



Science-based urban cat management

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IT'S NOT JUST THE ANIMALS

"The effect on mental health is a very real problem, and veterinarians were the most affected – it was terrible to see the impact on them"

"I have seen so many people's lives damaged by having to kill a never ending stream of kittens and cats"

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One Welfare philosophy



Actions balance and optimise the wellbeing of animals, people and their physical and social environment

Proactive & solutions focused



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- Animals:**
 - Aust 33% of cats/kittens killed in pounds & shelters
 - Aust worst quarter of municipalities kill 67% - 100%
 - Most killed are young (<6 months), healthy & "strays"
- People:**
 - Extensive research documents negative mental health impact on people killing animals
 - Other staff impacted – AMOs- QOL, job satisfaction
 - People caring for cats being killed (Scotney 2023)
- Environment (including wildlife):**
 - 2022 report to OLG NSW "Input of cats into pounds is stable across NSW" – killed 107,000 cats/kittens
 - Chua 2024 – impoundments increasing

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AIM: OUTCOME MEASURES based on One Welfare Is wellbeing of animals, humans & environment improved?

Animal well-being – is it improved?

Measures:

- Higher level cat caring behaviours
- Decreased pound intake of strays and euthanasia of cats and kittens
- Decreased numbers of free-roaming cats over time (on camera traps)
- Low relative risk of spread of infectious disease to pet cats, humans and wildlife



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AIM: OUTCOME MEASURES based on One Welfare Is well-being of animals, humans & environment improved?

Well-being of humans – is it improved?

Measures:

- Decreased euthanasia of healthy but shy/fearful cats and kittens
- Impact on mental health and job satisfaction of pound/shelter staff & animal management officers
- Impact on wellbeing of owners and semi-owners assisted in program (Crawford 2023)



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AIM: OUTCOME MEASURES based on One Welfare
Is the well-being of animals, humans & environment improved?

Well-being of environment:

Reduced number of free-roaming cats

Measures:

- Decreased intake of cats and kittens
- Decreased cat-related calls to council
- Decreased numbers of cats over time on camera traps
- Identification of cat impacts on wildlife & if changed over time
- Home-range of desexed RM cats



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AIM: OTHER OUTCOME MEASURES

- Identification of community priorities for management of urban stray cats.
- Development of transferable processes to share with local governments to rapidly achieve animal, human & environmental benefits from community cat programs in locations of 1500 to >1 million residents.
- Costs and benefits, compared to current 'business as usual' methods of cat management, for councils and shelters



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Diverse & expert multidisciplinary team:

- Veterinarians**
- Ecologists**
- Biosecurity**
- Shelter experts**
- Psychologists**
- Infectious disease experts**
- Animal behaviour, welfare & ethics**
- Economists**



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Publications

1. Situational Analysis of Cat Ownership and Cat Caring Behaviors in a Community with High Shelter Admissions of Cats

- 35% owned cats, 3% fed stray cats.
- Cats were predominantly obtained from family or friends (31%) and stray (19%).
- More owned cats than owned dogs were sterilized (91% versus 78%). However, only 74% of cats aged 4 to <12 months were sterilized.
- 51% of owners contained their cat(s) at all times, and a further 18% at night

2. A situational analysis of attitudes to stray cats and preferences and priorities for their management.

- 94% stop kittens being born > killing wildlife > disease transmission to pets, people

3. Cat caring behaviors and ownership status of residents enrolling a cat in a free sterilization program

4. Outcomes of a Community Cat Program based on sterilization of owned, semi-owned and unowned cats in a small rural town

5. Solutions-Based Approach to Urban Cat Management—Case Studies of a One Welfare Approach to Urban Cat Management.

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Ecology research— Numbers of free-roaming cats over 5 years & interactions of wildlife, cats, land-use



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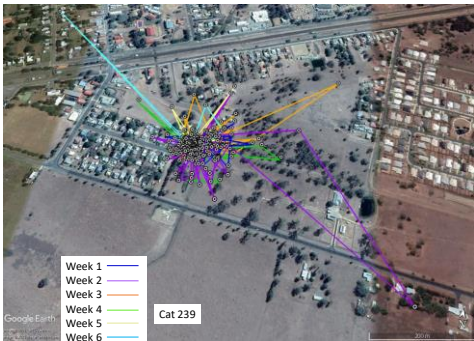
Cat Tracking (Sirtrack collars)



