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**Sent:** [REDACTED]

**To:** [REDACTED]

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Dear Minister Templeman and Mr Hancock,

In relation to your **review of WA's Cat Act, and the recent survey of WA residents**, please find attached **the Australian Cat Action Plan** which contains **best strategies** for managing cats, to develop consistency for effective cat management and welfare across all states and territories in Australia.

The Australian Cat Action Plan specifically has **sections for State and Local Governments** and all other stakeholders, to make it easy to implement. Because it was developed and refined over 4 years with **wide consultation with the AVA, breeders, pet industry, wildlife conservationists, researchers, and other animal welfare groups, based on success in Australian and overseas, it should save you a lot of time.**

The plan was forwarded to you and all other state governments in October 2017. You responded **by letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2017 (Your Ref: 66-03191)** regarding which of the strategies in the plan were already implemented or planned.

I look forward to hearing what strategies you are planning and would be happy to meet with you or your government staff if you would like any assistance.

One of the key strategies explained in the Plan is government-funded targeted Cooperative Desexing Programs, which are the most effective and economical way to prevent unwanted domestic (owned, semi-owned and unowned) cats in urban and suburban environments. Sharing the desexing costs reduces the number of cats needing to be collected, held and killed or rehomed, which causes much unnecessary stress and harm, and is far more expensive.

Our National Desexing Network currently runs Cooperative Desexing Programs for Councils in Qld, NSW and SA, to prevent abandoned animals.

We would be happy to develop and manage such programs in WA for local Councils or State Government.

Many thanks for your initiatives so far to improve cat management and welfare in WA.

We look forward to hearing from you about implementation of the Australian Cat Action Plan to progress effective and ethical cat management in WA.

*Kind regards*

*Joy*

[REDACTED]



**GETTING 2 ZERO**

# AUSTRALIAN CAT ACTION PLAN

**A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

**For government and non-government sectors  
to improve the management and welfare of domestic cats**

**June 2018**



## Contents

Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction.....	7
Background.....	7
Aim of the Australian Cat Action Plan.....	8
The reason for the focus on cats.....	8
Definitions .....	9
What are the cat issues in Australia? .....	10
1. Overbreeding.....	11
2. Insufficient promotion and availability of desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age .....	11
3. Irresponsible breeding and selling of undesexed kittens.....	12
4. Low owner reclaim rates .....	12
5. Changing lifestyles and insufficient pet-friendly accommodation.....	13
6. Overcrowded pounds and shelters .....	13
7. Owned cats allowed to roam .....	13
8. Balancing cats and native wildlife .....	14
9. Insufficient stakeholder awareness and coordination .....	14
Current numbers of stray and surrendered cats.....	14
Successful reductions in abandoned and euthanized cats and kittens.....	14
What can be done? An Overview.....	16
Strategies.....	19
Strategy 1 Increase desexing of owned, semi-owned and unowned cats.....	19
Strategy 2 Increase pre-pubertal desexing .....	21
Strategy 3 Require desexing of kittens prior to sale or transfer by all breeders and sellers.....	21
Strategy 4 Improve identification to increase reclaim rate .....	22
Strategy 5 Increase cat-friendly rental and strata-title accommodation.....	22
Strategy 6 Improve rehoming .....	22
Strategy 7 Support owners to manage and keep their cats.....	23
Strategy 8 Support semi-owners to prevent undesexed strays.....	24
Strategy 9 Assess impacts of cats and pilot Trap Desex Adopt Return & Support programs.....	24
Strategy 10 Increase use of welfare-friendly cat containment and anti-predation devices.....	26
Strategy 11 Involve all stakeholders in solutions .....	27
Strategy 12 Whole city/shire statistics to involve communities in solutions .....	27

How to implement the plan .....	28
1. Animal pounds, shelters and rescue groups .....	28
2. Breeders .....	30
3. Cat owners.....	31
4. Community members.....	32
5. Desexing organisations.....	32
6. Journalists.....	33
7. Local government.....	33
8. Property owners, real estate professionals, body corporates and aged care facilities .....	39
9. Sellers of Cats .....	40
10. State Government .....	40
11. Veterinarians .....	43
12. Veterinary schools.....	45
13. Volunteers in pounds/shelters/rescue groups.....	45
14. Wildlife and conservation groups.....	46
Conclusion .....	46
Appendix 1 - Current legislation and review activity .....	47
Appendix 2 - Summary of stakeholders & strategies for G2Z Australian Cat Action Plan .....	52
References.....	54

*The Australian Cat Action Plan has been developed by Getting 2 Zero (G2Z) in consultation with national stakeholder groups.*

*Getting to Zero (G2Z)® is a national program, developed and delivered by Animal Welfare League of Queensland. It assists communities across Australia to increase responsibility for companion animals and prevent and reduce abandonment and euthanasia of companion animals. The Getting to Zero Model details the principles, structures and strategies that have been successful in achieving better management and reducing killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs in whole communities.*

*G2Z works respectfully with state governments, councils, animal shelter groups, veterinarians, breeders, pet industry, and the general public, to provide practical support to put into place successful policies, strategies and practices that contribute to Getting 2 Zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and dogs. Communication with stakeholders and the community is achieved through a website ([www.g2z.org.au](http://www.g2z.org.au)), national bi-annual G2Z Summits and direct consultation.*

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## Executive Summary

The Australian Cat Action Plan (ACAP) proposes a way forward to achieve national consistency in effective strategies for the management and welfare of domestic cats, i.e. owned, semi-owned and community cats (with some dependence on humans) living in cities/towns in Australia. (Management of feral cats, i.e. unowned unsocialised wild cats with no relationship or dependence on humans living in rural and remote areas, will be addressed in a separate process.)

Following a Discussion Paper in 2013/14, a national meeting of key stakeholder organisations in August 2014, and further consultation in 2015 - 17, the ACAP includes key actions to help reduce the numbers of unwanted and euthanized domestic cats in Australia.

The key actions recommended (in no particular order of priority) include:

### Low cost imperatives

1. Increase desexing of both owned and unowned animals:
  - a. Well-publicised targeted cooperative desexing subsidy programs funded by local governments for owned, semi-owned and community cats, to apply to people on low incomes and/or caring for multiple cats.
  - b. All animals rehomed from a shelter/pound/rescue group desexed and microchipped prior to sale or transfer from 8 weeks of age, unless for medical exemptions (with follow-up desexing as soon as medically possible).
2. Increase pre-pubertal desexing:
  - a. All veterinary clinics promote desexing of owned cats before puberty, with desexing appointment made at time of immunisation bookings, followed by a text/phone call reminder, unless the kitten has already been desexed by the breeder.
  - b. Shelter clinics (or contracted vets) desex all kittens from 8 weeks or 1kg in weight, and cats, prior to rehoming from pounds/shelters/rescue groups.
  - c. Veterinary training in desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age by every veterinary school, and for practicing veterinarians.
3. All kittens required to be desexed (unless being sold to a permitted breeder), prior to sale or transfer by anyone who breeds or sells kittens, with recommended desexing age from 8 weeks, as well as being socialised, vaccinated and microchipped.

This can be incorporated into a Breeder and Seller Permit System for improved welfare and management of cats and identification of responsible breeders. To achieve consistency across cities and states, consensus needs to be reached on:

- a. Inspection process
  - b. Cost for breeders
  - c. Inclusion of all who breed or intend to breed; or all entire cats
  - d. Measuring effectiveness for welfare & management
4. Breeders' details required to be recorded on a government-authorised microchip database; and sellers (who may be the breeders) required to record new owners' details on microchip database at time of sale/transfer.

5. Greater availability of pet-friendly accommodation for responsible owners through anti-discrimination legislation; new estates to include cat safe fencing options; progressing availability of property owner insurance to cover pets; and promotion of best practice models for cats in aged care facilities.
6. Improved rehoming of desexed cats/kittens through adoption drives, expanded foster care networks, and effective management of intake and flow of animals, with pet shops rehoming desexed and microchipped pound/shelter/rescue animals.
7. Owner support policies by local government to prevent animals wandering, being surrendered or abandoned
8. Semi-owners encouraged to find owners where possible; or take ownership and desex cats.
9. Community carers supported to desex, adopt or return-and-support colony cats to reduce numbers in urban areas where native species are not endangered.
10. Containment measures and anti-predation strategies/devices promoted to keep cats and wildlife safe.
11. Assessment of impacts of cats and other human interventions e.g. loss of habitat which affect wildlife in specific areas to develop area-appropriate ethical strategies to care for people, cats and wildlife.
12. Community stakeholder coalitions engaged in solutions.
13. Local intake/rehoming/euthanasia statistics shared with transparency and consistency, and data gathered to analyse effectiveness of strategies to reduce numbers of abandoned cats/kittens in cities /towns, before and after innovations.
14. A common education message promoted by all stakeholders: Desex, tag & microchip, enrich and keep safe; with specific information on how to do these essentials and assistance available.

**Initiatives requiring capital investment which support the above initiatives for long term gains**

1. Shelter/Pound Clinic for desexing from 8 weeks of age, microchipping and treatment of animals prior to rehoming.
2. Community Veterinary Clinic/Programs for low cost desexing and microchipping from 8 weeks of age and treatment of owned animals, particularly those who would otherwise be abandoned or euthanized due to owners' inability to pay for their treatment.

G2Z is working with stakeholder groups to implement these actions.



## Introduction

The Australian Cat Action Plan (ACAP) proposes a way forward to achieve national consistency in effective strategies for the management and welfare of domestic cats i.e. owned, semi-owned and community cats (with some dependence on humans) living in cities/towns in Australia. (Feral cat management will be addressed in a separate process).

Overall, widespread support was shown for the ACAP in the national Discussion Paper consultation which took place from September 2013 to mid-2014. You can view the report [here](#).

The ACAP was developed further based on discussions with invited representatives of all relevant national stakeholder groups at a meeting in August 2014 and further stakeholder negotiations in 2015-17. These national stakeholder groups include:

Australian Cat Federation, Australian National Cats, Australian Institute of Animal Management, Animals Australia, Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, Australian Veterinary Association, Sentient, Animal Welfare League of Australia, RSPCA Australia, and the National Animal Rescue Groups of Australia.

This final draft includes areas of agreement across the majority of stakeholder groups.

G2Z is now working with stakeholders to progress implementation. Progress with this plan will be reviewed approximately biannually, and the plan revised as needed.

## Background

Cats are intelligent sentient beings who have had, and continue to have, a significant role, in Australian society. Cats have formed a bond with many people, providing companionship and enjoyment. Studies have shown that relationships with animals are positive and important to many people, contributing to health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> However, domestic cats have bred faster than they can be accommodated and, with their independence and agility, are often allowed to wander. Oversupply, people's changing circumstances, and nuisance complaints lead to cats being impounded, and owners with accidental litters often surrender the mother cat and kittens to pounds and shelters. Based on RSPCA statistics nationally and in Queensland,<sup>2</sup> of cats entering shelters, approximately half are kittens and half cats (53% kittens, and 47% adult cats over 2006-2010). Of adult cats, approximately 50% are surrendered owned cats and 50% are stray, mostly socialised to people (only 10% of cats entering shelters are categorised as feral and 92% of these are euthanized). Importantly, of kittens entering shelters, about 44% are from owned queens and 56% are stray (only 9% are categorized as feral). Most cats are domestic shorthair/medium hair. Based on the analysis of 191,000 cats entering RSPCA shelters nationally,<sup>2</sup> very few adults (8%) or kittens (2%) are pure breeds. Purebred cats represented 3% of cats being euthanized. The postcodes where most kittens and cats are coming from are lower socioeconomic areas.<sup>3</sup>

The difficulty of finding sufficient homes for these cats in the long Australian breeding season means that the majority of impounded and surrendered cats have been killed in most cities/shires, or left to wander to contribute to wild populations. Blaming cats for native wildlife depletion, instead of

humans' introduction of non-native species, habitat destruction, pollution, and resource use, has also led to anti-cat sentiment with further limits on cat ownership and further killing.

Such high levels of abandonment and killing have been highlighted by animal welfare groups, and many communities have indicated they find these levels unacceptable.

However, at present, all states are at various stages of introducing breeder permits, desexing and identification legislation, with varying levels of consistency within and across states. Some local governments have introduced proactive policies and legislation. However, because people and cats move across borders and between municipalities, differences in legislation and policy are not helpful in developing effective solutions to cat issues in Australia. A further complication is that cats are identified both as pets and pests in different legislation, with no clear distinction between semi-owned and unowned domestic cats, and feral cats, resulting in further inconsistencies and ineffectiveness in their management.

### **Aim of the Australian Cat Action Plan**

The aim of the Australian Cat Action Plan is for all stakeholder groups to work together using effective strategies to:

1. Reduce the abandonment of domestic cats
2. Prevent the killing of healthy and treatable cats in pounds and shelters
3. Increase cat safety and minimise nuisance and native wildlife predation by cats

While it is acknowledged that up to 10% of stray and surrendered domestic cats in pounds and shelters may be euthanized for untreatable conditions such as severe injury, terminal illness with uncontrollable pain, or dangerous behaviour, at least 90% should be desexed and microchipped, and returned to their homes or rehomed, to responsible owners/carers.

### **The reason for the focus on cats**

The capacity of cats to reach sexual maturity from as early as 16 weeks old and have multiple litters each year in Australia's mainly temperate climate, means, among other factors, that Australia has a significantly larger number of abandoned kittens than puppies in most communities' pound/shelter/rescue facilities. This then impacts on the proportion of cats that are able to be rehomed.

In addition, free-roaming undesexed owned, semi-owned or unowned urban cats can reproduce and contribute to feral cat populations.

Dog breeding has already had significant consultation to address the issue of puppy farming and has been successful in raising awareness and promoting discussion and action in each state toward some common solutions. Cat breeding issues are significantly different from dog breeding issues.



## Definitions

- **Domestic cats:** cats with some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans. There are three sub-categories of domestic cats - owned, semi-owned, or unowned community cats.
  - **Owned cats:** cats identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable although sociability varies depending on parenting, previous experience, current owners' interaction and environment. They include:
    - **Responsibly owned cats:** cats who have a close relationship with humans, are identified with a microchip, registration tag and/or collar and address tag, kept safely confined in a house or yard, and have physical and mental health needs addressed. They are desexed unless kept for breeding.
    - **Casually owned cats:** cats whose carers consider the cat their own, but who may not be desexed, identified or kept confined to the owner's yard, due to such factors as owners' personal beliefs, lifestyle, organisational skills, financial circumstances or lack of knowledge.
  - **Semi-owned cats:** cats fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider they own them. They are of varying sociability with many socialised to humans.

These cats may be owned by someone else, and choose to visit other households, or they may have been abandoned.
  - **Unowned cats:** cats who have indirect dependence on humans and/or casual and temporary interactions with humans. They have varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and may live in groups.

