

Masterton Dog Policy



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Horopaki | Context

Masterton has over 6,000 registered dogs. Many people consider their dog(s) to be part of the whānau, and there are various health, social, and physical benefits of having a dog as a companion animal. It is also important to have a range of public places that are accessible to dogs and their owners for exercise and recreation.

Masterton District Council (MDC) recognises that the majority of dog owners in Masterton are responsible and that most interaction between dogs and the public is positive. However, we also need to acknowledge the reality that dogs can cause problems (such as barking), can cause injuries (such as bites, which can be particularly harmful and traumatic to children) and can even cause death (such as to protected wildlife or other animals).

Requirement to have a Dog Policy

The Masterton Dog Policy (the Policy) is a mandatory Policy. MDC must adopt a Dog Policy under Section 10 of the Dog Control Act 1996 (the Act).

Pūtake | Purpose

The purpose of the Policy is to:

- minimise danger, distress, and nuisance to the community generally;
- minimise the inherent danger in allowing dogs to have uncontrolled access to public places that are frequented by children, whether or not the children are accompanied by adults;
- enable, to the extent that is practicable, the public (including families) to use streets and public amenities without fear of attack or intimidation by dogs; and
- meet the exercise and recreational needs of dogs and their owners.

Whānuitanga | Scope

This Policy applies in respect of all dogs that reside in or visit the Masterton district.

What the Policy must cover

Under section 10(3) of the Act, the Policy must:

- explain which dog control bylaws are in place (or will be made) under section 20 of the Act;
- identify all the public places and areas:
 - where dogs are prohibited, either at all times or just at certain times;
 - where dogs (except working dogs) must be on a leash; and
 - where dogs are allowed off-leash.
- identify any places in those leash-control areas where dogs are allowed to run freely (exercise areas) without a leash;
- state if dogs that the Council has classified as menacing (under section 33A or 33C) must be neutered. The policy must also state if the neutering requirement applies to all dogs, and if not, what matters the Council considers in requiring a particular dog to be neutered;

- state if dogs that another council has classified as menacing (under section 33A or 33C) must be neutered when they register with MDC. The policy must also state if the neutering requirement applies to all dogs, and if not, what matters the Council considers in requiring a particular dog to be neutered; and
- include any other details the Council thinks are important. This may include:
 - Registration fees or proposed fees
 - Owner education programmes
 - Dog obedience courses
 - How owners are classified
 - When owners can be disqualified
 - When infringement notices (fines) can be issued.

Whai wāhi ki ngā Whaitua Tūmatanui | Access to Public Places

MDC recognises the importance of meeting the recreational and exercise needs of dogs and their owners, and aims to provide opportunities for dogs and their owners to access public places throughout the Masterton district. However, dogs' access to public areas within the Masterton district will be restricted where it is considered necessary in order to minimise danger, distress and nuisance to the community, and to protect children and wildlife.

MDC designates areas throughout the district as on-leash, off-leash or prohibited. Dog owners are responsible for ensuring that their dogs abide by dog access rules.

In areas designated as off-leash, dogs can be exercised in these areas as long as they remain under control.

Masterton also has a designated dog exercise area on Colombo Road (known as Barkley Park) that is fully fenced with dog play equipment available. Dogs must be kept under control in this area at all times.

Prohibited area rules do not apply to disability assist dogs or other working dogs that are working.

Refer to the Schedules of the Control of Dogs Bylaw for maps of areas designated as on-leash, off-leash, and prohibited.

Classification of Areas Under Other Legislation

Access of dogs to specified areas not under the control of MDC may be controlled under other legislation, including the Conservation Act 1987 and Reserves Act 1977. Refer to www.doc.govt.nz for areas in the Masterton district.

No Using Motor Vehicles to Exercise Dogs

A dog must not be allowed to run or walk behind, beside or in front of a moving motor vehicle travelling in a public place as the dog owner cannot ensure the dog is under direct control. This does not apply to working dogs.

A motor vehicle as defined by the [section 2 of the Land Transport Act 1998](#) (the LTA) generally includes any vehicle drawn or propelled by mechanical power – such as cars, trucks, motorcycles, buses, and mopeds.

Mobility devices and vehicles declared as mobility devices under section [168A](#) of the LTA are not motor vehicles.

As per guidance from the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, pedestrian-controlled machines (e.g. e-bikes and standard bicycles, skateboards, and in-line skates), and low powered vehicles (e.g. electric scooters or e-scooters) are not considered motor vehicles.

Users of pedestrian-controlled machines, low powered vehicles or other devices other than motor vehicles must still keep their dog under control at all times.

Rēhita | Registration

Registration Fees

Dog registration fees are set by Council resolution in accordance with the Revenue and Financing Policy and are set as part of the Council's Fees and Charges, adopted alongside the Annual Plan or Long-Term Plan.