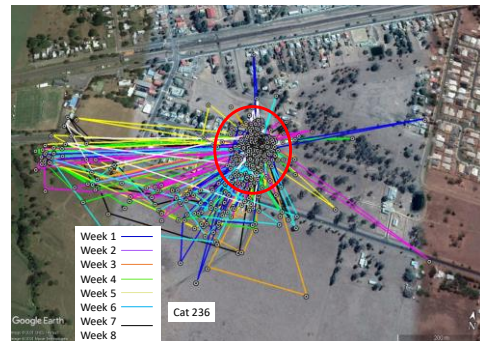
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95% home range 0.2 - 0.4 hectare

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Ceres Tags

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Tracking cats after desexing



Cat tracked at multi-cat site in Jul - Sep 2023. Note limited range of cat from food source

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Strategy 1: Definitions of feral



- Based on how and where they live – **NOT** behaviour
- Calling domestic cats “feral”, kills pet cats, adoptable cats and cats people have emotional strong bonds with
- “The bonds that we have with them are just as strong as the bonds as my own cats that live in my house...we think of them as our cats.”



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Definition is important to protect cats



Stockton Breakwall – Port of Newcastle

“Port of Newcastle engaged a licensed and experienced external contractor to help control **feral cats** on the breakwall to reduce risks to the community, native fauna and the environment.”



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“Horrific. I still today of horrific nightmares. Nightmares about cats being injured and jumping into the water and me trying to get in the water to find them and I can't. I couldn't help them. I felt so helpless”



“I couldn't eat for weeks. I'm that thin and it's because when the stress of the cull happened, I literally couldn't eat.”

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Does mandatory containment work?



‘Overall, councils with cat containment regulations have not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations’. (RSPCA 2018 Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia)

Yarra-Ranges-Council-data (Mandated-24/7-containment-in-2014)¶

| Measure | 2012/13 | 2016/17 | Difference | %-Change |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|------------|----------|
| Resident-population | 149,026 | 152,246 | +3,220 | ^2.2% |
| Cat-Nuisance-complaints | 237 | 576 | +339 | ^143.0% |
| Cats-impounded | 440 | 738 | +298 | ^68.0% |
| Cats-euthanased | 232 | 273 | +41 | ^18.0% |

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Strategy 2: Anti-nuisance laws NOT mandated containment

- Strongly encourage containment on property & provide practice tips
- Promote bedtime feeding – feed cat as go to bed & close windows



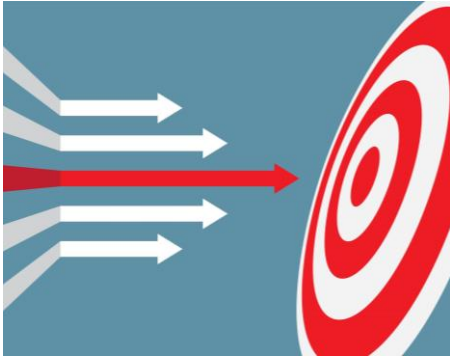
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What can we do?



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Targeted approach



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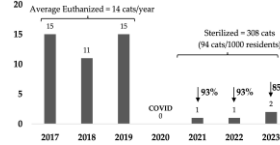
Community Cat Programs

Cat-related calls to council **down 39%** in

\$2/resident per year



https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/21/3058



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Strategy 3: Stop the kittens!



. >50% cats entering shelters and pounds were born in previous 6 mths

. Targeted (microtargeted) free desexing programs



- Annual family income was the strongest predictor of whether cats in the household were **desexed** (Chua 2009)
- On average, 20% of Australian households (2.4 people) live on < \$800/week
- In disadvantaged suburbs, ≥ 30% households on < \$800/wk
- **\$300+/ to desex & microchip female cat**
- Own or care for average 1.5 cats



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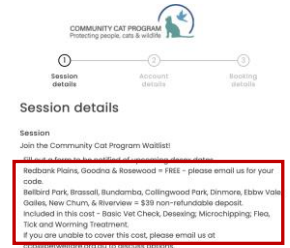
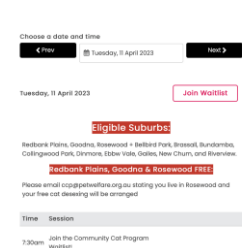


Flyers offering free sterilization



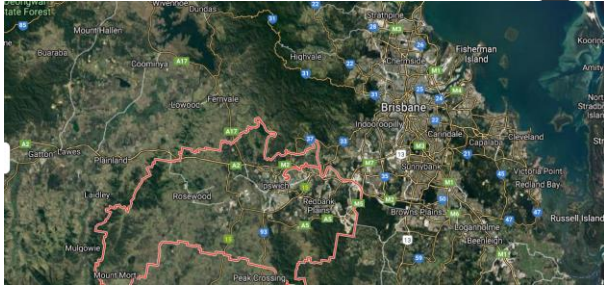
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On-line booking system – BookIt (Waitwhile)