They may have been owned and abandoned or lost, or may be the progeny of straying owned, semi-owned or unowned cats with little human contact and dependence. They may live in a group of cats in areas in cities/towns where they scavenge food or are fed by community carers e.g. in parks, school/university grounds, factory areas, shopping complexes.
- **Feral cats:** cats who are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, and live and reproduce in the wild (e.g. in forests, grasslands, deserts)
- **Stray cats:** cats who wander (straying refers to the activity of wandering away, not an ownership status) Stray cats may be responsibly owned and temporarily escape from their yard (e.g. a gate or door left open), casually owned and wander from their yard regularly (e.g. due to inappropriate fencing), and/or semi-owned (e.g. cats making regular visits to one or more households who do not own them, but who may be currently owned, or lost or abandoned). Stray cats may also be born to previously owned cats and live in colonies, directly or indirectly being fed by humans.

Many municipalities around Australia consider cats and dogs to be "stray" once they leave the confines of their owner's property.<sup>4</sup> They may be collected by an animal management officer or member of the public and handed in to a pound or shelter. There is usually a holding period to determine if the cat has been socialised, and to locate the owners and return the cat, or give owners an opportunity to collect the cat. If the owner is not found during the holding period, cats may be desexed, identified and rehomed; or desexed, identified to a shelter, rescue group, or carer and returned to where they were captured, so they may return to their home themselves, but no longer breed.

- **Surrendered cats:** cats handed in to a pound or shelter by owners (or on behalf of owners).
- **Abandoned cats:** domestic cats whose owners have moved or withdrawn all support for them.
- **Sellers:** people who transfer a cat to a new owner including those who sell from pet shops, the internet (Gumtree etc), or their own or another's home, and whether animals are sold for a fee or given away.
- **Breeders:** people who breed animals including commercial breeders, hobby breeders and people who have a litter from their family pet, whether pure breed or cross breed animals, intentional or accidental litters, large or small scale.
- **Cat owners:** people who acknowledge they own a cat, and feed it. Owners may take varying levels of responsibility from allowing the cat to wander, be undesexed, unmicro-chipped, and unregistered, to keeping the cat indoors and/or in the owner's yard, and desexing, micro-chipping, registering, using an ID tag on a collar, and providing health care and socialisation.
- **Healthy:** no sign of any behavioural or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk to the community, and no sign of disease, injury, or congenital condition that adversely affects the well-being of the animal.
- **Treatable:** not healthy, i.e. shows behaviour/temperament defects and/or illness, injury or condition that adversely affects the animal's well-being, but who could become healthy or their condition be managed with reasonable effort so that the animal still has quality of life.
- **Untreatable:** irremediably suffering or a demonstrated history or likelihood of causing grievous bodily harm to people or other companion animals.
- **Getting to Zero:** a model for preventing abandoned and homeless cats and dogs and ending the killing of healthy and treatable stray and surrendered cats and dogs in a whole community
- **Early Age Desexing (EAD):** desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age (before puberty). Also referred to as pre-pubertal or paediatric desexing
- **Trap-Desex-Adopt-or-Return-and-Support (TDARS)** is the Australian version of TNR (the term used in the USA). TDARS refers to a process for the reduction in numbers of unsocialised cats, in areas where they have some direct or indirect human interaction. Not easily handled, they often require trapping to be desexed ("desex" covers both sexes rather than "neuter"). TDARS emphasises a preference for adoption, if possible (many kittens are easily socialised, and some cats may have had experience with caring humans), and if not, return to original location with ongoing support, so that new cats that come into the area are also desexed.

## What are the cat issues in Australia?

1. Overbreeding
2. Insufficient pre-pubertal desexing
3. Irresponsible breeding and selling of undesexed kittens
4. Low owner reclaim rates
5. Changing lifestyles and insufficient pet-friendly accommodation
6. Overcrowded pounds and shelters
7. Owned cats allowed to roam
8. Balancing cats and native wildlife
9. Insufficient stakeholder awareness and coordination



## 1. Overbreeding

Due to seasonal breeding, the early breeding age from 4 months and continuous breeding cycles of cats, there are more cats needing homes than the number of homes offered, particularly during the warmer months and in northern parts of Australia with an extended warmer season.<sup>5</sup> While national statistics across all government departments and not-for-profit animal welfare organisations are not currently gathered, 2010/11 NSW Government statistics (the only state that has published comprehensive state-wide pound and shelter data) show that 64% of cats were euthanized, 19% were rehomed, 14% were transferred to other organisations, and 2% were reclaimed by their owners.<sup>6</sup> According to the NSW Government Companion Animal Taskforce's report, in 2011, only 43% of the almost 500,000 microchipped cats on the Companion Animal Register were desexed.<sup>6</sup> In a 2014 South Australian study, 22% of owned cats had an unplanned litter before being desexed.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, between 10% and 26% of Australian households feed or have fed a cat they do not own.<sup>8-10</sup> Semi-owners have identified that only approximately 25%<sup>8</sup>-35%<sup>9</sup> of the cats they are feeding are already desexed (with 59% and 44% of these cats respectively owned, and another 16-17% possibly owned, by someone else) and 16% and 20% respectively desexed by semi-owners. In one study, almost half of semi-owners believed they knew to whom the cat belonged, so semi-owners may be reluctant to desex these cats due to legal ramifications or cost of desexing a cat owned by someone else.<sup>9</sup> This means approximately half of these wandering owned/semi-owned cats are potentially breeding.

Some cats who are lost or abandoned live in colonies near humans to access food, either directly from carers or indirectly through hunting and scavenging. If undesexed, these cats breed and their progeny become increasingly unsocialised. Community carer strategies to manage and reduce colonies by feeding, catching, desexing, adopting or returning and supporting/monitoring cats are often at odds with some government-based trap and kill strategies.

## 2. Insufficient promotion and availability of desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age

Some vet schools have only recently started teaching about the issue of abandoned animals in pounds and shelters and how vets can help prevent this through the benefits of desexing cats before puberty which can occur from 16 weeks of age. Many vet clinics still do not encourage the public to desex their kittens by 16 weeks of age to prevent accidental pregnancy, and do not desex kittens before they leave the breeders, pounds and shelters, despite there being "no significant health concerns with early age desexing in kittens", and "significant health and behavioural benefits".<sup>5</sup> A Gold Coast City survey in 2010 showed that 13 of the 43 vet clinics in the city offered desexing of kittens at 8-10 weeks of age.<sup>11</sup> In a 2013 study of British, Australian and NZ veterinarians, only 17.5% and 20% respectively of vets would spay or castrate a cat by 10 weeks of age.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Irresponsible breeding and selling of undesexed kittens

Responsible breeders work to eliminate illness for good feline health, socialise their kittens, desex and microchip them prior to rehoming to responsible owners, and offer lifetime support. However not all breeders do this.

Though there appear to be few large scale commercial breeders of cats, small scale cat breeders can produce many kittens from a small number of breeding cats, because cats reproduce early, and breed prolifically. Many of these cats are undesexed when sold or given away. This results in people inadvertently becoming cat breeders for a number of reasons:

- Cats breed before the owner gets around to desexing them (in 2009/10, 32% of owners who surrendered cats in the City of Gold Coast indicated their surrendered cats were not desexed due to not getting around to it).<sup>13(p.20)</sup>
- Cats commence breeding earlier than expected by the owner (34% of owners surrendering cats over the age of 8 weeks indicated that they believed their cat was too young to be desexed).<sup>13(p.20)</sup>
- Because female cats can breed several times in a breeding season, they can be pregnant before weaning their kittens which perpetuates unplanned breeding.

Internet, wholesale and pet shop sellers also vary in their social responsibility. Increasingly pet shops are choosing to rehome already desexed and microchipped cats and kittens on behalf of animal welfare and rescue groups. However, very few, who accept kittens from breeders, or accidental litters from the public, desex them before they sell them.

### 4. Low owner reclaim rates

It has only been in recent years that most state and local animal management legislation has included a requirement to identify cats and dogs through microchipping and/or registration. The majority of cats entering pounds and shelters have not been identified, and their owners have therefore not been contactable.

Many cat owners fail to visit a pound to look for their cat because they assume it will come home eventually. US research found that the median time for an owner to recover their cat was 5 days, and 66% of the 73 cats recovered, returned home on their own.<sup>14</sup>

Even when cats are identified, and the owners contacted, some owners are unable or unwilling to pay the impound fee to reclaim their cat. Reasons for this could include the ease of replacement of cats due to the oversupply and lower levels of attachment. Only 2% of cats entering pound facilities in NSW in 2010/11 were returned to their owners.<sup>6</sup> A survey of cat entry into RSPCA Qld shelters in 2012-13 found that only 9% of stray cats were microchipped and of these, 37% had incorrect data associated with the microchip.<sup>15</sup>



## 5. Changing lifestyles and insufficient pet-friendly accommodation

Epidemiologist Dr Chris Baldock identified that a reduction in the proportion of households owning cats and dogs was due to changing demographics, with a growing proportion of older couples without children, lone parent households, and one parent families and group households, which have practical difficulties with pet ownership.<sup>16</sup> Regulations in apartments, strata title and rental accommodation often limit the capacity for people to keep cats (and dogs).<sup>17</sup> This leads to owners surrendering their cats to a shelter or pound, or abandoning them at the residence, if they have to move. 22% of cats surrendered in the City of Gold Coast in 2009/10 were due to accommodation issues.<sup>13(p.15)</sup>

## 6. Overcrowded pounds and shelters

The extensive daylight periods in the warmer months in Australia result in huge numbers of kittens being born, far more than the number of homes available, resulting in their surrender to pounds and shelters. This then leads to overcrowding in many pounds and shelters. Many cats and kittens become stressed and succumb to infectious diseases such as cat flu and ringworm. Due to lack of space, and sometimes the facility design, these animals are often not segregated effectively or provided with treatment. A lack of fostering programs in many pounds also means these animals have no opportunity to be placed in a less stressful, disease-free environment. Even though these illnesses can be treated, euthanasia is often the management strategy due to the difficulty with treatment, high risk of disease transfer to other animals and limited resources.

While animal welfare organisations/rescue groups have foster care programs, it is often costly to accommodate and treat the numbers of animals needing veterinary care and fostering in the warmer months.

Cats who are timid, anxious or bored often respond by demonstrating a lack of sociability and behaviours such as hiding or striking at their carers. This makes them harder to care for and rehome, as they need time, patience, space and less stressful environments to show their normal personalities.

## 7. Owned cats allowed to roam

Keeping cats safely on their owners' property has not been regarded as important as keeping dogs safely confined. It is difficult to keep cats contained using traditional fencing. Methods of containing cats in suburban yards have progressed, but the continued high level of socialised cats entering pounds and shelters<sup>18</sup> suggests many owners are still not installing effective cat containment, perhaps unaware, or unwilling/unable to pay the cost of modifying their fencing or building cat enclosures attached to their homes.

Wandering cats are more at risk of death, disease, injury, and parasites, as well as increasing the risk of breeding if left entire or wandering before the traditionally recommended desexing age of 5-6 months. Because cats are able to survive independently in cities and rural areas, numbers can continue to grow, with inadequate and often inhumane strategies to manage them.

## 8. Balancing cats and native wildlife

The increasing importance of native wildlife protection in Australia has often led to anti-cat sentiment. However another cause of wildlife decline has been identified as habitat loss.<sup>19</sup> In addition, cats are not the sole species responsible for threatening native wildlife species - foxes, rabbits and rats, amongst others, also have impacts on native wildlife. In some environmentally sensitive areas, cats have been found to be helpful in reducing the effects of other introduced species on native wildlife.<sup>20</sup>

Preventing habitat loss and achieving a balance between introduced and native species so that native species can survive is therefore complex and difficult to achieve.

## 9. Insufficient stakeholder awareness and coordination

Some state and local governments have not taken responsibility for preventing and managing cat issues in their communities and instead have relied on welfare groups to manage cats. Some Councils and welfare groups have been fearful of criticism if euthanasia figures are revealed. This means that the whole community remains unaware of the extent of the issues and how they can help to resolve them to improve the lives of people, cats and wildlife.

### Current numbers of stray and surrendered cats

Little data has been collated in most states, so a national figure of stray and surrendered cats is difficult to determine. However the NSW government gathers and publishes its pound data annually, and the RSPCA NSW and AWL NSW, the largest shelters in NSW, gather their data. From this combined data it is possible to extrapolate a national estimate based on numbers of stray and surrendered cats in relation to population size i.e. the number of cats per year entering pounds and shelters is at least 153 000 cats nationwide. In 2010/11, approximately 64% of cats in pounds and welfare facilities in NSW were euthanized. Nationally this extrapolates to approximately 100 000 cats euthanized.<sup>21</sup> 47% of cats arriving at NSW Council pounds were abandoned with a substantial increase (of almost 25%) in the number of abandoned cats between 2008/9 and 2010/11.<sup>6</sup>

There are currently no national figures on the numbers of abandoned domestic cats in urban Australia who have become wild and continue to breed.

### Successful reductions in abandoned and euthanized cats and kittens

Combined efforts of stakeholders to reduce the numbers of stray and surrendered cats in whole cities using strategies presented in this plan have been successful. For example, in Gold Coast City, Animal Welfare League of Queensland has worked closely with Gold Coast City Council to systematically reduce the number of unwanted and euthanized animals in a whole community using the Getting to Zero (G2Z) model. Focussing on both reducing breeding of owned animals and



increasing community responsibility for keeping cats safely, reclaiming and rehoming, the number of stray felines coming into the Gold Coast City Council pound has been reduced from almost 2000 in 2001 to 1267 in 2016/17 despite a growing human population. Gold Coast City (over 500 000 people) has reduced its cat euthanasia rate over the last 15 years from over 50% to 8% of all incoming cats for the whole city in 2016/17.<sup>22</sup> This represents a reduction in cat euthanasia from almost 5 per 1000 human population in 2001/02 to less than 1 per 1000 in 2016/17.

In the Australian Capital Territory (350 000 people), RSPCA has reduced the euthanasia rate to approximately 23% of all incoming cats for the whole community in 2015/16.<sup>23</sup>

Internationally, the Nevada Humane Society working closely with Washoe County Regional Animal Management Services first reduced the euthanasia rates for the County to 22% of incoming stray and surrendered cats in 2007. 78% found new homes, were reclaimed by their owners or in the case of feral cats, were adopted as barn cats or returned through Trap Neuter Return programs.<sup>24</sup> In 2016, of the 3500 cats taken in, 127 cats (4%) were euthanized.<sup>25</sup> First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) was started in Duval County, Florida (pop. 864,263) in 2002. At that time, 33,847 cats and dogs were entering the shelters and council pounds, and 23,104 were being euthanized (32% save rate). After approximately 10 years, that number is down to 2,150 – a reduction of almost 90%.<sup>26</sup>

Three cities in Oklahoma i.e. Claremore, Lawton, and Tulsa have reduced euthanasia rates substantially through the introduction of breeder and seller legislation and availability of low cost desexing to reduce numbers of abandoned and "euthanized" animals.<sup>27</sup>

To provide an ongoing picture of legislation progress recommended in this Action Plan by each Australian state or territory, a legislation table has been attached. **See Appendix 1 - Current legislation and review activity in Australia**

NOTE: State and local government representatives are encouraged to check [Appendix 1](#) to see if the legislation is up-to-date in your area, and to contact [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au), if you have any changes, in place, in development or proposed, in accord with the recommendations; and any figures which verify successful reductions in numbers of unwanted and euthanized cats and kittens.