A discounted dog registration fee is available for:

- neutered dogs;
- rural dogs; and
- owners who hold Responsible Dog Owner status.

No registration fee is applied for disability assist dogs.

Responsible Dog Owner Status

MDC encourages responsible dog ownership by providing a discounted registration fee to owners that meet the following criteria:

- All dog registration fees have been paid by 31 July for the previous two years (or, if newly registered in Masterton, able to provide evidence that registration was paid on time to the previous territorial authority). If a person who holds Responsible Dog Owner (RDO) status with MDC acquires a new dog, the RDO status will be maintained provided all other criteria are met.
- All dogs owned have been neutered (an exception may be made for certified breeders or if a veterinarian certificate is presented certifying that for reasons specified, the dog will not be in a fit condition to be neutered).
- All dogs owned are microchipped (if the dog was registered for the first time after 1 July 2006). This does not apply to working dogs.
- All dogs owned are kept securely on the owner's property. Access to at least one door of the dwelling must be available without encountering the dog.
- Dog shelters on the property must comply with the requirements of the MDC Control of Dogs Bylaw.
- The owner has not been the subject of a substantiated complaint or received an infringement or been convicted of an offence under the Act in the previous two years in respect of the dogs owned.
- The owner has not had any dogs impounded in the previous two years.

Owners of dogs that are classified as menacing by deed or are dangerous dogs are not eligible for RDO status.

RDO status is only available to dog owners residing within the urban area of Masterton.

Applications for RDO status will be accepted any time during the year but any application received after 31 March will not receive a discount until the following registration year (e.g. an application received on 1 April 2025 will not receive a discount until the 2026/27 registration year). A one-off application fee will be payable.

If a dog owner moves within the Masterton District, it is the owner's responsibility to notify MDC of their updated address. An inspection will be completed to satisfy requirements for RDO status on their new property.

If a dog owner moves to the Masterton district, and is able to provide evidence that they currently hold RDO status (or equivalent) with another territorial authority, this will be recognised by MDC and no further application fee will be payable.

RDO status may be revoked if any criteria are not maintained.

Whakatō Mōtete Tāhiko | Microchipping

All dogs (except working dogs) registered after 1 July 2006 must be microchipped. If the dog is not microchipped by MDC, a microchip certificate is to be provided to MDC within 30 days of registration.

All impounded dogs will be microchipped before being released.

Te Here ki te Nama o ngā Kurī e Whakaaetia ana | Limitation on the Number of Dogs Allowed

The number of dogs allowed is limited as follows:

- Any person wishing to keep three or more dogs on any premises as provided in the Control of Dogs Bylaw must make written application to the Council in such form as may be required by the Council for a permit and must give to the Council such information in respect of the application as the Council may require.
- A permit may be issued upon or subject to such terms, conditions, or restrictions as the Council may consider necessary and any breach of such terms, conditions or restrictions is a breach of the Control of Dogs Bylaw.
- A permit will not be issued to any dog owner with two or more menacing dogs, regardless of whether the dog is menacing by deed or by breed.
- A fee will apply and will be set every year by the Council in the Annual or Long-Term Plan.
- The fee for such permit must be payable in addition to and separate from the dog control fees payable under the Dog Control Act 1996.

Mātauranga | Education

MDC encourages dog owners to understand their responsibilities and be responsible owners. MDC acknowledges the importance and effectiveness of education for dog owners and the wider community as a method of achieving responsible dog ownership and in minimising dog-related issues.

MDC will support education through training programmes, providing and promoting educational material, and undertaking educational visits to schools and other groups when requested.

Kurī Whakahakahaka | Menacing Dogs

MDC will classify a dog as menacing by breed, type, or deed, in accordance with section 33A of the Act.

Notice of Classification

Once a dog is classified as menacing, the owner of a menacing dog will be notified in writing of the classification. Notification must include the classification's effect and the owner's right to object.

If a dog has been classified as menacing by another territorial authority, the dog will continue to be classified as menacing when it registers with MDC and the requirements below will apply.

Neutering of Menacing Dogs

Within one month of the menacing classification notice being issued, the dog owner must, at their expense, provide a certificate issued by a veterinarian that the dog:

- has been neutered; or
- is unfit to be neutered by the specified date.

If the appropriate certificate is not provided within one month, the dog will be impounded and will only be released to the veterinarian appointment to be neutered, as arranged by the owner.

Menacing Dogs in Public

In accordance with section 33E of the Act, a dog classified as menacing must be muzzled when in public places and when on private ways (unless confined within a cage or vehicle).

