

# Guidelines for managing animals at Emergency Relief Centres, assembly areas or other places of emergency shelter

**The welfare of animals can be a deciding factor for people in making decisions about their personal welfare, including evacuating a threatened property or seeking emergency shelter.**

Local Government is responsible for the coordinating of the provision and operation of emergency relief centres/shelters (Emergency Management Manual, Victoria). In doing so, it is highly recommended that plans include procedures for animals that may present at these sites (Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan, Revision 1, 2015).

Victoria's standards for animal containment and care are provided in Codes of Practice. It is anticipated these standards may not be fully achievable or appropriate in emergency situations. These guidelines have been developed to assist Local Government plan for and effectively manage animals that are brought to these sites.

The guidelines do not cover the management of animals left behind by owners when evacuating due to an emergency event. For information on managing animals left behind, go to [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies).

## Planning Checklist

- Do you have a Municipal Emergency Animal Welfare Plan that is linked to your Municipal Emergency Management Plan?
- Have you identified locations that would be suitable for the emergency shelter of evacuated animals, including large animals?
- Do you know what animal management resources and equipment council currently has available that may be utilised in an emergency relief centre or shelter?
- Have you identified providers of animal management services and resources that may be required or may assist in an emergency?
- Have you defined the roles and responsibilities of staff that will be required to process and care for animals that will arrive at emergency relief centres and shelters?
- Do you have staff trained in the processing of animals at emergency relief centres and shelters?
- Have you communicated to the public the process of evacuating with animals in your community and the location of appropriate relief centres?



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## Pre-emergency planning

It is highly recommended that Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs) consider the development of an emergency animal welfare plan that is included in the principal Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). An emergency animal welfare plan should outline how animal welfare support services will be delivered during an emergency, including those associated with the management of evacuated animals. For an example template to assist with the development of a Municipal Emergency Animal Welfare Plan, email [stateanimalwelfare@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:stateanimalwelfare@dpi.vic.gov.au). Plans should:

- identify potential animal welfare issues that may arise based on animal ownership and population data and likely needs in the event of an emergency (eg. assessment, treatment, carcass disposal, containment, food and water sources, management of evacuated animals);
- include a contact list of government and non government animal welfare service providers/ resources that deliver, or may be called upon to assist in the delivery of, animal welfare services (these providers or resources may be located in neighbouring municipalities);
- define the roles and responsibilities of Council Authorised Local Laws Officers and support staff during an emergency with respect to animal management during emergencies;
- identify locations within the community that would be suitable for the emergency shelter of evacuated animals; and the services and resources that may be needed at such sites (eg. treatment of injured animals);
- outline the process for community education regarding evacuating with animals.

## Identifying suitable shelter facilities before a disaster strikes

An Emergency Relief Centre (ERC) is a building or place established to provide basic, essential needs to people affected by an emergency (Emergency Relief Handbook, 2011). Emergency shelter is shelter for people affected by an emergency, in locations such as community halls, relief centres and tents.

As part of pre-disaster planning, MEMPCs should consider how animals will be managed at potential emergency relief centres and emergency shelters.

Plans should include shelter for both owned and stray pets (mostly dogs and cats) as well as livestock, horses and exotic animals. Animals such as birds, rabbits, reptiles and wildlife kept under a permit may also be presented and should be planned for. Frequently, more than one site will be required to meet the needs of the community and the variety of species. For example horses may be able to be agisted on private property, saleyards may be suitable for livestock, and small pets may be able to be housed at the local animal shelter.

Agricultural showgrounds may also be a good location for animal housing.

Regardless of the quality and availability of off-site animal shelters, during an emergency, animals of all varieties are likely to present at the ERC and at emergency shelters as well as at the prearranged animal shelters.



Plans for animals at ERCs and emergency shelters should consider local arrangements and providers for the following:

- animal admission and identification/record keeping
- secure and functional housing / holding facilities and their proximity to relief centre sites
- feed and water requirements
- triage sites or access to veterinary treatment for injuries, illness and humane destruction
- identifying and contacting owners (lost and found registers)
- animals requiring specialist attention (such as horses and wildlife)
- staff health and safety
- processing and distribution of donated goods.

