barks. However, we do ask that you make sure your animals aren't impacting other residents' peaceful enjoyment of our municipality. Please try and put yourself in your neighbour's shoes if they are reporting excessive barking to you. It may not seem like a big deal to you, but to others, increased noise can bring significant mental stress and duress.

"If an excessively barking dog is causing frustration in your neighbourhood and discussing the issue with the dog's owner hasn't solved the problem, Council's Community Safety officers can help resolve the issue. Council is also authorised under State legislation to take further action when required - this includes issuing fines to offending dog owners or compliance orders through the courts," Cr McAulay said.

"Dog owners also have a responsibility to keep their dogs securely confined to their properties. If your dog wanders from your property, 'rushes' at a passers-by or attacks other animals, you may be charged with an offence under the *Domestic Animal Act 1994*.

"As I'm sure everyone can appreciate, being 'rushed at' – approached within three metres by an uncontrolled snarling or growling dog – can be really upsetting. Council has had several

reports recently from people who have experienced being rushed at by aggressive dogs - further action is being pursued in several of these cases.

“Council is committed to preserving and enhancing the rural lifestyle and village atmosphere in communities around Murrindindi Shire. Ensuring that everyone feels safe, supported and connected is essential to this,” Cr McAulay said.

“I really encourage you to take a moment to consider how your pet might be effecting those around you, and if you have any worries, just drop our Community Safety Unit a line on 5772 0333 – they really are here to help,” Cr McAulay added.