G2Z facilitates sharing effective strategies with all stakeholders through the web [www.g2z.org.au](http://www.g2z.org.au), e-news and the biennial [G2Z Summit](#). Contact G2Z to participate [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au).

## What can be done? An Overview

The following table (Table 1) provides an overview of the aims, issues to be addressed, and strategies to achieve success:

Table 1 ACAP Summary of Aims, Issues, Strategies, Actions and Lead Stakeholders

Aims	Issues	Strategies	Actions	Lead Stakeholder
1. Prevent abandonment of cats	Overbreeding	1. Increase desexing of owned, semi-owned and unowned urban domestic cats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooperative targeted desexing subsidy programs for owned, semi-owned and unowned cats</li> <li>Desexing prior to release/rehoming from pounds/shelters/rescue groups</li> </ul>	Local governments and/or State governments
	Insufficient desexing prior to breeding age	2. Increase pre-pubertal desexing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Veterinarians encourage and offer desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age for all cat owners and breeders</li> <li>Veterinarians desex cats from 8 weeks of age and before rehoming from pounds and shelters</li> <li>Registered veterinary practitioners develop knowledge and skills to desex kittens at 8-12 weeks of age</li> <li>Vet schools develop students' knowledge and skills to desex kittens at 8 - 16 weeks of age</li> </ul>	Veterinarians Veterinary schools
	Irresponsible and accidental breeding and selling	3. Require all kittens to be desexed prior to sale or transfer by all breeders and sellers	<p>While this can be legislated as a stand-alone requirement, introducing user-pays Breeder and Seller Permits provides a structure for compliance, with only those with a government Breeder Permit legally able to acquire an undesexed cat/kitten. Other benefits are improved welfare and management to prevent oversupply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permit fees used to fund inspections based on a Code of Practice to support good animal welfare and management of animals</li> <li>Display and publish the Breeder / Seller Permit Number</li> <li>Records of the sources of all animals accessible by inspectors/ state and local government authorities</li> <li>Publication of breeder permit numbers on a shared government site for consumer access</li> <li>Pet shops work with local government <i>and</i> animal welfare groups to desex and rehome the kittens of accidental breeders, and the parent cats to prevent future unplanned litters</li> </ul>	State governments and/or local governments

2. Prevent the killing of healthy and treatable domestic cats	Low owner reclaim rates	4. Improve cat identification to increase reclaim rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduce legislation to require breeders to microchip and register the breeder details on an authorised microchipping database</li> <li>• At point of sale or transfer, breeders/sellers required to update microchip database records with new owner details, and provide written instructions for owners on updating contact details on the relevant database, if details change.</li> <li>• Microchip databases required to have efficient processes for annual reminders to update details, instant updates and removal of old records between databases</li> <li>• Vets to assist by checking microchip data at every visit and advising owners on how to update database</li> <li>• Cats to wear quick release collar with ID tag to enable rapid return to owner</li> </ul>	<p>State governments and/or local governments</p> <p>Veterinarians</p> <p>Owners</p>
	Changing lifestyles and insufficient animal-friendly accommodation	5. Increase cat-friendly rental and strata-title accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State governments develop nationally consistent requirements to prevent discrimination against responsible cat owners keeping cats in strata title and rental accommodation, and aged care facilities.</li> <li>• Real estate agents promote cat-friendly properties and lease agreements to make properties more accessible to animal owners</li> <li>• Landlords and body corporates use animal- friendly lease agreements to enable responsible owners to demonstrate the suitability of their cat (or dog) for a particular residence. These can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Pet references</li> <li>○ Pet agreements</li> <li>○ Provision of appropriate cat safe fencing /enclosures.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Landlords and real estate agents advocate for landlord insurance for pets by encouraging insurance companies to introduce this into their insurance schemes.</li> </ul>	<p>State governments</p> <p>Real estate agents</p> <p>Landlords and body corporates</p>
	Overcrowded pounds and shelters	6. Improve rehoming	<p>A range of G2Z strategies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption drives &amp; hubs</li> <li>• Expanding foster care networks</li> <li>• Managing intake and flow of animals effectively to minimise long stays and disease</li> </ul>	<p>Animal pounds and shelters/rescue groups</p>
		7.Support owners to manage and keep their cats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform owners how to look for their cats if they go wandering, and to persist</li> <li>• Return animals home</li> <li>• Waive infringement fees for wandering owned cats in the first instance if the cause is addressed</li> <li>• Waive, reduce or refund impound fees if owners desex and identify their cat (or dog)</li> <li>• Provide Animal Information Help Lines and Lost/Found Pets App</li> <li>• Find alternatives for owners to prevent surrender of cats</li> <li>• Determine which areas of the community are most at-risk, meet</li> </ul>	<p>Local governments</p> <p>Animal shelters/rescue groups</p>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>people in their homes and streets to provide support.</li> <li>Increase the permitted maximum number of cats per household for responsible people with suitable environments who are caring for community cats</li> </ul>	
		8. Support semi-owners to prevent undesexed strays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage semi-owners to find owners through door-knocking in 3-5 house radius and to work collaboratively with owners.</li> <li>Encourage the community to take friendly stray cats to their local veterinarian to check for a microchip.</li> <li>Promote availability of low cost desexing and microchipping to semi-owners who cannot find owners of the cats they are feeding, and encourage them to take full responsibility for their care.</li> </ul>	Local governments and animal welfare/rescue groups
		9. Assess impacts of cats and pilot Trap Desex Adopt Return & Support programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess impacts of cats (positive and negative) in specific areas and develop area-appropriate ethical strategies to care for people, cats and wildlife</li> <li>Support several pilot studies of Trap Desex Adopt Return and Support (TDARS) of unowned urban cats in various urban non-endangered species areas to assess potential to reduce numbers of unowned colony cats</li> </ul>	Community members, state and local governments and animal welfare/rescue groups
3. Increase cat safety and minimise nuisance and native wildlife predation by domestic cats	Owned cats allowed to roam and hunt native species which may be vulnerable in specific locations	10. Increase use of welfare-friendly cat containment and anti-predation devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote range of cat containment measures</li> <li>Encourage property developers to incorporate options for cat friendly properties in estates.</li> <li>Promotion for cats to wear anti-predation devices</li> </ul>	Breeders and sellers, veterinarians, State and local governments, animal welfare/rescue groups
	Insufficient stakeholder awareness and coordination	11. Involve all stakeholders in the solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise stakeholder coalitions at local, state and national levels</li> <li>Community-wide education through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>Teacher training</li> <li>Vet clinics</li> <li>Animal welfare/rescue organisations</li> <li>Pet supplies &amp; service businesses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	State and local governments, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, pet supplies & service businesses, wildlife and conservation groups
		12. Whole city/shire statistics to involve communities in solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislate to require reporting of standardized gathering of data on incoming, reclaimed, rehomed, TDARS, and euthanized</li> <li>Local governments and animal welfare and rescue groups combine data and publish</li> <li>Inform community that their help is needed to be involved in solutions</li> </ul>	State governments to coordinate with local governments and animal welfare shelters/rescue groups



### Strategy 1 Increase desexing of owned, semi-owned and unowned cats

#### i. Targeted Cooperative Desexing Subsidy Programs

Cooperative Desexing Subsidy Programs<sup>28</sup> are essential for Councils to fund to:

- support people on a low income to enable them to comply with breeder/desexing legislation
- reduce council costs - The cost of collection of an abandoned cat, holding the animal for an average of four days and euthanasing is on average **\$220, and \$260 for a litter** collected and housed together, then euthanized. The statutory holding period is up to 14 days in some areas, which can add another \$200 to the cost i.e. total cost of approximately **\$420 per animal or \$480 per litter**. In contrast, the cost to local government of a Co-operative Desexing Program can be as little as **\$35 per male cat** and \$55 per female cat. The cost saving for Councils is therefore approximately \$180 per cat, which is a conservative figure as, for each cat prevented from breeding, the savings grow exponentially with a potential 2-3 litters per year that do not have to be collected in the future.
- reduce numbers of abandoned cats over time
- support people who are feeding cats they do not own to help them take responsibility and desex them.

#### Key features of a COOPERATIVE DESEXING SUBSIDY PROGRAM:

- a. Ongoing subsidies are based on need and made available to:
- holders of pension, concession or health care cards
  - families on low incomes
  - people with large numbers of cats
  - people caring for unowned community cats

Explaining to the community that Council funds need to be used to help desex as many animals as possible over a number of years to reduce euthanasia rates, usually means that people do not take advantage of the program unless they really need it.

- b. Costs are shared between owners, Council, animal welfare groups and veterinarians. Prices must be low enough to allow cat owners on a pension or low income to contribute. Experience has shown that most people on a pension or low income can afford \$40 - \$60. Where this is not possible negotiation should occur. Consider the most reasonable rates possible in your community taking into consideration existing subsidy programs that might be offered currently by animal welfare groups, and veterinarians. Use the following guidelines summarised in Table 1. The following model has worked in Gold Coast City for many years, and is currently being offered in an increasing number of Councils:

**Table 1: Guidelines for sharing of costs in a G2Z Co-operative Desexing Program**

	OWNER	COUNCIL	NDN**	VET RECEIVES
Female Cat Spey*	\$55	\$65	Staff to run the program and volunteers to support it	\$120
Male Cat Castration	\$35	\$55		\$90

*\*If a female cat is pregnant or in season, an additional \$55 can be claimed by the vet clinic from the Council Subsidy Fund. (This means slightly fewer cats desexed (approx. 20% of cats may be pregnant or in season, with more in peak breeding season), or an extra 20-30% can be added to the budget).*

*\*\*Animal welfare groups may contribute financially or by managing the program for Council*

Note: To cover rising costs, the proportions each party pays can be adjusted gradually over time, but should only increase minimally every two or three years, to remain at a realistic level that is affordable for owners on low incomes, and still cover costs for vets.

If all or most vet clinics in your municipality participate, each clinic will have to desex fewer animals at a subsidised rate and can set aside a slower day or evening for this extra work. If only one or two vet clinics participate, they will benefit from increased business, with less down time, compensating the reduction in profit from each service with the quantity of services offered, and strong support from the community.

- c. Use the subsidy program to offer a **Last Litter Fund** (<http://www.g2z.org.au/desexing-programs.html>) to desex (at the subsidised rate, or free of charge if needed) all mother cats, whose litters are surrendered to a pound/shelter/rescue group (waive fee for surrender as a reward for desexing). This enables owners to keep the mother cats (who are harder to rehome and therefore a saving to the pound/shelter in costs and a reduction in euthanasia with no further risk of unwanted litters).
- d. Annual desexing promotion to all owners and carers in National Desexing Month in July, before the cat breeding season.

Provide incentives to encourage immediate action to desex cats e.g. discounts, free microchip. This is an ideal time to promote Cooperative Desexing Programs as well, for residents in need.

Assistance is available from G2Z to work with relevant staff to develop a cooperative program in your municipality, and templates of the documentation and promotional materials are available free of charge.

## ii. Community Vet Clinic

If there is no support from existing vet clinics for an effective G2Z Cooperative Desexing Subsidy Program, or to facilitate easier access to low cost desexing, set up a Community Vet Clinic. A Community Vet Clinic provides high volume low cost desexing and microchipping and all veterinary services to the general public to help cover costs of supporting animals who would otherwise not receive treatment due to owners' inability to pay. See <http://www.g2z.org.au/models-for-desexing-programs.html> for information.

## iii. Desexing prior to release/rehoming from pounds/shelters/rescue groups

All cats (and dogs) from pounds, rehoming centres and rescue groups must be desexed prior to rehoming to avoid contributing to further unwanted cats (and dogs). The cost can be included in the rehoming price for the animal. Foster programs are essential to provide care for cats and kittens



needing time, socialisation and/or rehabilitation before desexing. These can be organised cooperatively by recruiting local community groups e.g. animal welfare, service or church groups.

## Strategy 2 Increase pre-pubertal desexing

- i. Veterinarians encourage and offer desexing from 8 weeks of age to anyone who has a litter of kittens to prevent accidental litters when they are transferred to new owners. In the 2014 SA survey, 22% of owners indicated their cat had an unplanned litter and 3% were unsure. Only 10% identified that cats can have kittens by 5 months of age with 18% suggesting by 3 or 4 months, 27% from 6 months, 15% from one year, and 29% unsure. If veterinarians are inexperienced in desexing at 8-10 weeks they can book kittens for desexing at the time of their third vaccination.
- ii. Veterinarians desex cats from 8 weeks of age before rehoming from pounds and shelters.
- iii. Veterinary students develop knowledge and skills for desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age and experience at shelters/pounds and shelter and community clinics
- iv. Veterinary practitioners develop knowledge and skills to desex kittens at 8-12 weeks e.g. an online professional development program is available <http://catcare.org.au/vet-professional-education-package/> which can contribute to Continuing Professional Development points.

## Strategy 3 Require desexing of kittens prior to sale or transfer by all breeders and sellers

Desexing of all kittens prior to sale or transfer should be introduced by all states to prevent unwanted litters, complemented by state and local government targeted cooperative desexing subsidy programs to ensure all residents can comply. Exemptions should only apply if:

- a. Kittens are being transferred to another permitted breeder, i.e. with a government permit, or, until such time as a government scheme is introduced, registered with another authorised breeder organisation; or
- b. a veterinarian declares in writing that desexing is likely to be a serious risk to an animal's health e.g. See Standard 38 in the GCCC Breeder Code of Practice for the keeping and breeding of entire cats and dogs.

Membership of a registered breed organization must not be considered an exemption from being registered by the government and/or excluded from complying with a mandatory welfare code of practice and/or premise inspections.