Prior to an emergency, councils need to communicate to residents the whereabouts of emergency animal shelters. During an emergency the existence and location of animal shelters should be communicated to affected people and essential services personnel.

## Options for evacuated animals

Accommodating animals in ERCs is a last resort. The first option should always be with family or friends outside the affected area that can better provide for animals. If this is not feasible, pet friendly accommodation or boarding kennels may be available and appropriate. Wildlife should be transferred to authorised wildlife carers located in a safe area.

In the event of a major incident or if there is insufficient accommodation available, management of animals at emergency relief centres or emergency shelters will need to be considered.

Animals should not be kept at an ERC or emergency shelters for more than three days unless the conditions set out in the relevant Victorian Codes of Practice can be met ([www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare) - see legislation).

## Establishing animal admission facilities at an ERC

At the onset of an emergency, council may establish animal admission facilities in conjunction with the ERC. The MEMPC should incorporate plans in the MEMP for staffing and logistical support for any such facility.

The roles of personnel staffing an animal admission facility will be to:

- identify and record details of animals presented
- contain animal/s
- separate animals as appropriate to ensure their safety and welfare
- assess all animals presented, whether or not they are owned
- arrange or administer first aid
- arrange for transfer of animals which require ongoing care or significant treatment to an external veterinarian, in consultation with the owner where possible.

If an animal is assessed as being fit and healthy, it may be:

- retained on site in the care of the owner in facilities arranged by the council,
- transferred to accommodation of the owners choice, or if the owner is not present or does not have a preference, to a facility which can care for the animal. If possible this will be to a shelter with which the council has pre-existing arrangements for the provision of such services.

The planning of the areas, personnel and logistical support of an admission facility should be directed towards supporting these roles.

The animal admission area should be protected from the weather and away from busy areas. The area may be equipped with examination tables, cages and kennels, a microchip scanner and should have water access and electricity.

All staff at the ERC that are expected to deal with animals must be trained and experienced to properly care for, handle and manage the type of animals that are likely to be presented during an emergency. All staff should be educated in the prevention of zoonoses and animal attacks.

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MEMPCs may be able to incorporate plans in the MEMP to engage the services of private veterinary practitioners to assist in the assessment of animals being presented to the ERC. If the emergency is of a significant size, a separate animal triage site may be established close to the admission area.

Assistance in resourcing such a site may be available from the Australian Veterinary Association or animal welfare organisations with veterinary resources, alternatively contact the DPI state emergency animal welfare unit (if in place) or State Emergency Animal Welfare coordinator for assistance (email: [stateanimalwelfare@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:stateanimalwelfare@dpi.vic.gov.au) or ph: 136186).

MEMPCs should consider planning for the transportation of animals from an ERC to other facilities such as animal shelters, veterinary facilities, agistment or other accommodation organised by the owner of an animal.

## Setting up emergency animal shelter facilities at an ERC

Animals can not be loose within an emergency animal shelter. Personnel engaged in animal welfare roles at an ERC or an emergency shelter should use cages, crates, tethers, fencing and other appropriate methods of restraint to house all animals on site. Animals should be protected from the weather. Animal housing should be removed from public areas to help reduce the amount of stress that animals are subjected to. Separate areas should be designated for dogs, cats and other animals. Owned animals may be housed apart from stray animals. Ideally each group of animals should be contained within a larger area to ensure that if an animal gets loose it can not escape.

An area will be required for animal food. The animal food storage, distribution and preparation area should be in a location where the food is protected from vermin and will not get wet. The animal food preparation area will require food utensils.

Animal supplies and other resources including food dishes, litter boxes, cat litter, scoops, cages, toys, leashes, collars, muzzles, flea treatment, brushes, newspaper, towels, and blankets must be stored so they will not get wet and are available as needed.

A water storage area will be needed when normal water resources are not operating or the tap water is not suitable for drinking. The water storage should be in a central location within the facility with easy access for delivery trucks.

An animal's crate, box or pen should be cleaned daily. These should not be washed in the food preparation area. The animal cage cleaning area needs to be set up near a water source and not somewhere that the run off will cause other parts of the facility to flood or contaminate ground being used by humans for accommodation.

Staff health must be protected. Staff and volunteers dealing with animals must have or be provided with:

- properly fitting personal protective clothing
- washing facilities with disinfectant soap
- adequate information and training on health, hygiene and safety
- arrangements for washing personal protective clothing
- tetanus immunisation.

