



Cats United WA

Feedback on the Cat Act 2011

As the newest cat association in Western Australia, Cats United WA would like to provide feedback from our member's perspective as stakeholders of the Cat Act 2011 in relation to how the Act is working and whether it has been effective. We would also like to highlight some areas where it could be improved.

As noted in the consultation paper the main purposes of the Cat Act 2011 (Cat Act) are to:

- encourage responsible pet ownership
- safely return lost animals to their homes
- keep the community and other animals safe
- reduce the number of animals admitted to pounds and shelters
- reduce the proportion of animals that are euthanised

These are all great objectives and we fully support the Government in trying to achieve these aims but it is our opinion that almost every one of them has achieved limited success. We also feel that the amount of cost and restriction placed on our members and the hobby we love has been an unwanted side effect of the Act.

Encourage responsible pet ownership

We don't see much evidence of the Act achieving this goal. As members of the cat fancy, cat breeders and cat owners we have a lot of contact with pet cat owners. Our members desex and microchip their kittens for their new owners and strongly encourage (and often contractually require) that the cat or kitten be kept as an inside only pet. We encourage responsible pet ownership but we don't see that the Act is doing this. We don't feel pet owners know much more about the Act than you have to pay a fee, give the council a copy of your cats desexing certificate and chip info.

What is responsible pet ownership? What does it look like? Is it keeping your cat inside or enclosed, giving it a happy and healthy environment? Is it about feeding it properly or making a commitment of fifteen to twenty years to its care? Or is it just chip, snip and pay the council fee.

Safely return lost animals to their homes

Whilst the cat act requires microchipping prior to sale or transfer of ownership we see little promotion of this. Our members are required by our association to do so with their cats and kittens and we know our vets encourage people to chip their pets but we don't see any enforcement to follow this up. There are great websites for checking chip information but pet owners are not educated that this service is available and we have seen no public awareness campaigns about the benefits of microchipping pets. We often hear stories of owner details being supplied at the time of chipping but inconsistent processes to register the chips on the various databases means the data is not recorded.

One of our members found that two litters of kittens chipped by a previous vet she used were not recorded despite details being supplied. She found out when one of the adult cats went missing from its home aged five. It was found but had the chip been scanned it would have no record.

Keep the community and other animals safe

Our breeding members adopt their kittens into inside only homes. It is actually now the preferred way that people tend to keep their cats. It is a very old school thing to have a moggie cat that roams, isn't desexed and kills wildlife. So we believe that cat owners are already heading in that direction with or without impact from the cat act. We feel the issues around cats and wildlife stem from the unowned or semi owned cat populations. The Act does nothing about this type of cat. It does not provide any assistance for groups that trap and rehabilitate then rehome such cats. It does not provide cheap desexing programs or fund trap, neuter and release programs. Money is being generated for local government by the Act but we are not seeing it spent on the objectives of the act.

Armadale Community Rescue Group runs a "Chip and Snip" Op Shop that funds a cheap desexing program for low income earners. It operates two doors down from the op shop that funds their shelter operations. They see the need to desex cats as crucial to reducing the amount of cats they have to rehome. It is very proactive but should the fees generated from the Act not be used in a similar proactive manner?

Reduce the number of animals admitted to pounds and shelters

It is a bit of a myth that people who don't desex their pet cats are responsible for the large number of unwanted cats in shelters. Cats that are not desexed make awful pets. The boys spray urine on everything and the girls cry and scream out when they are in heat. It is a hard task for breeders to manage entire (undesexed) cats. The average pet owner will desex their cats if they are not already desexed before they buy them. Even cats and kittens that do end up in shelters are now sold desexed or with desexing included in the price. So where is the flood of unwanted shelter cats coming from? Again it is our opinion that it is unowned and semi owned cats that are the issue. The cats that hang around the bin at the local KFC, a mum or two and a bunch of kittens. We would love to see funds raised by the cat act helping these cats and stopping them from having kittens (who have kittens).

Reduce the proportion of animals that are euthanised

Our association has not seen any data on the change in the amount of cats being euthanised since the Act came into effect. To us this is one of the main objectives of the act. To stop unwanted cats being killed for no reason other than they can't find a suitable home. We believed that if the Act could reduce the number of non-registered breeding cats either in back yard breeding situations, in low income areas where the cost of desexing is a barrier, in educating vets about the benefits of early desexing and perhaps in funding rescue groups so that they can desex every pet they rehome without struggling to pay huge vet bills then maybe it could make a difference. We are not seeing information telling us that the rate of euthanasia of unwanted cats in WA has come down. Our members would like to know where the funds they have to pay annually to continue with their hobby (and the fees paid by the owners of the kittens they breed) are going as this is a key area we would like to see change.

So having provided feedback on how we feel the Act is working and if it has been effective we would like to highlight some further areas where it can be improved

Cost of Registering Breeding Cats

We are a small group of enthusiasts. Some, but not all, of our members breed cats as part of our hobby. Currently the fees we have to pay to local government in order to keep the cats that are part of our hobby can total in the thousands of dollars per year. Our hobby is not profitable. It is

expensive. When you add in the cost of travelling to compete, show entry fees, food bills, vet bills, the cost of adequate shelters, the list goes on. It is far from lucrative. It is a hobby. A pastime.

It seems unfair that our members have to pay such large fees per cat per year when other people enjoying other hobbies don't. It is also unfair that we have to pay these fees but see nothing in return. We don't get any benefit other than permission to continue our hobby. If we could see the funds we pay being used to help reduce euthanasia rates and to help unwanted cats and kittens find homes this would be one thing but we don't see anything being done with the fees.

The cost has also become a barrier to breeders doing the right thing. There are many registered breeders who have not registered with their councils and the annual cost is likely a big part of this. If the fee was even the same as a desexed cat it would be something. Reducing fees could lead to better compliance

Cats are not like dogs. We cannot use artificial insemination and frozen sperm to breed. We have to keep a certain number of cats to breed successfully and with good health. This adds up to a lot more annual fees. It only takes nine breeding cats and a breeder's fee to equal \$1000+ per year depending on what council you are in. Many of us pay more. This is a lot to pay a council annually just to participate in a hobby.

Consistency across councils

Different councils in WA deal with breeders differently. This can be from the way they charge fees, council visits, turning a blind eye or looking at a breeder in detail. The Act is the Act. A breeder here should be treated the same as a breeder there. We don't want easy going councils being more strict though. We would like to see that there is a shift in focus from worrying about us to worrying about where the unwanted or nuisance cat population is actually coming from.

Ability to add bodies to the act

We have requested that Cats United WA be added to the list of prescribed associations in the act. We are a legitimate body affiliated with an Australian governing body in the same way the current named associations are. We put in a request formally over six months ago and since then we have been told several times we have to wait for the minister to approve us. Some local councils have recognised our association and registered our member's cats (thank goodness). We know the act allows for them to do so but if we were named we could give our members the assurance that they would automatically be recognised by their council as a registered breeder. If there is a list of approved bodies in the act there should be a mechanism for being added (or removed) from the list.

And finally our hobby is a fun one. We love our cats and through them we have made lots of friendships and formed a community. It is one that helps each other, is inclusive and is doing our best in our own way to promote responsible pet ownership in relation to cats and kittens.

We would like to be included in any updates and we would like to know if there is any way we can help contribute further as we all try to make the Act do the things it was originally intended to do.


On behalf of Cats United WA

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