Removal of Menacing Dog Classification

If a dog has been classified under section 33A of the Act as menacing by deed, the owner may request the classification be reviewed for removal after a 24-month period if the owner:

- provides evidence of an MDC-approved dog behavioural assessment report, at the owner's expense; and
- has not obtained any infringements or committed an offence under the Act in relation to the dog within the preceding 24-month period;
- has complied with all obligations under the menacing dog classification.

Kurī Mōrearea | Dangerous Dogs

MDC will classify a dog as dangerous in accordance with section 31 of the Act. The owner of a dog classified as dangerous must:

- neuter the dog;
- ensure the dog is muzzled and controlled on a leash in public places and private ways (except when confined in a vehicle or cage);
- ensure the dog is kept securely fenced on the owner's property. Access to at least one door of the dwelling must be available without encountering the dog; and

- not sell or give the dog to any other person without the written consent of the Council in whose district the dog is to be kept.

MDC may seize a dangerous dog if any of the requirements above are not met. The dog may be impounded until there are reasonable grounds to believe that the dog's owner has demonstrated a willingness to meet their obligations. Costs associated with impounding of the dog will be charged to the owner.

Where any dog is classified as a dangerous dog, MDC must immediately give notice in the prescribed form under the Act of that classification to the owner.

Where any dog is classified as a dangerous dog, the owner may, within 14 days of the receipt of notice of that classification, object to the classification in writing to MDC, and will be entitled to be heard in support of his or her objection.

Whakaūnga | Enforcement

Barking Dogs

All complaints received about barking dogs will be investigated. Where a dog is assessed as creating a nuisance through persistent and loud barking or howling, MDC may issue the owner a notice requiring them to take reasonable steps to mitigate the nuisance. This may include removing the dog from the property.

If, following monitoring and investigation by MDC, the dog's barking is determined not to meet the threshold for nuisance, the complaint will not proceed further. The complainant will be advised that the barking does not meet the legal threshold for nuisance and provided with an explanation of the assessment.

Roaming Dogs

Any dog found that is not under control in a public place or on a private property without the consent of the property owner may be impounded.

Impounding

If a dog is impounded, MDC will attempt to identify and contact the owner. MDC will keep the dog for seven days. All registration and impounding fees must be paid before the dog is released.

If a dog is not claimed after this period, all reasonable steps will be taken to rehome the dog (unless the dog's temperament is assessed as not suitable for rehoming or the dog is menacing by deed or breed).

Impounded dogs will be microchipped and registered before being released.

If the dog cannot be rehomed after reasonable attempts to do so, it may be euthanised.

Dogs should only be surrendered to the pound as a last resort. Surrendered dogs will only be accepted at MDC's discretion and fees will apply. Fees may be waived in exceptional circumstances at MDC's discretion in accordance with the MDC Delegations Register. Considerations include:

- the history of the dog and the owner;
- the risk the dog poses to the community;
- other actions available to or taken by the owner to rehome or otherwise dispose of the dog; and

- any other matter that may be relevant.

A dog owner may only have the fee waived on one occasion.

In the event a dog is euthanised as a result of its surrender to MDC, the owner may not claim a refund of their dog registration fee.

Issuing of Infringement Notices and Prosecution

Any person who commits an infringement offence under the section 65 of the Act may be issued with an infringement notice. Infringement fees are applied as per Schedule 1 of the Act.

Where any person is alleged to have committed an infringement offence, that person may either be proceeded against by filing a charging document under section 14 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011 or be served with an infringement notice as provided in section 66 of the Act.

Disqualification of Owners

Any person convicted of an offence under the Act (or other Acts specified in section 25 of the Act) or who commits three infringement offences (not related to a single incident) within a 24 month period will be immediately disqualified from owning a dog. It is not necessary for an owner to be classified as a probationary owner before being disqualified.

A disqualified owner must dispose of any dogs they own in a manner that does not constitute an offence against the Act or any other legislation. Disqualified owners cannot own any more dogs for a period specified by MDC not exceeding 5 years.

A disqualified owner has the right under section 26 of the Act to object to the disqualification and have their objection heard by Council.

Disqualification does not apply if MDC is satisfied that the circumstances of the offence or offences are such that:

- disqualification is not warranted; or
- MDC will instead classify the person as a probationary owner under section 21.

Probationary Owners

Any person convicted of an offence under the Act (or other Acts specified in section 21 of the Act) or who commits three infringement offences (not related to a single incident) within a 24 month period may be classified as a probationary owner instead of disqualified at MDC's discretion.

The probation period is 24 months. A probationary owner:

- is not allowed to own any dogs other than those that were owned at the time the classification was made;
- must dispose of any unregistered dogs in a manner that does not constitute an offence against the Act or any other legislation; and
- is liable for 150% of the usual dog registration fee.