## Requirements for short term accommodation of animals in emergencies

### General

Animals are often stressed during an emergency. Reactions of animals under stress are unpredictable. Some animals will attack, whereas others are inclined to hide. Although many can adjust themselves quickly to their surroundings, every possible effort must be undertaken to avoid unnecessary stress.

Predator and prey species (for example, cats and birds, dogs and cats) should be kept as separate as possible.

Because animals in an emergency shelter are likely to be suffering stress, they should be inspected regularly (ideally every four hours during daylight) to ensure their environment is adequate to maintain their health. It is the responsibility of all staff to report any animal that appears sick, injured or whose behaviour has changed, to the Manager as soon as possible.

The temporary housing provided to animals should protect them from predators. Foxes, snakes and birds of prey are very effective hunters and may pose a threat to small animals that are housed outdoors, and livestock can be vulnerable to dog attack. Containment for public safety reasons (i.e. road safety, dog attack) is also important.

Any housing container must be constructed to adequately contain the animal. It must not cause the animal to damage itself. There must be no sharp projections (such as nails) upon which the animal could hurt itself and the container must be easy to clean.

Each animal contained in the container or pen must have enough space to turn about normally while standing, to stand and sit erect, and to lie in a natural position. Allowance also needs to be made for water containers in the cage. Animals that are being kept in cages that can not be let out for toileting must be provided with enough room to be able to lie in a clean area separate from a litter tray. Animals can be housed together if they normally cohabit, but otherwise should be kept separate. If animals are housed together, there must be adequate room for each animal to move independent of the other.

If animals are being held in a container, then it should be placed off the ground. Cargo pallets are suitable for this purpose.

The container or pen provided for the animal must allow adequate ventilation.

All animals in the shelter should be provided with food in sufficient quantity and nutritional quality to meet the daily requirements for the condition and size of the animals. Food and water containers should be of a suitable type for the animal, and should not easily spill. Animals should have access to water at all times.

Mature males will become upset by the presence of females in heat (oestrus). If sexually entire, mature male and female animals are being housed, they should be kept as far apart as possible.

If animals are accustomed to being tethered, it may be convenient to tether them. Birds, cats and small pets (ie rabbits, mice etc) must not be tethered and no animal should be tethered by the foot. Tethered animals must still be provided with water and shelter from climatic extremes. The animal's collar should be fitted with a swivel to which the tether is attached. The other end of the tether should be firmly attached via a swivel to a centre fixed anchor point.

Details on care of specific groups of animals can be accessed at [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animawelfare](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animawelfare) and [www.vic.gov.au/pets](http://www.vic.gov.au/pets).

## Dogs

Dogs should be walked daily. Sanitation and clean up are essential so poo bags and garbage bins should be readily available.

If dogs that have been declared menacing, dangerous or of a restricted breed are presented at relief centres, they must wear a muzzle and their specified collar, and be restrained on a secure leash until alternate suitable housing can be arranged.

Further information on the care of dogs can be found in the "Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs (Victoria)" and "Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds Revision 1".



## Cats

Cages need to be large enough to allow both a sleeping area, water container and litter tray. Cats should be provided with clean litter daily. Litter trays should be disinfected before being provided to another cat.

Further information on the care of cats can be found in the "Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats (Victoria)" and "Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds Revision 1".

## Wildlife

Wildlife require specialist housing and care. The Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) is the primary Support Agency for the welfare of wildlife. If wildlife is presented at the ERC, advice should be sought from DELWP on an appropriate course of action, regardless of whether it is owned or wild.

Information on the care of wildlife can be found in the "Code of Practice for the Welfare of Wildlife during Rehabilitation" and Jackson, Stephen M, Australian mammals: Biology and Captive Management, 2003.

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## Birds

Birds are particularly susceptible to stress.

Perches must be provided for birds that rest by perching, and the perches must be of sufficient diameter to permit the bird to maintain a firm grip. There must be sufficient perch space for all birds in a container to perch comfortably at the same time.

Bird cages must be covered or kept in a darkened room at night to enable them to get appropriate rest.