The following provides a legal framework to enable cat desexing, welfare and management to be monitored and complied with:

- a. **User-pays Breeder and Seller Permits** to cover costs of an independent inspection for compliance with high level Standards wherever animals are bred and /or held for sale
- b. **Requirement to display and publish the Breeder / Seller Permit Number** (if not the breeder) with all cats and dogs sold through breeding establishments, pet outlets, private homes, all other places or via the internet or other media within Australia, so customers can recognise animals have come from independently inspected establishments which meet appropriate standards of care and responsible rehoming



- c. **Records of the sources of all animals** (breeder and sellers' names and addresses), health care treatments and desexing and microchipping records (this will be essential if animals are going to be traded interstate) to be accessible by inspectors and local government authorities
- d. **Publication of breeder permit numbers** on a shared government site for consumer access so they can identify and purchase from more responsible breeders.
- e. **If one-off "accidental" breeders present a litter to pet shops for rehoming**, pet shops work with local animal welfare groups/desexing agencies/local government cooperative desexing programs to desex and rehome their kittens and their adult cat **to prevent future unplanned litters**

#### **Strategy 4 Improve identification to increase reclaim rate**

- a. Introduce state-wide legislation to require breeders to microchip and register the breeder details on an authorised microchipping database
- b. At point of sale or transfer, breeders/sellers required to update microchip database records with new owner details, and provide written instructions for owners on updating contact details on the relevant database, if details change.
- c. Microchip databases required to have efficient processes for instant updates and removal of old records between databases

#### **Strategy 5 Increase cat-friendly rental and strata-title accommodation**

- a. Landlords, real estate professionals, body corporate and aged care facilities boost their customer base and play an important role in preventing abandonment of cats, by promoting cat friendly lease agreements. These include ways responsible owners can demonstrate the suitability of their cat (or dog) for a particular residence e.g.
  - i. desexing and microchipping certificates,
  - ii. pet references, and
  - iii. cat safe fencing/enclosures.
- b. Such agreements will safeguard the rights of pet owners to keep their companion animals, as well as the rights of property owners and other residents.
- c. Landlords and real estate agents should advocate for landlord insurance for pets by encouraging insurance companies to introduce this into their insurance schemes

#### **Strategy 6 Improve rehoming**

- a. Proactive rehoming policies include:
  - a manager committed to G2Z
  - enthusiastic staff, volunteers
  - an extensive foster care program
  - positive marketing
  - opening hours convenient to the working public
  - off-site adoptions
  - sufficient and suitable facilities.
 See <http://www.g2z.org.au/the-checklist.html>
- b. Local pet shops/pet supply stores to rehome desexed kittens and cats on behalf of the pound/shelter. Offer the store the opportunity to surrender unwanted kittens from the general

public to the local shelter for desexing and microchipping and to rehome them on the shelter's behalf, or purchase from the shelter already desexed, microchipped etc., at an affordable rate, for on-selling to the public. This increases access to pound/shelter animals and faster rehoming.

- c. A shelter vet clinic to prepare animals quickly and efficiently for rehoming. An employed vet and vet nurse with experience in desexing from 8 weeks of age plus a keen attitude to saving lives check animals daily, treat animals with illness and injuries promptly, and desex and microchip prior to rehoming. A small clinic can be set up with minimal expense. Local community organisations and volunteers can assist with fundraising and physical support.

The next best option is to have a veterinarian with a clinic near the pound/shelter who will desex from 8 weeks of age, has the capacity to visit the animals regularly and provide care and treatment for all sick or injured pound/shelter animals. Where veterinary services are not locally available, animal management officers and local community volunteers should be provided with training and supplies for treatment of animals for parasites and first aid; as well as micro-chipping, and coordinate and assist with regular desexing clinics by veterinarians in local community centres.

- d. Include shelter medicine in veterinary courses as a legitimate pathway for the veterinary profession. Specific knowledge and skills are needed to prevent and manage the health and well-being of animals in a shelter environment, which can impact on the number of animals rehomed.
- e. Provide information on care throughout the animals' life stages including behavioural information.
- f. Encourage and facilitate uptake of pet insurance at time of adoption or sale.
- g. Preparedness by breeders, sellers, pounds and shelters to take back and rehome any animals whom the owner cannot care for
- h. Breeders required to desex and find homes for animals who are retired from breeding or are unsuitable for breeding, unless deemed unsuitable for rehoming by a veterinarian.

## **Strategy 7 Support owners to manage and keep their cats**

- a. Encourage and provide information to owners about how and where to look for their cats if they go wandering, and to persist in their search. This prevents the need for rehoming and develops positive community relationships.
- b. Return animals home rather than impound them where contact can be made with an owner. Returning the cat home has the added benefit of creating an opportunity to speak with the owner to determine if there are management issues that owners need assistance with and which require further information e.g. cat safe fencing, desexing support. If a cat is impounded there is only a 5-10% chance that it will be reclaimed, and often the owner will get another one 'free to a good home' instead. The better option is to engage the owner, assist in preventing the wandering if possible, and have the cat retain its home.
- c. Waive infringement fees for wandering owned cats in the first instance if the cause of the escape is addressed within a designated reasonable time frame e.g. appropriate fencing.
- d. Waive, reduce or refund impound fees for entire and/or unidentified animals if owners desex and identify their cat (or dog) (with low cost cooperative desexing programs available as described above).
- e. Provide trained volunteer and/or government supported Animal Information Help Lines or promote access to existing local, state or national animal welfare resources for information on how to address common issues e.g. pet behaviour issues, safety and benefits of desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age, body corporate no-pet by-laws which are regarded as legally unreasonable in most states/territories and negotiating a reasonable pet agreement with pet references.
- f. Promote the range of cat containment options to help owners keep their cats on their properties. See [Keeping Cats Safe](#), [Good Cats Play at Home](#).

- g. Encourage and support owners and finders to help find alternatives to surrendering of cats where possible for e.g. assist with behavioural information, encourage them to temporarily foster until a place can be found and provide guidance on finding a suitable new home for the cat themselves.
- h. Implement outreach programs targeted at helping pet owners most in need. Shelter and pound data can assist in determining which areas of the community are most at-risk for relinquishing their pet or experiencing animal management issues. Meet people in their homes and community and provide support for medical procedures, transport, behavioural and management issues.
- i. Increase the permitted maximum number of cats per household, for carers who are providing a community service in reducing roaming unowned cat numbers by getting the cats desexed and socialised and adopting them from their homes. Desexed cats are less likely to cause noise or aggression issues, so are less likely to be a burden on animal management.
- j. Breeders/sellers/veterinarians encourage and facilitate uptake of pet insurance at time of adoption to ensure owners can afford veterinary treatment for animals to avoid abandonment/euthanasia

### **Strategy 8 Support semi-owners to prevent undesexed strays**

Australian studies have shown that 61%<sup>9</sup> - 75%<sup>8</sup> of people who feed a stray cat believe that the cat is, or might be, owned by someone else. A video tracking study into the movement of owned cats showed that many owned cats had regular wandering habits into neighbours' yards for food.<sup>29</sup>

Semi-owners need to be encouraged to take the cat to a vet to be scanned for a microchip, and return the cat to the owner, if found. If the cat is not identified, they should be encouraged to door-knock within a 3 – 5 house radius, which studies have shown is the area which many owned cats explore, with approximately 10% exploring up to 2 kilometres. Posters with photos can be used to find owners in this wider area, if not found more locally.

If the owner is found, encourage the owner to desex and microchip, and keep their cat safely on their own property, to avoid being hit by a car or attacked by dogs/other cats or being impounded, if trapped by neighbours or animal management officers.

If no owner can be found, support semi-owners to desex and microchip the cat to reduce the number of unowned cats breeding in the wild, take ownership or find the cat a new home. Government desexing subsidies for effective G2Z Cooperative Desexing Programs are well-justified for this to prevent nuisance issues, reduce euthanasia rates and protect wildlife for the whole community's enjoyment.

### **Strategy 9 Assess impacts of cats and pilot Trap Desex Adopt Return & Support programs**

- a. Wildlife protection needs to be considered carefully as cats predate on wildlife of various types (some endangered, some considered pest species) which may impact negatively or positively on native wildlife species' survival. Positive impacts of cats were found in a study in suburban bushland in Sydney, where cats reduced predation on ground birds' nests through killing rats.<sup>30</sup> In a study in suburban Perth, housing density and size of nearby bushland, not cat density, were correlated with bird species' richness.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, assessment of the impacts cats have in different areas is required to identify appropriate management strategies for both cats and wildlife. Development of a Decision Tree with all stakeholders including animal welfare, community carer, agriculture and conservation groups may provide some guidance. The following is a preliminary example:



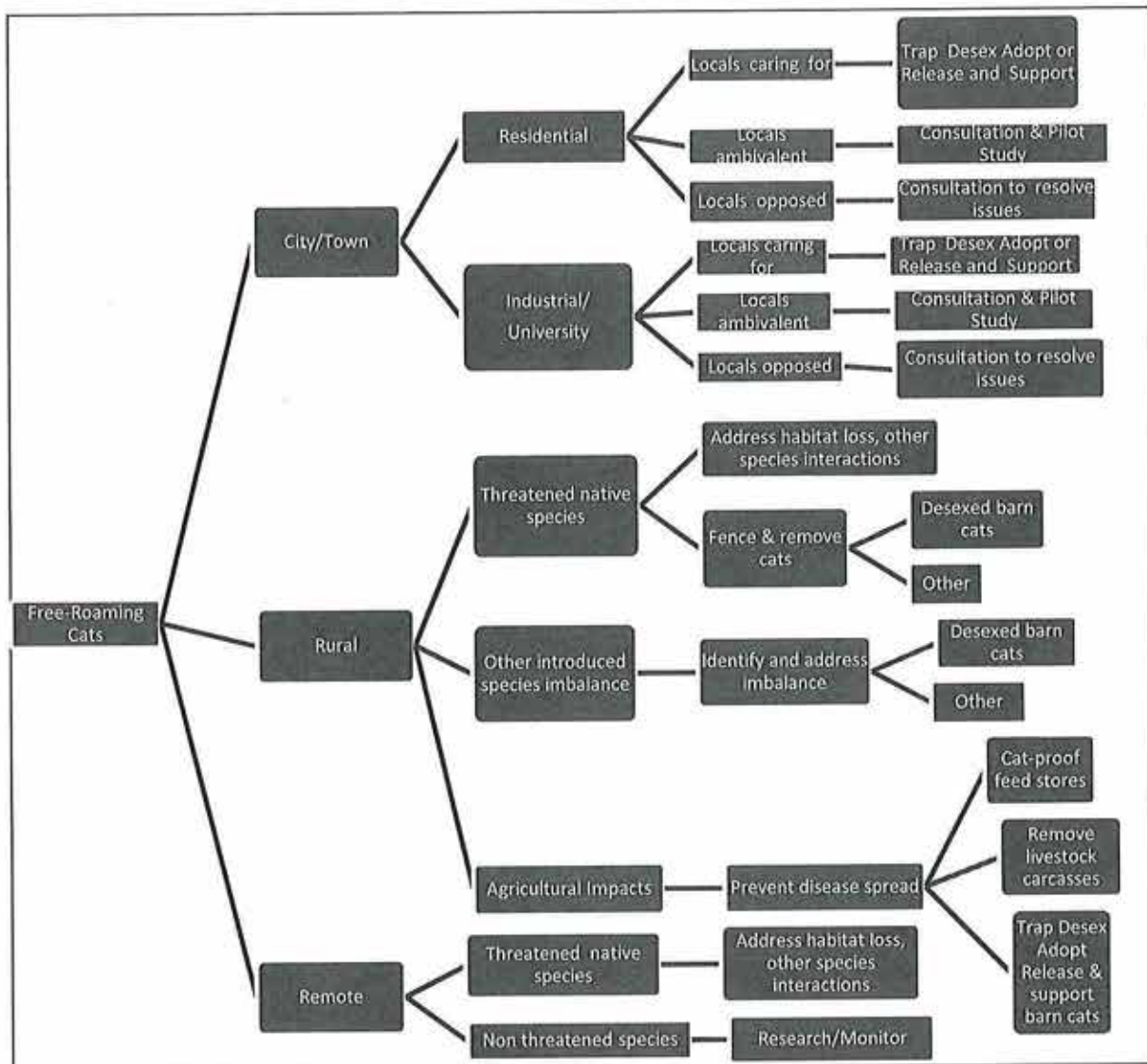


Figure 1 Sample Decision Tree using location and impacts on all animals and people affected to determine management strategies for unowned cats

- b. Community engagement in Trap-Desex-Adopt-or-Return-and-Support (TDARS) of unsocialised urban cats is a means of reducing euthanasia rates,<sup>31</sup> and reducing unowned cat numbers over time<sup>32, 33</sup> and therefore may reduce community concern about the welfare of both cats and native wildlife. In the USA, non-lethal methods of control have been shown to be preferred by Trap-Neuter-Return supporters, conservation groups and the general public over lethal management or doing nothing, and all these groups have been shown to prefer Trap Neuter Release as a management strategy than placement of cats in long-term no kill shelters.<sup>34</sup> Although little research has been done on TDARS in Australia, in one Australian study, although nearly 70% of 1239 respondents strongly agreed or agreed that cats had a negative effect on wildlife in their area, 82% of respondents supported desexing and returning to location of stray cats when given the following information: "Overseas, programs exist where stray suburban cats are captured, desexed (spayed/neutered), then returned to where they were captured. These programs have been shown to reduce the number of complaints about these cats and to reduce the numbers of stray cats and kittens put to sleep in shelters. Would you support a trial project like this in a specified area near you?"<sup>35</sup>

Desexing and returning impounded unidentified trapped cats to where they were found in urban areas has been shown to reduce dead cat pick-ups in the street, pound intakes and euthanasia.<sup>36</sup> It

has been shown that changing from a policy of euthanasia of trapped feral cats to desexing and returning them does not lead to an increase in complaints or cat impoundments.<sup>37</sup> Wandering owned cats are likely to find their own way home.<sup>38</sup> Wandering lost or abandoned cats can be returned to their colonies. Over several years, with high levels of education and support to control reproduction and prevent abandonment of owned cats to minimise immigration to the colony,<sup>39</sup> and persistent monitoring and ongoing desexing of any incoming cats to the colony, colony numbers can be reduced.<sup>40</sup>

Impacts of cats on individual birds, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates need to be considered, as well as impacts on populations.<sup>41</sup> Supplying cats with a steady supply of food has been shown not to prevent cat predation<sup>42</sup> and there is no ethical justification for valuing the life of a cat more than another mammal, bird, or reptile. From a population perspective, cats have been linked to island and regional extinctions of native mammals and birds and have caused the failure of reintroduction attempts aimed at re-establishing threatened species.<sup>43</sup> Other factors impacting on native wildlife also need to be considered. A Western Australian city study suggested that mammal and bird densities are not related to cat numbers but are related to housing density and distance from bushland.<sup>44</sup> International consensus principles for ethical wildlife control developed by a panel of 20 international experts identify that efforts to control wildlife should begin wherever possible by altering the human practices that cause human-wildlife conflict and by developing a culture of co-existence.<sup>45</sup>

In summary, identifying the possible impacts and desirability of a reduction in numbers of unowned domestic cats is the first step. If a reduction is necessary, a sustained intensive ongoing approach is needed whether the traditional trap-and-kill or Trap-Desex-Adopt or Return & Support (TDARS) approach is used. A demographic population model for a 25 year period suggests population decreases are comparable across euthanasia, TNR and a 50:50 combination when the immigration rate is 0%, but higher for euthanasia at 25% and 50% immigration rates.<sup>46</sup> Evidence of considerable migration between four study sites in a New York City study also identified the need for a broad-scale approach involving different facets of the community over multiple years.<sup>47</sup> Another modelling study also suggests even low levels of demographic connectivity significantly reduce the effectiveness of any management intervention, and continued abandonment is similarly problematic, so that attempts to prevent owners from allowing their cats to roam freely and to abandon unwanted cats are essential along with sound biological management.<sup>48</sup> Low cost desexing programs for owned and semi-owned cats compliment free-roaming cat management by reducing the probability that these cats will serve as source populations, thus negating control attempts.<sup>46</sup>

**Because public preference is for non-lethal control methods and modelling suggests euthanasia requires higher treatment rates than TNR,<sup>46</sup> investment in low cost desexing and cat safe containment programs along with community education and TDARS appears to provide a less harmful, more publicly acceptable approach to reducing free-roaming domestic cat numbers in urban non-ecologically-sensitive environments, and reducing impacts of cats on other individual animals, and humans in the long term. To achieve success, a 2014 NSW Parliamentary research review concluded that high adoption rates, high sterilisation rates, small and stable cat populations and confined locations removed from native wildlife are necessary.<sup>49</sup>**

## **Strategy 10 Increase use of welfare-friendly cat containment and anti-predation devices**

Encouraging and providing information to owners on how to keep their cat safe. See [Keeping Cats Safe](#), and [Good Cats Play at Home](#) resources.