MDC may also require a probationary owner to undertake, at the owner's expense, a dog owner education programme and/or dog obedience course.

A probationary owner has the right to object to the classification and have their objection heard by Council.

Te Āhua, te Kōkiri hoki o ngā Ture ā-Rohe | Nature and Application of Bylaws

In accordance with the Act, MDC has a bylaw that gives effect to this Policy. The Control of Dogs Bylaw specifies MDC's requirements under section 20 of the Act.

Kuputaka | Definitions

Dangerous Dog: MDC must classify a dog as a dangerous dog if:

- the owner of the dog has been convicted of an offence in relation to the dog under section 57A(2) of the Act;
- MDC has, on the basis of sworn evidence attesting to aggressive behaviour by the dog on 1 or more occasions, reasonable grounds to believe that the dog constitutes a threat to the safety of any person, stock, poultry, domestic animal, or protected wildlife; or
- the owner of the dog admits in writing that the dog constitutes a threat to the safety of any person, stock, poultry, domestic animal, or protected wildlife.

Neutered Dog: A dog that has been spayed or castrated but does not include a dog that has been vasectomised. May be colloquially referred to as "desexed" or "fixed".

Disability Assist Dog: means a dog certified by one of the organisations listed in [Schedule 5](#) of the Act as being a dog that has been trained (or is being trained) to assist a person with a disability.

Menacing Dog by Breed: A dog considered to pose a threat to any person, stock, poultry, domestic animal or protected wildlife because of any characteristics typically associated with the dog's breed or type. Under [section 33C](#) of the Act, MDC must classify a dog as menacing if there are reasonable grounds to believe the dog belongs wholly or predominantly to one or more breeds or types set out in [Schedule 4](#) of the Act.

Menacing Dog by Deed: A dog considered to pose a threat to any person, stock, poultry, domestic animal or protected wildlife due to observed or reported behaviour of the dog.

Motor Vehicle: Has the meaning given by [section 2](#) of the Land Transport Act 1998 meaning, a vehicle drawn or propelled by mechanical power, and includes a trailer but does not include:

- a vehicle running on rails;
- a trailer (other than a trailer designed solely for the carriage of goods) that is designed and used exclusively as part of the armament of the New Zealand Defence Force;
- a trailer running on one wheel and designed exclusively as a speed measuring device or for testing the wear of vehicle tyres;
- a vehicle designed for amusement purposes and used exclusively within a place of recreation, amusement, or entertainment to which the public does not have access with motor vehicles;
- a pedestrian-controlled machine;

- a vehicle that the Agency has declared under section 168A of the Land Transport Act 1998 is not a motor vehicle; or
- a mobility device.

Nuisance: May include barking, fouling or roaming.

Working Dog: A disability assist dog, or any dog set out in [section 2](#) of the Act as a Working Dog.

Urban Area: Any area zoned residential, commercial or industrial in the Wairarapa Combined District Plan, unless otherwise stated.

Owner: in relation to any dog, means every person who:

- a) owns the dog; or
- b) has the dog in his or her possession, whether the dog is at large or in confinement, otherwise than for a period not exceeding 72 hours for the purpose of preventing the dog causing injury, damage, or distress, or for the sole purpose of restoring a lost dog to its owner; or
- c) the parent or guardian of a person under the age of 16 years who:
 - i) is the owner of the dog pursuant to paragraph (a) or paragraph (b) of this definition; and
 - ii) is a member of the parent or guardian's household living with and dependent on the parent or guardian;

but does not include any person who has seized or taken custody of the dog under the Dog Control Act 1996 or any other Act.

Arotake Kaupapa Here | Review of Policy

This Policy will be reviewed every five years.

Ngā Tohutoro | References

[Conservation Act 1987](#)

[Dog Control Act 1996](#)

[Reserves Act 1977](#)

[Local Government Act 2002](#)

Tuhinga Hāngai | Related Documents

Masterton District Council Control of Dogs Bylaw (2025)

Whakahaere Kōnae | Version Control

Version	Date	Summary of Amendments	Approved By
1	2004	New policy	Masterton District Council
2	28/3/2018	Full review of policy including amendments to designated areas and the addition of responsible dog owner status.	Masterton District Council
3	14/05/2025	Full review of policy including amendments to: - designated areas (Taranaki Street, Castlepoint Reef Area, Motuwaireka Stream mouth at Riversdale Beach) - requirement to Neuter an Uncontrolled Dog - exercising Dogs Alongside Moving Vehicles Clarification - process for Removing Menacing Dog Classification - discretion for Council to Waive Surrendering Fees - responsible Dog Owner Status Clarity and Exemptions for Neutering.	Masterton District Council
3.1	25/06/2025	Update to clarify limitation on menacing dogs.	Masterton District Council