Further information on the care of birds can be found in the "Code of Practice for the Housing of Caged Birds" and at [www.vic.gov.au/pets](http://www.vic.gov.au/pets)

## Horses

MEMPCs should identify possible temporary horse agistment properties prior to an emergency. These sites may include a local shelter, horse riding facilities, horse studs or large fenced properties. Written arrangements with the owners of these properties should be made prior to an emergency.

Horses can be adequately housed for a short time on an oval or in a paddock as long as there is adequate fencing, water and food, and the pasture (if any) is fit for horse consumption. Councils may wish to have a source of temporary fencing readily available.

Unfamiliar horses should not be housed adjacent to each other as they may bite or kick each other through fencing. Stallions will require specialist fencing and should be housed separately from other animals.

Further information on the care of horses can be found in the "Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses".



## Livestock

In most large emergency situations, DEDJTR will establish its own Incident Management Team to coordinate field operations relating to agricultural properties affected by a natural disaster.

People transporting large livestock to an ERC or an emergency shelter should be directed to the nearest large, safe venue for holding them. Possible sites might include show grounds, saleyards, empty feedlots, large sheds with adequate ventilation, airplane hangers, livestock auction markets and fenced pasture. If the area does not usually house livestock, council should prepare a suitable area with adequate fencing, shelter, food and water.

Further information on the care of livestock can be found in the Codes of Accepted Farming Practice.

## Small pets

A variety of small pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, mice or reptiles are likely to arrive at relief centres. These will hopefully arrive in cages suitable for housing and confinement.

Further information on the care of small pets can be found in Codes of Practice at [www.vic.gov.au/pets](http://www.vic.gov.au/pets).

## Conditions attached to housing of animals at an emergency animal shelter

It would be reasonable to expect that Councils attached certain conditions to the housing of animals at an ERC or an emergency shelter. Examples of such conditions may include:

- all animals are held at the owner's risk
- owners are required to feed the animals
- water will be provided for the animals
- housing is only short term. Animals that remain at the shelter after three days may be processed as unowned animals
- animals must be confined or on a leash at all times
- animals with special needs will need to be managed by the owner to ensure they do not cause harm or discomfort to other animals or people
- animals must not be moved from their designated crate/pen without notification to the person in charge of the animal shelter.

## Record keeping

Keeping an accurate record of each animal that is presented is extremely important. Good record keeping will facilitate reunions between owners and animals, and it will assist with the coordination of resources and donations.

At least one person should be designated to complete paperwork, photograph and put identification on each animal when it comes in.

There are three classifications of animals that arrive during a disaster; unowned animals (including wildlife and stray animals), owned animals and dead animals. Specific procedures should be developed and followed to document all arriving animals.

A lost and found register will need to be created or data on unowned animals uploaded to a common register if for example a multi municipality register is being used. The importance of this system should be communicated to other shelters and animal businesses that may receive animals directly from the public.

The Domestic Animals Act requires such businesses to hand over unowned animals unless there is an agreement with Council.

Consider what arrangements you may put in place with organisations that may not have an existing agreement and how a lost/found register is best established if an existing system is not sufficient.

See Appendix B Register of Animals Received.

### Processing incoming animals during a disaster

- take the animal to the animal admission area
- secure the animal in a cage or on a leash
- record details of the person presenting the animal
- scan the animal for a microchip and search for any identifiers such as tags or tattoos
- take pictures of the animal and note photo number on the register of animals received
- record breed and sex of the animal
- identify the animal with a neck tag or other appropriate form of ID
- if owned or the owner is known, record details of ownership, alternatively record location where animal found

- prepare a card to stay on the cage of the animal with the ID number of the animal and owner name (if known). Use this card to record notes on the management of the animal, such as medical treatment or when the animal was fed or walked
- have the animal assessed by an appropriately skilled person and processed as necessary
- record details of the departure of all animals from the ERC, including hospitalisation and deaths, on the register of animals received
- transfer information from the animal registration process to a central database as soon as practical
- if appropriate, transfer information on unowned animals to a lost and found register as soon as is practical.

A simplified outline of the process an animal will go through once they are presented at a relief centre or a shelter is represented in Appendix C and Appendix D Relief Centre Operations.

## Costs

It is imperative that owners are aware of and agree to any costs that will be incurred either through veterinary treatment or costs of boarding at an arranged location. If the owner has not agreed to the cost, the owner has no obligation to pay the bill.