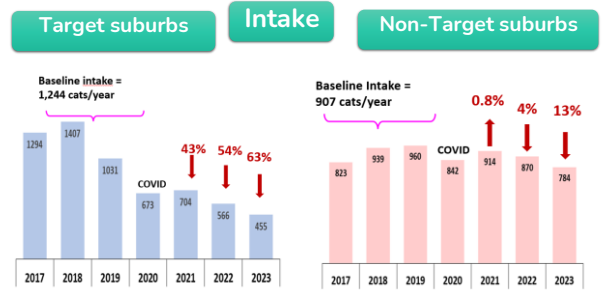


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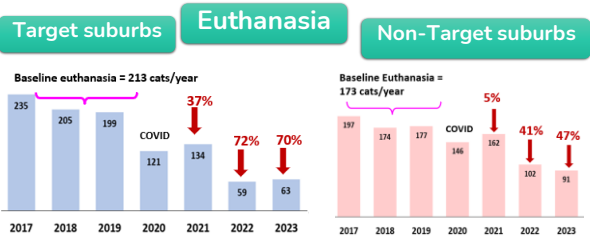
Queensland: City of Ipswich



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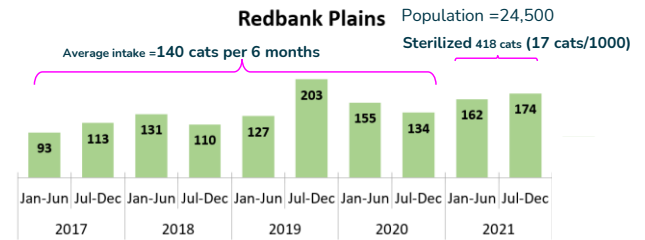
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Decreasing cat intake in target areas -especially of shy & timid cats which have longer lengths of stay in shelters & higher risk of euthanasia
 → frees up shelter resources to help other cats have live outcomes.

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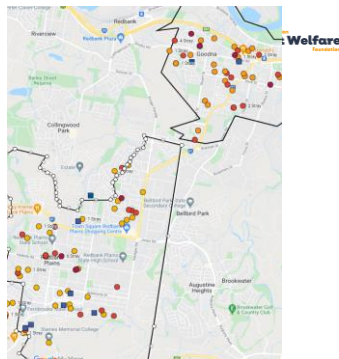
Intake



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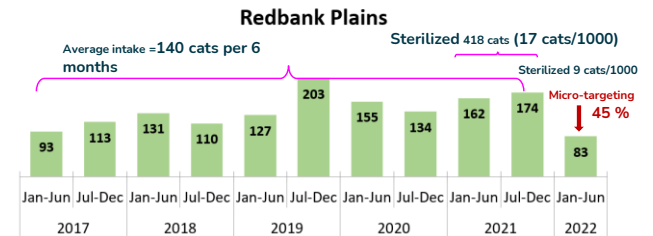
Micro-targeted community liaison to locations where complaints or multiple cats were originating from.

Door-knocking & flyers



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Intake



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Semi-owners

- Cat semi-owners caring for 1-3 cats represent a **significant avenue** to “rehome” timid and shy cats
- Assist semi-owners to adopt!
- High risk of euthanasia in shelters and pounds
- Reduces **unnecessary euthanasia** & is **lower cost**



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Strategy 4: Stop the timid-shy cats!

- High risk of complaints, impoundments, euthanasia
- Make it easy for semi-owners to adopt!



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Remove barriers

1. Free desexing for semi-owners' cats
2. Free microchipping
3. Free registration
4. No excess cat permits
5. Do NOT have mandatory 24/7 containment
 - Poorly socialised
 - Not house-trained
 - Over time become more socialised



“Since being desexed my male cat is a lot calmer, he doesn't attack the children anymore and enjoys just a pat or cuddle”

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Multi-cat sites (defined > 4 cats, average 12 cats)

- 1 in 25 semi-owners are overwhelmed individuals feeding 6 or more cats
- Sometimes squalor situations and mental health issues
- Want help and respond very well – provided cats not killed
- Most on private property, including around social housing
- Other sites aged care facilities, hospitals, schools, shops, universities, **few on truly public land**
- True hording rare – “Rescue” hoarder, “Exploitive” hoarder



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Strategy 5: Stop kittens from multicat sites and timid shy adults!