Anti-predation devices have been shown to reduce the rate of predation on wildlife by domestic cats. Both collars equipped with a bell and an ultrasonic device have been found to significantly reduce predation rates, and are therefore recommended as a partial solution to reducing predation rates of mammals and birds by domestic cats.<sup>50</sup> Brightly-coloured anti-predation collar covers also have been shown to lower predation of prey with good colour vision ( i.e. birds, reptiles and amphibians) but not mammals with limited colour vision.<sup>51</sup> Cat bibs regardless of colour have also been shown to reduce predation of particularly birds, but less so of mammals, and reptiles and amphibians.<sup>52</sup>

### **Strategy 11 Involve all stakeholders in solutions**

- a. Form Coalitions of local stakeholder representatives to work cooperatively on implementing G2Z solutions  
Include:
  - o Animal welfare and rescue group managers
  - o Local government – animal management coordinator, education officer, pound manager
  - o Board members of cat breed organisations
  - o Owners of local pet shops and pet supply shops
  - o Local veterinarians/practice managers
  - o University vet schools and researchers, if accessible
  - o Wildlife group representatives
- b. Community education through the general media, social media and government communications can inform the general public about the fate of unwanted kittens and cats, the need to Desex, Tag & Microchip, Enrich and Keep Safe, how to access desexing subsidies, and how to help Council to achieve compliance with breeder permits and microchipping and desexing kittens before sale.
- c. Education programs for primary and secondary students to involve them in the solutions e.g. visiting the rehoming centre, training the animals, promoting their rehoming <https://www.awlqld.com.au/education/school-programs/companion-animal-course/>. Teachers and teacher trainees in relevant areas such as primary and secondary social science visit the pound/refuge and learn how they can educate students on the essentials: Desex, Tag and microchip, Enrich, Keep Safe (with cat safe fencing).

### **Strategy 12 Whole city/shire statistics to involve communities in solutions**

Councils and animal welfare shelters work together to provide the numbers of incoming stray and surrendered animals, reclaimed, rehomed, and euthanized for each city/shire. Some Councils/welfare groups are fearful of criticism if euthanasia figures are revealed. However **how they are revealed is the key**. It must be made clear that this is a community issue which can only be resolved with all stakeholders participating i.e. lower abandonment and euthanasia numbers are the end-product of community involvement in the strategies outlined in this plan. The ACAP can be used to guide all stakeholders on how they can help.



## How to implement the plan

All stakeholders need to work together to implement the strategies which achieve zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats.

An enthusiastic cooperative community-wide approach with informed and committed stakeholders, and honest communication about professional concerns, can achieve a faster and more sustainable outcome than groups working independently, often unaware of how they can help or the impact they may be having on other groups.

The following section therefore contains the key strategies, organised by stakeholder group, for easy access to action:

1. Animal shelters and pounds /rescue groups
2. Breeders
3. Cat owners
4. Community members
5. Desexing organisations
6. Journalists
7. Local Governments
8. Property owners, real estate professionals, body corporate organisations and aged care facilities
9. Sellers of cats
10. State Governments
11. Veterinarians
12. Veterinary schools
13. Volunteer community members
14. Wildlife and conservation groups

### 1. Animal pounds, shelters and rescue groups

#### i. Proactive rehoming policies

Proactive Rehoming Policies include a manager committed to G2Z, enthusiastic staff, sufficient numbers of volunteers and foster carers, positive marketing, convenient opening hours, off site adoptions and sufficient facilities. See the G2Z [checklist of strategies](#).

#### ii. Proactive strategies to find alternatives to surrender and prevent straying of cats

- a. Making appointments for surrender interviews enables owners to think about their decisions and how they can perhaps address their concerns without surrendering, with support from the shelter staff and relevant information. It also allows planning to ensure there is space for the animals.
- b. Prior to surrendering a mother cat and kittens, provide the option of free desexing of the mother cat if the owner is willing to keep her and just surrender the kittens. This saves the pound/shelter the cost of caring for the cat and finding a home when there are too many cats. It is also often a welcomed option for the owner who is usually happy to care for the cat as long as the breeding issue is resolved.
- c. Encouraging and providing information to owners on how to keep their cats safe ([Keeping Cats Safe](#)) and how to look for them and not give up if they are missing prevents the need for rehoming and develops positive community relationships. Provision and promotion of a Lost and Found website or App enables owners to search for a missing cat independently.
- d. Community engagement in Trap Desex Adopt or Return and Support (TDARS) of unsocialised cats to where they were found is a means of reducing shelter intake and euthanasia rates,<sup>31, 36</sup> reducing

unowned cat numbers over time,<sup>40</sup> and therefore community concern both for animal welfare and impacts on local wildlife species.

Some legal constraints in relation to abandonment and pest management will have to be overcome in various states to implement this strategy in Australia, and community consultation and education will be necessary. Research trials need to be conducted in different urban environments to consider its effects in the Australian context, with careful consideration given to areas where endangered species might be affected.

### iii. Encourage local pet shops to rehome pound/shelter kittens and cats

Encourage local pet shops to rehome desexed kittens and cats on behalf of the pound/shelter. Offer the store the opportunity to surrender unwanted kittens from the general public to the local shelter for desexing and microchipping and then rehome them on the shelter's behalf, or purchase from the shelter already desexed, microchipped etc., at an affordable rate, for on-selling to the public. This enables more access to pound/shelter animals and a less overwhelming environment.

### iv. Vet School Shelter/Pound Visits

Invite local university vet school faculty to your shelter/pound. Explain the issues to them, and the need for training of vet students in prevention strategies such as desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age. Coordinate opportunities for veterinary students to have experience at shelters/pounds and shelter and community clinics, particularly developing knowledge and skills in desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age. See [Veterinary schools and veterinary students](#).

### v. Shelter/pound veterinary clinic

A shelter vet clinic is important to check animals daily, treat animals with illness and injuries, and desex and microchip prior to rehoming to prevent perpetuating the oversupply. A small clinic can be set up with minimal expense. Local community organisations and volunteers can assist with fundraising. Employment of a pound/shelter vet with experience in desexing from 8 weeks of age plus a keen attitude to saving lives will mean a cheaper, quicker and more efficient and effective service. An on-site shelter clinic allows sick animals to be treated quickly and reduces transport costs. The next best option is to have a veterinarian with a clinic near the pound/shelter who will desex from 8 weeks of age, has the capacity to visit the animals regularly and provide care and treatment for all sick or injured pound/shelter animals. Where veterinary services are not locally available, animal management officers and local community volunteers should be provided training and supplies for treatment of animals for parasites and first aid; as well as micro-chipping, and coordinate and assist with regular desexing clinics by veterinarians in local community centres.

### vi. Community Veterinary Clinic/Programs

Seek out large financial donations/bequests to establish Community Veterinary Programs or a Community Clinic to focus on services for owned animals i.e. low cost desexing and microchipping, desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age, and treating sick or injured animals whose owners are financially disadvantaged. A fixed full service Community Veterinary Clinic is a sustainable model used in Australia <http://www.g2z.org.au/models-for-desexing-programs.html>. Community clinic services may be combined with a shelter clinic or participating veterinarians to reduce costs.



**vii. Develop and/or coordinate desexing and support programs with local government including Community Outreach Programs**

Provide staff and volunteers to implement subsidised desexing programs, on behalf of Council. Transport animals to/from desexing appointments to help pet owners in need. Meet people in their homes and provide information and support for food, cat safe fencing, medical procedures, behavioural and management issues.

Shelter and pound data can assist in determining which areas of the community are most at-risk for relinquishing their pet or experiencing animal management issues.

## **2. Breeders**

All breeders (of pure-breeds, cross-breeds; intentional or accidental) have an important role to play in preventing abandoned and euthanized animals by:

**i. Selling only desexed kittens and cats**

Sell only desexed kittens and cats, unless being sold to another breeder with a permit, or a veterinarian deems a particular kitten is unable to be desexed due to poor health.

A 2014 SA study found 22% of owned cats had an unplanned litter.<sup>7</sup> Results from a Western Australian study of cats presented for discounted microchipping revealed that 50% and 71% of cats under 2 years of age were undesexed in 2012 and 2013 respectively. This is significant and poses a high risk of unwanted litters.<sup>53</sup>

Breeders can incorporate the cost of desexing in the price of the cat. Accidental breeders on low incomes can access low cost desexing programs through the National Desexing Network or Council Cooperative Desexing Programs to ensure the cycle of unwanted kittens does not continue by giving away undesexed kittens.

**ii. Microchipping and registering the breeder details on an authorised microchipping database prior to sale, and ensuring updating to the new owner's details at point of sale.**

This ensures the cat can be returned to the owner, or the breeder for rehoming if the owner abandons her.

**iii. Only breeding when responsible homes are assured**

**iv. Producing well-socialised and healthy animals**

**v. Education and support of new owners**

- a. Provide information on care throughout animals' life stages including behavioural information.
- b. Encourage and facilitate uptake of pet insurance at time of adoption or sale.

**vi. Preparedness to take back and rehome any animals whom the owner cannot care for**

**vii. Desexing and finding homes for animals who are retired from breeding or are unsuitable for breeding**

**viii. Participating in community coalitions to develop proactive legislation and policies to reduce abandonment and euthanasia of cats**

**ix. Where governments are introducing breeder and seller legislation, supporting nationally-consistent state-wide Breeder and Seller Permit Systems which require desexing of kittens by**



breeders before sale, support and follow up for inadvertent breeders to get their pets desexed, and traceability of breeders through published breeder permit numbers <http://www.g2z.org.au/recommended-legislation.html> . Breeders who are more responsible benefit from a breeder permit system which:

- a. supports fair competition for breeders and sellers who desex their kittens prior to sale and have high standards of welfare
  - b. enables government officers to identify inadvertent or socially irresponsible breeders to require them to desex their kittens, improve standards, or stop breeding
- x. **Advising owners about the importance of keeping cats safely within the property boundaries**

See [Keeping Cats Safe](#), and [Good Cats Play at Home](#) .

### 3. Cat owners

Cat owners can prevent abandoned and unwanted cats by:

- i. **Desexing and microchipping your cat(s) before 16 weeks of age to prevent unplanned breeding**  
There are no significant health concerns with desexing of kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age, and significant health and behavioural benefits.<sup>5</sup> Care must be taken to keep kittens indoors until desexed and microchipped. Owners should also ensure cats are wearing an ID Tag on a quick release collar to enable rapid return if wandering.
- ii. **Keeping details of which microchip database company you are registered with, and updating contact details whenever they change.**
- iii. **Keeping cats safely within your own property boundaries, and ensuring enrichment and socialisation so that your cat's physical and behaviour needs are met.**  
There are a variety of ways cats can be safely contained. See [Keeping Cats Safe](#), [Good Cats Play at Home](#) .
- iv. **Taking out pet insurance to ensure that you can afford to treat your animal if seriously sick or injured**
- v. **If your cat goes missing, search carefully within a 5 house radius, and get the message out with fliers and posters, social media and lost and found websites and local vets, pounds and shelters. Don't give up. Your cat may be scared and hiding or may have been trapped and impounded.**
- vi. **Support nationally-consistent government Breeder and Seller Permit systems, to include:**
  - desexing of kittens by breeders and sellers before sale at 8-10 weeks of age with desexing subsidies and follow up for people in need with undesexed cats and accidental breeders.
  - inspection of all breeders and sellers based on a Code of Practice to protect cats and their litters from over-breeding, poor conditions and irresponsible rehoming
  - traceability of breeders through published breeder permit numbers.

## 4. Community members

### i. Taking responsibility for stray cats

Taking responsibility for a friendly stray cat that comes into your yard includes not just feeding. It also includes:

- a. getting the cat scanned for a microchip to see if he/she is owned.
- b. if the cat is not identified, door-knock within a radius of 3-5 houses, which has been found the range of most house cats allowed to roam, to see if you can find the owner.<sup>54</sup> Approximately 10% of wandering owned cats may explore up to a mile, so posters with photos could be used to find owners in this wider area, if not found more locally.
- c. if the owner is found, encourage the owner to desex and microchip, and keep their cat safely on their own property if it is annoying you or other neighbours.
- d. if no owner can be found, desex and microchip the cat to reduce the number of unowned cats breeding in the wild. Investigate availability of desexing subsidies through your local government animal management department, local animal welfare shelter, or the National Desexing Network [www.ndn.org.au](http://www.ndn.org.au).
- e. take full ownership (or find the cat a new home), socialise and contain in your home/ yard where possible.

### ii. Caring for unowned colony cats

Help unowned community cats who live in colonies around urban areas such as schools, business hubs, factories, restaurants and hospitals:

- a. find a veterinarian who is supportive of desexing unsocialised community cats and who works with the National Desexing Network or another animal welfare desexing program offering low cost desexing.
- b. encourage the cats to accept human contact so they will tolerate being put in a cage to be desexed and microchipped, flea treated and wormed. It may be necessary to use a cage trap. Set traps need to be monitored, covered immediately after the cat is caught and removed to a vet clinic (who is aware of the short-notice situation). Trapping can be very time-consuming and stressful, so work with a local rescue group or animal welfare organisation if possible, to access resources, advice and support.
- c. if possible find homes for desexed kittens or abandoned owned cats who are more easily socialised. Advertise yourself or surrender to a reputable shelter or rescue group when they have space.
- d. return unsocialised cats to their original environment, provided they have access to food and shelter, locals in that area accept the cats and are not likely to harm them, and they are not a threat to endangered native species. Work with legislators to allow this, or get a permit.
- e. monitor any returned cats, to provide care as needed, and desex incoming undesexed cats to the colony to enable a reduction in numbers over time.