## Further Information

DEDJTR can provide further advice on requirements for evacuated animals for control and supporting agencies.

DEDJTR Animal Health Officer – Municipal Emergency Management Plan

DEDJTR Customer Service Centre – 136 186

Victorian Bushfire Information Line - 1800 240 667 (only in event of a bush fire)

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies)

Codes of practice can be found at [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare)



## Appendix C Relief centre operations: small animals

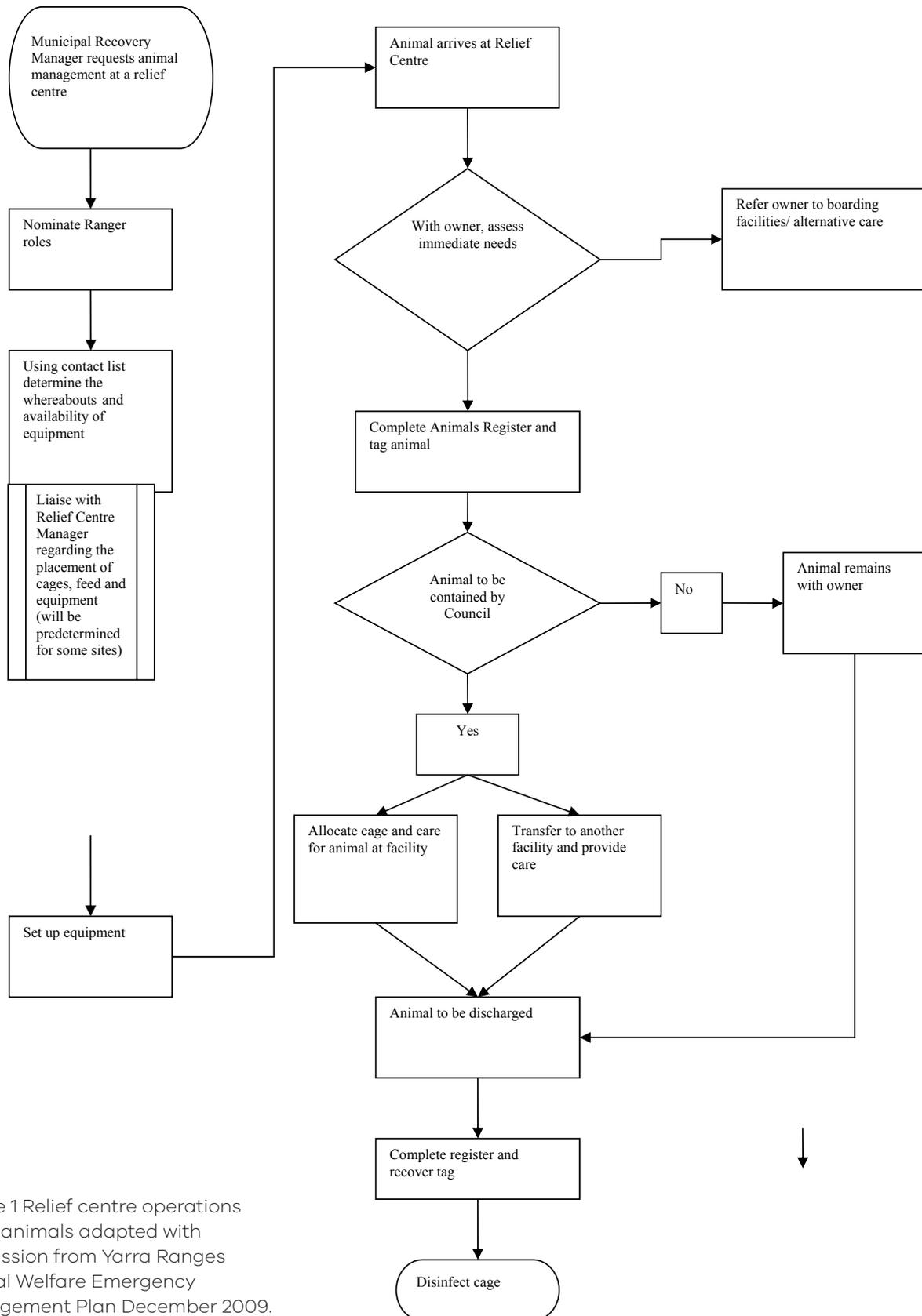


Figure 1 Relief centre operations small animals adapted with permission from Yarra Ranges Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan December 2009.