- Legislative changes to allow **cats to be desexed and returned to carer** with ear tip and microchip
- Business and organisations be also allowed to be owners



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TNR +++

- Assist them to care for these cats – sterilizing, microchipping, health care, food, cat litter
- Resolve complaints – assist with fencing or deterrents



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Strategy 6: Stop killing healthy but fearful, timid shy adults!

- Legislative changes to allow **impounded unidentified** "stray" cats if healthy but **would be euthanased** because of timid, shy, fearful behaviour to be **desexed and returned to home** location with ear tip and microchip
- Return to field** (shelter, neuter and return) and Working Cats (barn cats, factory cats etc)
- It is life-saving!!**
- For cats & shelter staff**



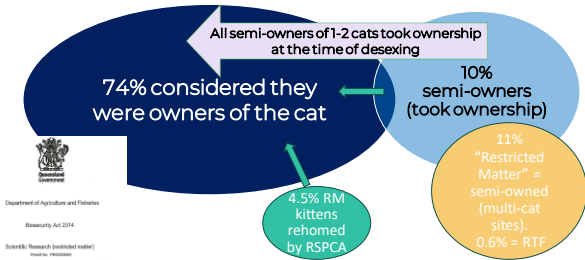
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Community Cat Programs: Aim to reduce shelter intake and euthanasia

- Sterilizing owned cats** to stop kittens being born to become strays or surrendered to shelter
- Converting semi-owners to owners** to stop timid and shy cats and kittens coming into shelter
- Managing multi-cat sites (TNR)** Sterilizing cats for cat caregivers (semi-owners) to stop timid and shy cats & kittens coming into shelter
- Protecting human & animal lives (Return to field – RTF and Barn/Working cats)** Returning healthy cats that would not be adopted to where they were found – someone is caring for them – RTF
- Assisting cat owners and carers to care for their cats**
- Resolving cat-related nuisance issues**

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City of Ipswich -Community Cat Program 3401 cats desexed since Aug 2020



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If at first you didn't consider yourself to be the owner, but now you do, what made you change your mind (n=82)? Choose up to 5 factors



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Key factors for success: Community Cat Program

- Identify suburbs with highest cat admissions or complaint calls
- Microtarget:** Engage with community and AMOs to facilitate sterilization and microchipping of **cats most at risk of impoundment & euthanasia** -Desex 5-10 cats per 1000 residents each year
- Target (not microtargeted):** Desex owned, semi-owned & unowned cats -30 cats /1000/yr
- Work with complainants** – cameras & flyers, water-deterrents, fencing, bed-time feeding and keeping cats off your property



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Guess what? It works!!

Number of cats observed per camera deployment (every 6 mths)

| Overall/All suburbs | Number of cats |
|---------------------|----------------|
| Deployment 3 | 3888 |
| Deployment 4 | 2329 |
| Deployment 5 | 2807 |
| Deployment 6 | 1801 ↓ 54% |

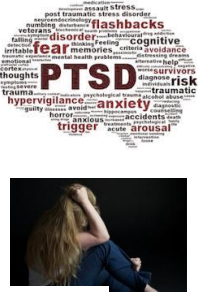
| Suburb | Number of cats |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Goodna | |
| Deployment 3 | 1831 |
| Deployment 4 | 847 |
| Deployment 5 | 1226 |
| Deployment 6 | 510 ↓ 72% |
| Redbank Plains | |
| Deployment 3 | 948 |
| Deployment 4 | 724 |
| Deployment 5 | 865 |
| Deployment 6 | 585 ↓ 38% |
| Rosewood | |
| Deployment 3 | 1109 |
| Deployment 4 | 758 |
| Deployment 5 | 716 |
| Deployment 6 | 706 ↓ 36% |



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Without Community Cat Programs

- Someone has to kill the kittens and cats
- Killing healthy animal's damages people's lives, and some cases, killing animals kills people too.
- Suicide rate for animal rescue sector in USA reached number 1 with police & firemen



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Diverse & highly respected partners

National & International funders: Brigitte Bardot Foundation, Pets Regardless Foundation, SPCA International

Major Australian Universities: Queensland and La Trobe

Australian Welfare and Rescue Groups: RSPCA Qld, AWL Queensland, Maneko Neki, Cheltenham Cat Rescue, PetRescue, Sydney Dogs' and Cats' Home, Cat Protection Society, NSW, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation

Local governments: Cities of Ipswich, Banyule

Veterinary care, diagnostics and pharmaceutical: Greencross, MSD Animal Health, PetStock, Rosewood Veterinary Service plus 10 veterinary clinics

International partners: Neighborhood Cats, Dr John Boone

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