## 5. Desexing organisations

Desexing organisations provide vital support including:

- i. Working with local government animal management departments to secure ongoing annual funding for Cooperative Desexing Programs, which are cost saving for Councils.

- ii. Liaising with residents in need and veterinarians to get cats desexed
- iii. Promoting desexing programs before spring breeding season with incentives for action
- iv. Encouraging formation of a local coalition of stakeholders (See Local Government section)
- v. Working with local pet shops to provide assistance to desex the mother cat and kittens of people who bring litters to pet shops to sell

## 6. Journalists

In their role of social responsibility, journalists can play an important part by:

- i. Sharing information about the issues AND how the community can positively contribute to solutions
- ii. Reporting on initiatives and successes of local government and animal welfare groups in preventing abandoned animals
- iii. Keeping in touch with local government and animal welfare groups, to build community awareness of new legislation e.g. Breeder Permit Systems and policies for better compliance.

## 7. Local government

### Preventing Abandonment of Cats

Because animals are bought and sold across local government boundaries, it is preferable for local governments to work with State Governments on consistent legislation nationwide. Some of the recommendations below have already been implemented state-wide. However, where State Government legislation is delayed or difficult, the following should be introduced into local government programs and by-laws:

- i. **Targeted Cooperative Desexing Programs for cat owners/carers in need**

#### G2Z Cooperative Desexing Subsidy Programs:

- support people on a low income, enabling them to comply with desexing legislation
- provide incentives for all cat owners to prevent accidental litters
- reduce Council costs to manage unwanted animals

The cost of collection of an abandoned cat, holding the animal for an average of four days and euthanasing is on average **\$220, and \$260 for a litter** collected and housed together, then euthanized. The statutory holding period is up to 14 days in some areas, which can add another \$200 to the cost i.e. total cost of approximately **\$420 per animal or \$480 per litter**. In contrast, the cost to local government of a Co-operative Desexing Program can be as little as **\$60** on average per cat. The cost saving for Councils is therefore approximately \$160 per cat, which is a conservative figure as, for each cat prevented from breeding, the savings grow exponentially with a potential 2-3 litters per year that do not have to be collected in the future.

- support people who are feeding cats they do not own to take responsibility and desex them.



Key features of a **G2Z COOPERATIVE DESEXING SUBSIDY PROGRAM**:

- a. Ongoing subsidies are based on need and made available to:
  - holders of pension, concession or health care cards
  - people on low incomes
  - people with large numbers of cats
  - people willing to take responsibility for stray cats

Explaining to the community that Council funds are used to help desex as many animals as possible over a number of years to reduce euthanasia rates, usually means that people do not take advantage of the program unless they really need it.

- b. Costs are shared between owners, Council, animal welfare groups and veterinarians.
  - i. Prices must be low enough to allow cat owners on a pension or low income to contribute. Experience has shown that most people on a pension or low income can afford up to \$40 or \$50. Where this is not possible negotiation should occur. Consider the most reasonable rates possible in your community taking into consideration existing subsidy programs that might be offered currently by animal welfare groups, and veterinarians. Use the following guidelines summarised in Table 1. The following model has worked in Gold Coast City:

**Table 1: Guidelines for sharing of costs in a G2Z Co-operative Desexing Program**

	OWNER	COUNCIL	NDN or other ANIMAL GROUP**	VET RECEIVES
Female Cat Spey*	\$55	\$65	Run the program on Councils' behalf	\$120
Male Cat Castration	\$35	\$55		\$90

*\*If a female cat is pregnant or in season, an additional \$55 can be claimed by the vet clinic from the Council Subsidy Fund. (This means slightly fewer cats desexed (approx. 20% of cats may be pregnant or in season, with more in peak breeding season) but immediately prevents 3-5 more unwanted kittens in the community.*

*\*\*Animal welfare groups may contribute financially or by managing the program for Councils. The National Desexing Network currently manages G2Z Cooperative Desexing Programs for a number of Councils free of charge so that all Council funding is used to directly subsidise desexing for residents in need. For more information [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au)*

Note: To cover rising costs, the proportions each party pays can be adjusted gradually over time, but should only increase minimally every two or three years, to remain at a realistic level that is affordable for owners on low incomes, and still cover the costs for vets.

If all or most vet clinics in your municipality participate, each clinic will have to desex fewer animals at a subsidised rate and can set aside a slower day or evening for this extra work. If only one or two vet clinics participate, they will benefit from increased business, with less down time, compensating the reduction in profit from each service with the quantity of services offered, and strong support from the community.

As well, or alternatively, a Community Vet Clinic can be developed to increase the availability of low cost desexing and support owners who may otherwise abandon their pets because they can't afford the treatment.

The program, along with key messages about the importance of desexing, and the fate of unwanted kittens, should be promoted at key times (particularly in July before cat breeding season) for all cat

owners, to encourage immediate action to prevent unwanted kittens, particularly in the first few years of the G2Z program in communities with large numbers of abandoned animals.

- c. As part of the subsidy program, a Last Litter Fund (<http://www.g2z.org.au/desexing-programs.html>) needs to be offered to desex at the subsidised rate or, if necessary, free of charge, all mother cats, whose litters are surrendered. This means the owner can keep the cat with no further risk of unwanted litters, and reduce the numbers of adult cats needing to be rehomed.

## **ii. Desexing prior to release/rehoming from the pound**

All cats (and dogs) from pounds, rehoming centres and rescue groups must be desexed prior to rehoming to avoid further unwanted cats (and dogs). This can be most economically provided by the pound if it has its own shelter clinic and veterinary staff. The cost of desexing can be included in the rehoming price for the animal. Foster programs are essential to provide care for cats and kittens needing time to reach 8 weeks of age or 1 kg in weight, and to allow mother cats' milk to dry, before desexing. This can be organised cooperatively by recruiting local community groups e.g. animal welfare, service or church groups to coordinate a foster program if necessary.

## **iii. Require desexing of kittens prior to sale or transfer from all breeders and sellers**

Exemptions should only apply if:

- being transferred to another permitted breeder i.e. with a government permit, or, until such time as a government breeder permit is introduced, registered with another authorised organisation; or
- a veterinarian declares in writing that desexing is likely to be a serious risk to an animal's health e.g. See Standard 38 in the GCCC Breeder Code of Practice for the keeping and breeding of entire cats and dogs.

Membership of a registered breed organization must not be considered an exemption from being registered by the government and/or excluded from complying with a mandatory welfare code of practice and/or premise inspections.

## **iv. Microchipping of kittens prior to sale or transfer, with breeders' details required; and breeder/sellers' responsibility to transfer new owners' details onto authorised microchip data base when sold)**

Benefits to Local Government Animal Management Departments of requiring desexing and microchipping of kittens:

- Addresses the problem of unwanted and abandoned litters at its source
- Reduces animal management costs over time
- Less stress on pound staff with fewer animals collected and killed in pounds
- Increased community support for managing animals more proactively

## **v. Owner Support**

Provide every opportunity for owners to keep their animals safely and without nuisance to others e.g.

- a. Encourage and provide information to owners about how and where to look for their cats if they go wandering, and to persist. This prevents the need for rehoming and develops positive community relationships

- b. Encourage and provide information to community members who may be feeding cats they do not own, on how to find the owner, and if no owner, how to access subsidies to desex and take responsibility for the cats
  - c. Return animals home rather than impound them (whenever contact can be made with an owner). Returning the cat home has the added benefit of creating an opportunity to speak with the owner to determine if there are management issues that owners need assistance with and which require further information and/or training. If a cat is impounded there is only a 5-10% chance that it will be reclaimed, and often the owner will get another one free to a good home instead. The better option is to engage the owner, assist in preventing the wandering if possible, and have the cat retain its home.
  - d. Waive infringement fees for wandering owned cats in the first instance if the cause of the escape is addressed within a designated reasonable time frame e.g. appropriate cat safe fencing is built.
  - e. Waive, reduce or refund impound fees for entire and/or unidentified animals if owners desex and identify their cat (or dog) (with low cost cooperative desexing programs available as described above).
  - f. Provide trained volunteer and/or government-subsidised Animal Help Lines or promote access to existing local, state or national animal welfare resources for information on how to address common issues e.g. pet behaviour issues, safety and benefits of desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age, raise awareness that body corporate no-pet laws are regarded as unreasonable in most states/territories and how to negotiate a reasonable pet agreement with pet references.
  - g. Provide information on various cat safety options to help owners keep their cats on their properties: Keeping Cats Safe booklet and Good Cats Play at Home booklet.
  - h. Encourage and support owners and finders to help find alternatives to surrendering of cats where possible e.g. assist with behavioural information, encourage them to temporarily foster until a place can be found and provide guidance on finding a suitable new home for the cat themselves.
  - i. Implement outreach programs targeted at helping pet owners most in need. Shelter and pound data can assist in determining which areas of the community are most at-risk for relinquishing their pet or experiencing animal management issues. Meet people in their homes and community and provide support for medical procedures, transport, behavioural and management issues.
  - j. Increase the permitted maximum number of cats per household for adopters of unowned cats, provided the cats are desexed, appropriately cared for, contained and socialised. Desexed cats are not likely to cause noise or aggression issues in the community, so are not likely to be a burden on animal management.
- vi. **Harness community support for reducing stray and community cat issues non-lethally**
- a. Conduct an education campaign to encourage community members to understand cat wandering habits, to help owners find their wandering cats and ways to keep them safely and comfortably in the home or yard. 80 -90% of owned cats explore within a radius of 3-5 houses.<sup>54</sup> Approximately 10% of wandering owned cats may explore up to a mile, so posters with photos could be used to find owners in this wider area, if not found more locally.
  - b. Encourage semi-owners who feed cats they do not own to find owners through door-knocking in 3-5 house radius and encourage them to work collaboratively with owners to resolve any issues.



Encourage the community to doorknock, use social media, and posters to find owners of friendly stray cats and to check for a microchip at their local veterinarian.

- c. Promote availability of low cost desexing and microchipping to semi-owners who cannot find owners of the cats they are feeding, and encourage them to take full responsibility for their care.
- d. Support carers of unowned community cats in urbanised areas. They can help reduce council animal management costs of managing cat nuisance issues and pest management costs of culling unowned community cats. Research has shown that low level catch and kill methods commonly employed by pest management departments may actually lead to an increase in numbers of unowned cats.<sup>55</sup> Research has also shown that non-lethal methods of control are preferred by TNR supporters, conservation groups and the general public over lethal management or doing nothing, and in all these groups more respondents preferred Trap Neuter Release as a management strategy than placement of cats in long-term no kill shelters or trapping and euthanizing.<sup>34</sup> In an Australian study, although nearly 70% of 1239 respondents strongly agreed or agreed that cats had a negative effect on wildlife in their area, 82% of respondents supported desexing and returning to location of stray cats when given the following information: "Overseas, programs exist where stray suburban cats are captured, desexed (spayed/neutered), then returned to where they were captured. These programs have been shown to reduce the number of complaints about these cats and to reduce the numbers of stray cats and kittens put to sleep in shelters. Would you support a trial project like this in a specified area near you?"<sup>35</sup>

High impact Trap Desex Adopt or Return and Support (TDARS) of cats in managed colonies has been shown an effective tool in reducing shelter intake and euthanasia.<sup>31</sup> Cats in managed colonies have good welfare with no difference in body condition score from owned cats, while even unmanaged cats' quality of life scores have been found to be fair to good.<sup>56</sup> Less than 1% of 100 000 free-living stray and feral cats trapped in trap-neuter-return programs in the US were deemed too unhealthy to be returned to where they were living.<sup>57</sup>

However, to prevent increased group size from sexually intact cats immigrating into the neutered group more readily and neutered cats reducing their emigration rates, possibly due to a reduction in reproductive and competitive pressures, persistent efforts through Trap, Desex, Adopt or Return and Support (TDARS) are needed to maintain a high proportion of neutered cats to reduce populations of free-roaming cats.<sup>58</sup>

To assist community groups to manage unowned colonies and reduce their numbers:

- i. Provide desexing and microchipping subsidies for rehoming of stray or unowned cats.
- ii. Establish a register of managed colonies and their carers with guidelines including kittens to be desexed and rehomed, unsocialised cats to be desexed, identified and monitored, and annual reporting of numbers of desexed/entire cats/kittens to demonstrate a decrease in numbers over time.
- iii. Allocate a community liaison person to assist with community education and support

Wildlife protection also needs to be considered carefully as cats predate on wildlife of various types (some endangered, some considered pest species) which may impact negatively or positively on specific native wildlife species' survival). See further information in [Assessing impacts of cats](#) section

## vii. Breeder and Seller Permit Systems

NOTE: Many other programs and strategies listed in this plan should be in place before a permit system is implemented. **Any permit system must be backed by a comprehensively promoted and implemented Cooperative Desexing Program at low cost, along with desexing from 8 weeks.**

As Breeder and Seller Permit legislation is already in existence in various cities/states, the following elements are needed to ensure a nationally consistent cost-effective approach to prevent inadvertent breeding and create fair competition for socially responsible breeders:

- a. **Desexing all kittens prior to sale, unless to a permitted breeder.** Introducing a breeder and seller permit system enables only those with a breeding permit (i.e. who have been inspected and are meeting appropriate standards) to acquire an undesexed kitten. Breeders will no longer be able to sell undesexed kittens across borders and avoid and undermine the effectiveness of some city/ state breeder permit legislation. Breeders who are already desexing their kittens prior to sale will no longer be disadvantaged, as it will be a requirement for all breeders and sellers.

This would prevent the breeding of cats by the 32% of owners who surrender their cats who indicate the reason for not desexing is they did not get around to it.<sup>13(Fig10)</sup> In a SA study of cats owners 25% indicated cost as a reason for not desexing, and 20% because they wanted to breed.<sup>7</sup> Even with the availability of low cost desexing, between 2010 and 2016, 25% of cat owners issued with a subsidised desexing voucher failed to redeem their voucher (AWLQ Cooperative Desexing Program statistics).

- b. **An independent inspection of breeding/selling facilities and processes** for compliance with high level Standards wherever animals are bred and /or held for sale
- c. **Breeders/sellers pay for a Breeder and Seller Permit** to cover inspection costs
- d. **Display and publishing of the Breeder / Seller Permit Number** with all cats and dogs sold through breeding establishments, pet outlets, private homes, all other places or via the internet or other media within Australia, so customers can recognise animals have come from independently inspected establishments which meet appropriate standards of care and responsible rehoming
- e. **Records of the sources of all animals** (breeder and sellers' names and addresses), health care treatments and desexing and microchipping records (this will be essential if animals are going to be traded interstate) to be accessible by inspectors and local government authorities
- f. **Publication of breeder permit numbers** on a shared government site for consumer access so they can identify and purchase from more responsible breeders.