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## Appendix D Relief centre operations: large animals

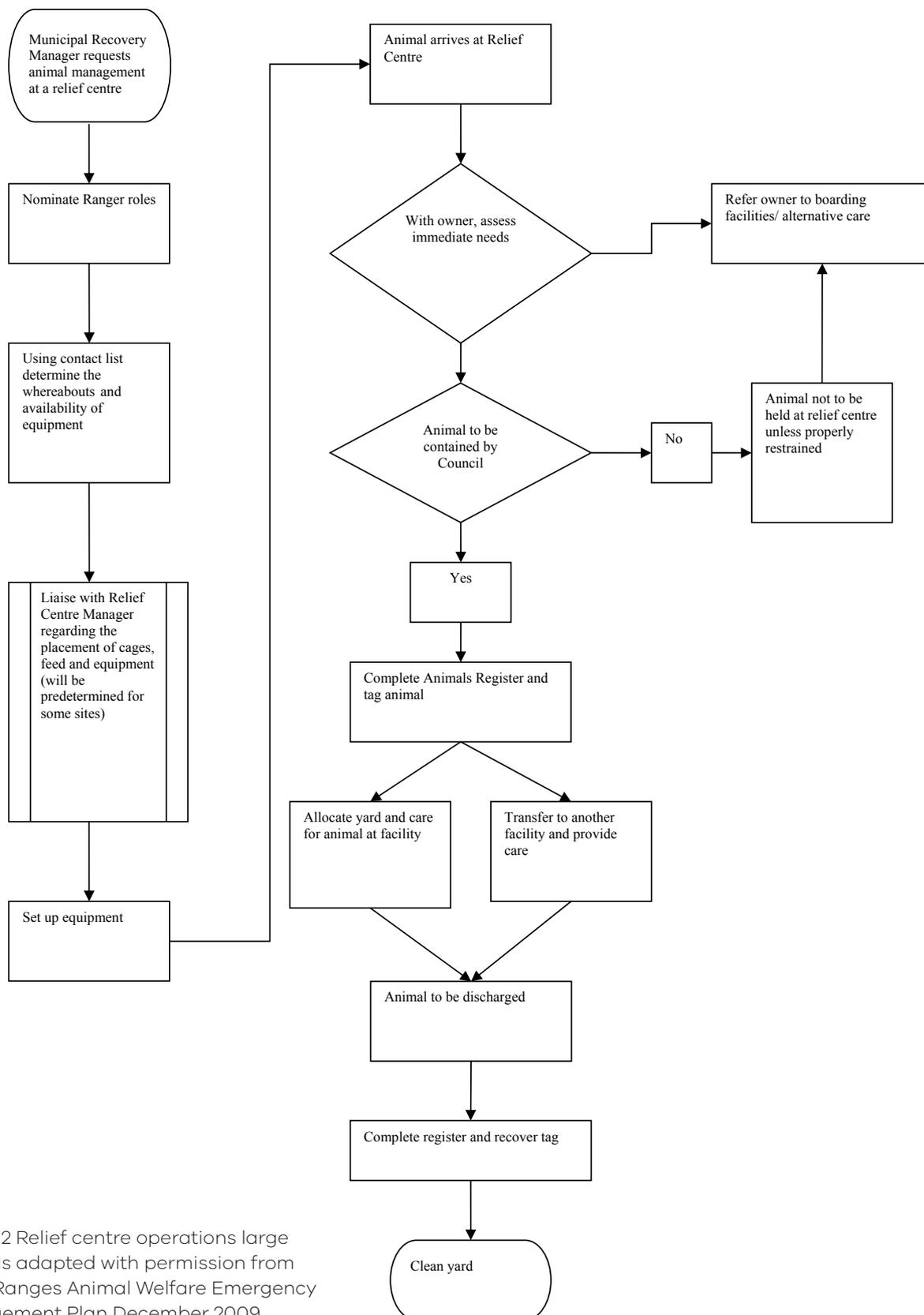


Figure 2 Relief centre operations large animals adapted with permission from Yarra Ranges Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan December 2009.