**viii. Coalitions of local stakeholder representatives to work cooperatively on implementing GZZ solutions**

Include:

- Animal welfare and rescue group managers
- Local government – animal management coordinator, education officer, pound manager
- Board members of cat breed organisations
- Owners of local pet shops and pet supply shops
- Local veterinarians/practice managers
- University vet schools and researchers if accessible
- Wildlife/conservation group representatives



**ix. Share statistics as a motivator to get your community involved in the solutions**

Councils and animal welfare shelters work together to provide the numbers of stray and surrendered animals, reclaimed, rehomed, and euthanized. This information can be used to encourage people to help by desexing their pets, and keeping them safely confined and identified; donating for community clinics, shelter clinics, subsidised desexing programs, and rehoming facilities; volunteering at the rehoming centre or by fostering, fundraising, or promoting animals e.g. using skilled pro bono volunteers such as PR experts, photographers, and IT experts. Seek research collaborations with universities to analyse data to identify the most successful strategies for decreasing intake and euthanasia.

**x. Develop education programs for primary and secondary students**

Involve students in the issues and solutions e.g. the AWLQ Companion Animal Course involves secondary students visiting the rehoming centre, socialising the cats, promoting their rehoming, desexing and cat safe fencing <http://www.awlqld.com.au/education/>; <http://rspcavic.org/services/education-and-learning/> . Teacher trainees in relevant areas such as primary and secondary social science should visit the pound/refuge and learn how they can educate students on the essentials: Desex, tag and microchip, Enrich, Keep Safe.

**xi. Educate the whole community about how they can prevent abandoned and euthanized cats**

Community education through the general media, social media and Council communications can inform the general public about the fate of unwanted kittens and importance of desexing them, the need to Desex, Tag & Microchip, Enrich and Keep Safe, how to access desexing subsidies, and how to help Council to achieve compliance with breeders having a permit, once required, and microchipping and desexing kittens before sale.

**xii. Involve veterinary students in pound and shelter work**

For shelters and pounds in cities with veterinary schools, involve veterinary students in pound and shelter work to learn how they can help prevent overpopulation of cats. Provide opportunities for veterinary students to be involved in desexing programs, particularly desexing kittens from 8 weeks of age.

**xiii. Also see Section 1. Animal Pounds and Shelters, Rescue Groups**

**8. Property owners, real estate professionals, body corporates and aged care facilities**

Landlords, real estate professionals, body corporate and aged care facilities can boost their customer base and play an important role in supporting responsible owners to keep their cats and prevent abandonment or surrender to pounds and shelters.

- i. Real estate agents explain the benefits of renting to responsible cat owners with pet references, and promote cat-friendly properties to make them more accessible**
- ii. Landlords and body corporates use animal- friendly lease agreements to enable responsible owners to demonstrate the suitability of their cat (or dog) for a particular residence. These can include:**
  - a. Pet references**
  - b. Pet agreements**



c. Provision of appropriate cat safe fencing /enclosures e.g. see [Keeping Cats Safe](#) booklet

iii. Landlords and real estate agents advocate for landlord insurance for pets by encouraging insurance companies to introduce this into their insurance schemes.

These strategies will ensure pet owners can keep their companion animals as part of their family, as well as safeguard the rights of property owners and other residents.

## 9. Sellers of Cats

Sellers of cats and kittens (other than breeders) e.g. pet shops, private homes and any other place also have an important role to play in preventing abandoned animals.

i. **All cats and kittens desexed prior to sale and therefore not contributing to overpopulation.**

There are no significant health concerns with desexing kittens from 8 weeks of age, and significant health and behavioural benefits.<sup>5</sup> These benefits can be promoted to new owners and the cost included in the price.

ii. **All kittens and cats microchipped and registered to the new owner on an authorised microchip database prior to sale or transfer**

iii. **Rehome cats and kittens on behalf of shelter/rescue groups; or sourcing cats and kittens only from breeders with a permit who meet independent government standards.**

iv. **If once-off “accidental” breeders present a litter for support with rehoming, work with local animal welfare groups/desexing agencies/local government cooperative desexing programs to desex and rehome the kittens and help these breeders access desexing services for their adult cats to prevent future unplanned litters**

v. **Guarantee a home for life for each animal sold, by taking back and rehoming any animal who has to be relinquished by the owner.**

vi. **Community coalitions**

Work with local governments and animal welfare agencies in community coalitions to develop proactive legislation and policies to reduce abandonment and euthanasia of cats

vii. **Support a seller permit system**

Sellers who participate in a seller permit system with inspections by independent local government or authorised animal welfare organisations demonstrate to the public that they are meeting community standards.

viii. **Encourage and facilitate uptake of pet insurance at time of adoption**

ix. **Promote pet friendly accommodation guidelines and cat safe containment options**

See [Keeping Cats Safe](#) booklet

## 10. State Government

i. **Departments of Local Government, Environment and/or Invasive Species facilitate desexing subsidy programs in cities/towns**

To prevent abandonment of kittens and proliferation of urban strays which contribute to feral cat populations offer financial incentives to local governments to provide effective long-term low cost programs e.g. state government could match local government funding on this over 5 years, or offer several fixed 5 year grants each year for which local governments can apply. (See Cooperative Desexing Programs under Local Government section).

**ii. Facilitate consistent legislation across all states and territories to require desexing of kittens before sale or transfer**

Desexing requirements should apply to all kittens and cats from breeders, pet outlets, internet sales, and pounds and shelters. Desexing exemptions apply if the animal is being sold to another permitted breeder i.e. a government permit, or until such time as a government scheme is introduced, registered with another authorised organisation (the permit number to be provided with all kittens/cats sold or transferred); or a veterinarian declares in writing that desexing is likely to be a serious risk to an animal's health e.g. Standard 38 GCCC Breeder Code of Practice for the keeping and breeding of entire cats and dogs).

The need for desexing prior to sale or transfer:

- a. As cats can be pregnant from four months of age, desexing prior to sale or transfer prevents the birth of unwanted kittens and often ongoing pregnancies, due to owners' delayed desexing. In 2009/10 in Gold Coast City 32% of owners surrendering undesexed cats of desexing age indicated the reason for not desexing as "didn't get around to it." <sup>13</sup> In a Western Australian study of cats presented for discounted micro-chipping in 2012 and 2013, 93% and 97% respectively of cats aged at least 2 years were desexed, while 49% and 28% of cats under 2 years old were desexed.<sup>53</sup>
- b. The safety and benefits of desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks of age is now well-established<sup>5</sup> and has been practiced by shelter and private practices around the world for over 20 years.
- c. Most Australian veterinary schools are aware of the need for training in this procedure, but progress has often been hindered due to logistics. Partnerships between animal welfare organisations and universities to provide young animals, sufficient scheduled hand-on practice time convenient to shelter routines, and experienced teaching staff are needed.
- d. Existing practitioners also often need to gain knowledge and experience in desexing from 8 weeks of age. A training module which can be used as part of veterinarians' required continuing professional development is available

**iii. All kittens required to be micro-chipped prior to sale or transfer, with:**

- a. breeders required to record their details on the microchip database (breeder name, place of breeding and breeding parent microchip number with each kitten (and pup) sold). This increases breeder accountability by making all animals potentially traceable.
- b. sellers (who may be the breeder) required to transfer details of new owner onto microchip registry and to keep records of this (and breeder source if not the breeder).
- c. all database companies to be accredited by state government and required to share information efficiently between databases and have a system for annual updates of owner details to facilitate return of animals and thus minimise impact on the community.

**iv. Consistent legislation for non-discriminatory pet-friendly rental and body corporate accommodation**

Work with other state governments to develop nationally consistent requirements to prevent discrimination against responsible cat owners keeping cats in strata title and rental accommodation, and

aged care facilities. Protect the interests of property owners through pet agreements and pet references. Property owner insurance for pet damage should also be available.

**v. Breeder and Seller Permit Systems**

NOTE: Many other programs and strategies listed in this plan should be in place before a permit system is implemented. **Any permit system must be underpinned by a comprehensively promoted and implemented desexing support service at low cost with desexing from 8 weeks for cats.**

Breeder and Seller Permit legislation is already in existence in various cities/states. The following elements are suggested to ensure a nationally consistent cost-effective approach to support consumers when acquiring a pet, to prevent inadvertent breeding, and create fair competition for breeders who are socially responsible and desexing their kittens.

- a. **Desexing all kittens prior to sale, unless to a permitted breeder.** Introducing a breeder and seller permit system enables only those with a breeding permit (i.e. preferably who have been inspected and are meeting appropriate standards) to acquire an undesexed kitten. It is important to work with local and state governments across Australia to achieve consistent legislation, so that breeder/sellers will no longer be able to sell undesexed kittens across borders and avoid and undermine the effectiveness of individual city/ state breeder permit legislation. This enables fair competition for breeders who are already desexing their kittens prior to sale. Any permit system must be underpinned by a comprehensively promoted and implemented desexing support service at low cost with desexing from 8 weeks.
- b. **A user pays Breeder and Seller Permit** to cover costs of an independent inspection for compliance with mandatory high level Standards wherever animals are bred and /or held for sale
- c. **Display and publishing of the Breeder / Seller Permit Number** (if not the breeder) with all cats and dogs sold through breeding establishments, pet outlets or via the internet or other media within Australia, so customers can recognise animals have come from independently inspected establishments which meet appropriate standards of care and responsible rehoming
- d. **Records of the sources of all animals** (breeder and sellers' names and addresses), health care treatments and desexing and microchipping records (this will be essential if animals are going to be traded interstate) to be accessible by inspectors and local government authorities
- e. **Publication of government permitted breeders with breeder permit numbers** on a shared government site for consumer access so they can identify and purchase from more responsible breeders.

**vi. Investigate the introduction of a Rehoming Permit System**

This would require development of Standards based on the best practice and of the most effective evidence-based strategies in reducing intake and increasing live release, and independent inspections of all pounds, shelters and rescue groups, with information and guidance for achieving the standards, and publication of data.

- vii. Control or reduce unowned cat numbers in cities and towns by working with the community on trap- desex- adopt-return-support (TDARS) programs.**



Although trap-neuter-return is unsuccessful in open populations and not practical over large areas,<sup>43</sup> reduction in numbers can be achieved in small well-defined urban areas.<sup>32, 33</sup> Communities have shown opposition to lethal cat control methods, particularly in urban areas.<sup>34</sup> In a study of Australian pet owners, 70% believed that cats have a negative effect on wildlife in their area, yet 82% indicated they would support a trial TNR project on stray suburban cats to reduce complaints and numbers euthanased in shelters.<sup>35</sup> Trap Desex Adopt or Return and Support programs can be achieved by:

- Amending legislation related to abandonment and pest species to allow Trap Desex Adopt Return Support (TDARS) programs for unowned unsocialised stray/colony cats in cities/towns
- Developing and promoting nationally-consistent guidelines on best practice in TDARS programs e.g. pilot studies to assess impacts on wildlife, particularly in relation to endangered species, as cats may have positive and/or negative impacts;<sup>30</sup> small managed colonies with kittens adopted and cats desexed and identified; organisation responsible for registering the colony with local government and providing primary and secondary contact details, location of colony and type of site e.g. university, office block; annual reporting of cat numbers – desexed/entire, cats/kittens
- Providing incentives to Councils to support desexing programs which give subsidies to socially responsible community members who care for and manage these cats to prevent further breeding and reduce numbers
- Community consultation and information about TDARS to resolve concerns
- Conducting education campaigns to raise awareness about prevention of wandering and unowned community cats through desexing, identification, cat safe fencing, how to best find a lost cat, how to find owners of stray cats, taking ownership of unidentified cats and desexing and identifying them with both chip and collar and phone tag

#### **Benefits of all of the above legislation for State Governments**

Assists various departments achieve effective governance i.e.

- Department of Local Government – cost-effective management of cats through prevention
- Department of Primary Industries – proactive strategies to improve animal welfare
- Department of Environment – proactive strategies for preventing domestic cats from breeding and contributing to the feral cat population and further wildlife predation

## **11. Veterinarians**

Veterinarians are in a unique position to assist with preventing unwanted animals and saving existing lives.

### **i. Promote desexing before 16 weeks of age to all cat owners**

- a. In a 2014 SA study of cat owners, only 47% desexed their most recently acquired cat at between 3-6 months of age. 24% indicated a cat should have a litter before being desexed (with another 16% unsure).<sup>7</sup>
- b. Desexed animals are likely to live a longer life, and require more veterinary treatment and care into old age, than if they are wandering undesexed, and euthanized in pounds/shelters. Over time with reduced oversupply, there will be fewer give-away kittens, unplanned owners and stray cats and less pressure for subsidised desexing and free treatment.

- ii. **Encourage and offer desexing from 8 weeks of age to all breeders<sup>5</sup> i.e. anyone who has a litter of kittens, to prevent accidental litters when owners don't get around to desexing, or don't go to a veterinarian at all.**
  - a. In the 2014 SA survey, 22% of owners indicated their cat had an unplanned litter and 3% were unsure. Only 10% identified that cats can have kittens by 5 months of age with 18% suggesting by 3 or 4 months, 27% from 6 months, 15% from one year, and 29% unsure.<sup>7</sup>
  - b. If practicing vets are not confident about desexing at 8-12 weeks, an online professional development program is available, which can contribute to Continuing Professional Development points.
- iii. **Encourage and offer desexing of cats from 8 weeks of age<sup>5</sup> to pounds and shelters in your local area to enable desexing prior to rehoming. This will improve cat welfare and management by reducing the numbers of abandoned kittens and cats, and reduce euthanasia in private and shelter vet clinics.**
- iv. **Be part of a cooperative subsidised desexing program for cat owners in need, and cat carers who are providing a community service by taking ownership of stray and colony cats.**

Share costs with local government, animal welfare groups and owners. See details of how such a program can work and benefit you and your community in the Local Government Section above. This service can also be used to encourage people who are feeding animals they do not own, to identify the owner, and if no identification, to take greater responsibility and desex these cats/kittens.
- v. **Encourage and provide incentives to microchip, check microchip data is up to date at vet visits, and advise owners on how to update their details on the microchip database**
- vi. **Provide information and support to encourage keeping cats safe within property boundaries with cat safe fencing (see Keeping Cats Safe booklet and Good Cats Play at Home booklet) and sufficient company and enrichment**
- vii. **Offer pet-friendly accommodation guides and references to cat owners to enable them to find accommodation in rental and body corporate properties**
- viii. **Initiate or work with an existing community coalition to promote and achieve zero euthanasia of all healthy and treatable cats and dogs in the whole community**
- ix. **Develop community awareness – find out the numbers of abandoned and euthanized animals in your community and provide this information to the community to encourage them to desex, identify, enrich, and keep their animals safe.**
- x. **Establish a community veterinary clinic or other support system with like-minded veterinarians who have a strong commitment to desexing and providing treatment for all animals, so that no animal has to be euthanized due to owner's inability to pay for veterinary treatment.**
- xi. **Help in shelter clinics or community clinics which work intensively to prevent overpopulation of cats and minimise loss of life**
- xii. **Encourage and facilitate uptake of pet insurance when animals are acquired**



- xiii. Identify and manage problem behaviours early, before they damage the human-animal bond and increase the risk for relinquishment. Provide guides on how to search for a lost cat, and how to find owners of a wandering cat.