## Appendix E Relief centre operations: stray animals

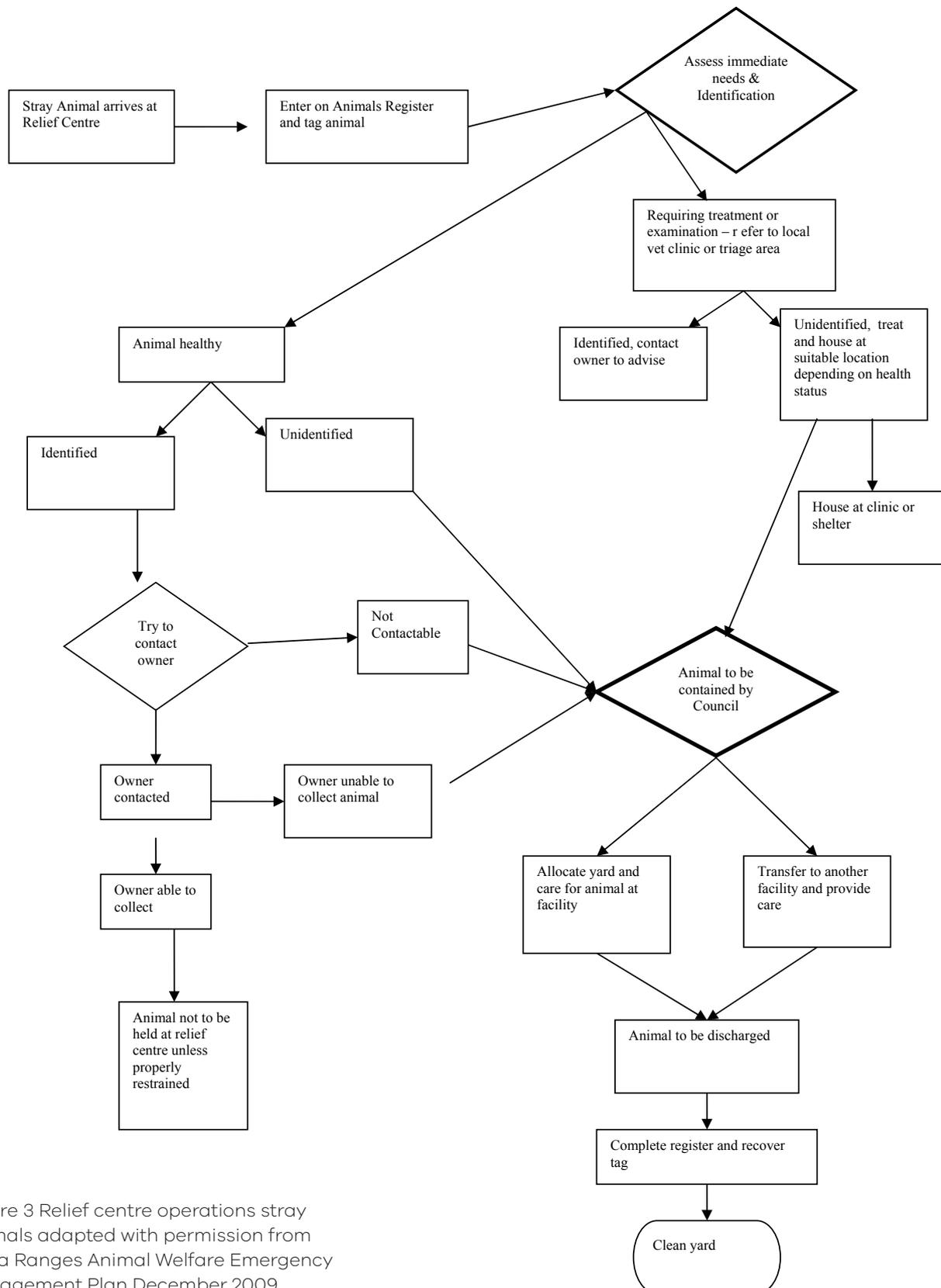


Figure 3 Relief centre operations stray animals adapted with permission from Yarra Ranges Animal Welfare Emergency Management Plan December 2009.

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