## 12. Veterinary schools

In order for veterinarians to further contribute to preventing unwanted animals, the following actions are needed in all veterinary schools:

- i. **Proficiency in desexing between 8 and 16 weeks of age. This is essential to help overcome the lack of experience and training of existing practitioners.<sup>5</sup> To achieve this:**
  - a. Partnerships need to be established with local pounds/shelters to provide animals, and where possible shelter clinic staff and facilities, to enable students to gain hands-on experience under direct supervision of shelter veterinarians highly skilled in desexing kittens between 8 and 16 weeks old.
  - b. University surgery teachers should do in-service with shelter veterinarians to become proficient in teaching quick safe desexing techniques for kittens from 8 weeks of age or 1 kg in weight, and to augment the shelter desexing program, so that the rate of desexing and saving lives of shelter animals is maintained. A vet professional education package is also available on-line.
  - c. Funding may need to be sought from other local community organisations not involved in shelter/rescue work, to fund the additional vet and vet nurse time needed to train students and redesign facilities and/or work flow to accommodate the interruptions.
- ii. **Compulsory work experience in a shelter or pound, to raise awareness of the desexing, health and behavioural issues of companion animals.**
- iii. **Include cat overpopulation issues in compulsory course content and how veterinarians can contribute to solutions (see Vet Section above).**

Course content should include the causes (refer to What are the cat issues in Australia at the beginning of the document), the numbers of animals being abandoned and proportions being euthanized in their local community, awareness of G2Z strategies that have been successful, and how veterinarians can contribute to the solutions including establishing, managing or working in community vet clinics; specialising in shelter medicine; initiating and/or participating in NDN Cooperative Desexing Programs; and providing owner information and support for desexing, identification, and keeping cats safely with various options for cat safe fencing.

## 13. Volunteers in pounds/shelters/rescue groups

Volunteers can make a huge impact on preventing unwanted animals and saving existing lives by:

- i. **Helping with cooperative subsidised desexing programs**

This involves working with animal welfare groups to manage desexing subsidy programs funded by Councils. It involves receiving calls from the public, issuing vouchers, liaising with local veterinarians and animal welfare groups, helping with transport of animals to be desexed (See Local Government section).
- ii. **Helping animal welfare groups with school programs**



- iii. **Using professional skills of marketing, photography, reception etc. to assist with rehoming of abandoned animals**
- iv. **Using professional skills of building, plumbing, painting, landscaping etc. to establish separate rehoming facilities at pounds**
- v. **Donating and fundraising to establish shelter and community vet clinics**
- vi. **Fostering young animals that are too young to be desexed and cats with treatable illnesses until they are well, so they can be safely desexed and rehomed from a shelter; or fostering healthy animals as part of a recognised rescue organisation while they wait for a permanent home.**
- vii. **Volunteering to care for and socialise cats waiting for new homes at pounds and shelters**

#### **14. Wildlife and conservation groups**

Wildlife groups e.g. Wildcare Australia and the Wildlife Preservation Society have played an important role in the development of the recommendations in this plan. The role of wildlife groups includes:

- i. **Being part of local, state and national Stakeholder Coalitions to encourage and give support to preventative legislation and policies**

Supporting the introduction of Cooperative Desexing Programs, legislation requiring all kittens to be desexed by the breeder prior to sale or transfer, and all cats desexed from pounds and shelters. These strategies will reduce the oversupply of cats and kittens which affect native wildlife.

- ii. **Helping with community education to promote desexing of cats from 2-4 months of age.**
- iii. **Promotion of appropriate cat safe fencing and enclosures that limit wandering and predation**

See Keeping Cats Safe and Good Cats Play at Home materials

## **Conclusion**

All stakeholders can play a significant role in reducing the numbers of stray, abandoned and euthanized kittens and cats in Australia. It is hoped therefore that all groups will support the plan and its implementation, particularly those aspects relevant to their stakeholder group, as well as continuing to engage in the national discussions to refine and develop new initiatives. Thanks to the national stakeholder groups who have contributed to this plan:

Australian Cat Federation, Australian National Cats, Australian Institute of Animal Management, Animals Australia, Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Council, Australian Veterinary Association, Sentient, Animal Welfare League of Australia, RSPCA Australia, and the National Animal Rescue Groups of Australia.

G2Z will work with governments and stakeholder groups to progress implementation. This document will be the basis for developing Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely and Tangible Action Plans for a strongly supported way forward. It will then be reviewed and the next stage developed with all stakeholders. Any updates will be available on the G2Z website.

For enquiries or to arrange a meeting with a G2Z representative to discuss the plan, please email [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au)

## Appendix 1 - Current legislation and review activity

(As legislation/policy is regularly being developed, Governments are asked to check this information and notify G2Z [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au) if there are additions/corrections needed)

LEGISLATION /PROGRAMS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
	Updated 14.6.18	Updated 25.6.18	Updated 16.1.18	Updated 26.2.18	Updated 16.1.18	Updated 16.1.18	Updated 17.1.18	Updated 16.1.18
<b>Desexing</b>								
State/Territory Government grants to support (or encourage local governments to support) targeted Co-operative Desexing Subsidy programs	No	No Some local councils funding desexing e.g. Camden, Illawarra, Campbelltown, Eurobodalla.	No	Not currently. Grants to 4 Councils for desexing initiatives in 2009/10. Some local councils funding desexing e.g. City of Gold Coast, Ipswich, Lockyer, Fraser Coast	No	No	No	\$3.2mill in grants made available 2012-2014 through Cat Act Implementation Program to assist with cat management facilities and desexing
Desexing of kittens required before sale or transfer by all breeders	Yes, if 3 months of age or more. A person commits an offence if a person sells a cat that has not been desexed and the cat is at least 3 months of age. Compulsory Standard in Breeder Code: A person may breed a litter from a cat only if the cat is between the ages of 12 months and 7 years.	No From July 1 <sup>st</sup> 2019 an annual permit required (within 21 days or when the cat is 4 months of age whichever is later) unless a cat is desexed, or registered prior to this date, or owned by a breeder who is a member of a recognised breeder organisation; Discount registration for cats desexed before 4 months, rather than 6 months from 1 July 2019	No	No but required by some councils i.e. City of Gold Coast, Fraser Coast	No but by 6 months, from 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2018, exemptions for registered breeders	Yes (unless a cert from vet, or a care agreement with buyer to have cat desexed, or purchased by reg. breeder)	No	Yes unless to an approved breeder or with a pre-paid voucher to buyer; and all cats by 6 months
<b>Microchipping</b>								
Microchipping required prior to sale or transfer	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes by 3 months old	Yes	Yes	Yes
Breeder information required on microchip database	No	Yes NSW register is currently being updated to collect better information to track animals throughout their life	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No



LEGISLATION /PROGRAMS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
M/C numbers required to be displayed when animal advertised	No	Yes Amendment to POCTA (effective late 2018) requires people selling or giving away dogs and cats to display a unique identifying number –either microchip number or Breeder ID number or Rehoming Org number.	No	No	Breeder Reg. Number	No	Yes	No
<b>Landlords/Body Corporates/Aged care and retirement accommodation</b>								
Non-discriminatory pet-friendly legislation for aged care, retirement, body corporate and rental properties	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Responsible Breeding</b>								
All breeders (pure-breed, cross-breed, planned or accidental) required to have a govt. breeder permit	Yes Breeder Licence required by a keeper or carer of a female cat which breeds a litter	No	No.	No. Required in some local govts only eg. City of Gold Coast (CofGC), Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC)	Breeder Reg. Number only	No but only registered breeders (with a cat breed org or govt) allowed to breed cats (Cat Management Act 2009); planning govt permits for time-limited breeding	No requirement for members of an applicable organisation to register with Council	Yes Local Govts under the Cat Act 2011
Breeder pays for the permit	No	No	No	No, except in some councils e.g. CofGC, MBRC	No	No	Varies-Registered domestic animal businesses are required to pay a reg fee to Council. Councils set fee structure to cover cost of inspection	Not legislated state wide, but can be introduced by local govts in local laws
Independent accredited inspection required	Yes, may be required.	No	No	No, except in some councils e.g. CofGC,	No	No	Yes	Not legislated state wide, but



LEGISLATION /PROGRAMS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
				MBRC				can be introduced by local govts in local laws
Compulsory standards in a Breeder Code of Practice	Yes	Yes	No	No, except in some councils e.g. CofGC, MBRC	Yes	No	Yes	No
Requirement to publish Breeder Permit numbers	Yes	Yes Amendment to POCTA (effective late 2018) requires people selling or giving away dogs and cats to display a unique identifying number –either microchip number or Breeder ID number or Rehoming Org number	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
State/Territory Government database of permitted breeders	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No but Pet Exchange Register commences on 1.7.19	No
<b>Responsible Selling</b>								
All sellers to have a Permit	No	No	No	No except some councils	No	No	No from 1.7.19 all sellers of cats and dogs required to enrol on Pet Exchange Register	No
User pays for permit	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Permit to be displayed	No	Yes Amendment to POCTA (effective late 2018) requires people selling or giving away dogs and cats to display a unique identifying number –either microchip number or Breeder ID number or Rehoming Org number	No	No	Breeder Number	No	Must include unique Pet Exchange Register source number in any advertisement from 1.7.19	No
Desexing all kittens/cats before sale	Yes, but required by 3 months. A person	No	No	No	Yes – if cat is of sufficient	Yes (unless a vet certificate, or care	No	Yes

LEGISLATION /PROGRAMS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
	commits an offence if a person sells a cat that has not been desexed and the cat is at least 3 months of age.				age or by 6 months, whichever is the later	agreement with buyer to have cat desexed, or reg. breeder		
Sellers required to keep records of source, health care and buyer for all animals sold; accessible by government and authorised agencies	Yes	Yes	No	No	Info about breeder and health care to the buyer	No	Yes under Codes of Practice	No
State/Territory Government database of government permitted sellers (linked nationally)	No	No	No	No	No	No	From 1.7.19 on Pet Exchange Register if selling or giving away a cat or dog. Public limited access to info.	No
<b>Pound, shelter and rescue</b>								
Desexing all cats required prior to adoption from pounds/shelters/rescue groups	Yes	No	No	No, except some councils	Yes	Yes	Yes. Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Pounds and Shelters	Yes
A rehoming permit system for effective evidence-based strategies to reduce intake, and increase live release rates, including adoption & fostering	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Councils required to report whole-of-city intake and outcomes (incl. pound/shelters/rescue) collated by State Government for public access	No	Yes. Pound data collected by Office of Local Government and reported to public on the OLG website	No	No	Yes S26	No	No Councils are required to prepare a Domestic Animal Man Plan every 4 years and may include this data in these plans	No
<b>Reducing Unowned Cat Populations</b>								
Legislation supports Trap Desex Adopt or Return & Support (TDARS) programs for	No	No	No	No	No	No (an offence to abandon a cat so	No	No

LEGISLATION /PROGRAMS	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
urban stray cats						trapped cats must be rehomed or euthanased)		
Government-authorised pilot studies to test and develop effective TDARS programs in suitable urban areas	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Standards and guidelines for best practice TDARS	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
State/Territory-wide education programs to prevent wandering, by promoting desexing, cat safe fencing, helping owners find lost cats, feeders find owners or if unowned take ownership and desex	Yes	Responsible Pet Ownership Program encourages ID, registration and early de-sexing of cats. Education actions include supporting release of the Good Neighbour package of materials for vets and cat owners, developed by the Cat Protection Soc NSW	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (\$1.4 mill for regional coordinators)	Yes Who's for Cats campaign aims to reduce the numbers of cats impounded and euth in shelters and pounds	Yes – Fact Sheets on Dept website and promotion through the Grant Program 2012-2014.
Other		OLG Statutory review of the Companion Animals Regulation prior to its automatic repeal 1 Sept, 2018					No	Cat Act to be reviewed after 1.1.19



## Appendix 2 - Summary of stakeholders & strategies for G2Z Australian Cat Action Plan

STRATEGY	STATE GOVT	LOCAL GOVT	POUNDS	ANIMAL WELFARE / SHELTERS/ RESCUE	DESEXING ORGANIS- ATIONS	CAT BREEDERS	SELLERS i.e.. PET SHOPS, INTERNET	VETS	VET SCHOOLS	CAT OWNERS	VOLUNTEERS COMMUNITY MEMBERS	JOURNALISTS
<b>Preventing Abandoned Animals</b>												
Targeted Cooperative Desexing Programs		*		*	*			*		*	*	*
Community Vet Clinic		*		*				*			*	
Pounds/shelters/rescue groups desex prior to sale or transfer	*	*	*	*				*				
Promote desexing 8-12 weeks old	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*
Require desexing kittens by all breeders prior to sale/transfer	*	*				*	*	*	*	*		
Breeder & Seller Permit System with inspection based on Code of Practice	*	*				*	*					
Require microchipping to include breeder details	*	*				*		*	*			
Increase pet-friendly accommodation	*	*		*			*					*
Owner support to prevent breeding, wandering and impounding		*	*	*				*	*	*		
Encourage people feeding stray cats to find owners or take ownership (desexing, microchipping)		*		*				*			*	*
Assess impacts and pilot Trap Desex Adopt or Return and Support programs for unsocialised cat colonies/community cats		*		*	*			*			*	
Increase use of welfare- friendly enclosures/fencing and anti- predation options		*	*	*		*	*	*	*			*
Stakeholder coalitions and school/community education	*	*	*	*		*	*	*			*	*
Whole city/shire data published		*		*					*			*

STRATEGY	STATE GOVT	LOCAL GOVT	POUNDS	ANIMAL WELFARE / SHELTERS/ RESCUE	DESEXING ORGANIS- ATIONS	CAT BREEDERS	SELLERS i.e.. PET SHOPS, INTERNET	VETS	VET SCHOOLS	CAT OWNERS	VOLUNTEERS COMMUNITY MEMBERS	JOURNALISTS
<b>Saving Existing Animals</b>												
Proactive rehoming policies		*	*	*							*	
Pet shops/pet supply stores rehoming desexed cats and kittens							*					
Shelter Vet Clinic		*	*	*				*	*		*	
Shelter medicine in vet courses as professional pathway			*	*					*			
Information & support on care through life-stages		*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Increase uptake of pet insurance at point of sale/transfer			*	*		*	*	*	*			*
Breeders/sellers/pounds/ shelters take back and rehome animals owners cannot care for		*	*	*		*	*					
Breeders desex and rehome retired breeding animals		*				*						
Increase permitted number of cats per household for adopters/carers		*										

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