

Submission
No 237

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 22 November 2024

Partially
Confidential

Submission - Inquiry into the management of cat populations in NSW

Introduction	Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry.
About me	<p>I have been a volunteer animal rescuer since 2012. Since starting, and especially since the previous federal government devised its 'war on cats', I have noticed a consistent decline in the regard with which cats are held and a failure of governments to implement management methods that are based on evidence.</p> <p>Instead, I see reactive measures like trapping, killing and cat curfews.</p> <p>I have volunteered and worked with Australia's expert in cat (and dog) management, Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand.</p> <p>Since 2015, I have also been assisting people to find their lost cats and am qualified with the Missing Animal Response Network.</p> <p>My experience means that I am well informed on effective cat management – and the costly and ineffective policies that are increasingly being imposed on people and cats, with no benefit.</p>
Summary of recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Fund and implement statewide free cat desexing programs, especially targeted to areas of greatest need (greater levels of socioeconomic disadvantage)2. Embrace, support, legalise and fund community cat programs3. Say no to cat curfews4. Do not participate in the 'war on cats'5. Align NSW's microchip system with that of other states6. Embrace non-lethal management of free-living cats who are independent of humans7. Develop a statewide registry of all impounded cats to facilitate reclaims
Free desexing programs	<p>Implement statewide free cat desexing programs, as these have proven to save large sums of money whilst also reducing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cat-related calls to councils• Stray cat numbers• pound intake• pound killing. <p>These need to be implemented for owned, semi owned and unowned cats for maximum benefit.</p>

An additional benefit is that fewer impounds and killing reduces the psychological harm caused to local laws officers, vets, nurses, pound and shelter workers from killing a never-ending stream of healthy cats and kittens.

Educate people about the non-impact of cats on wildlife in urban and semi urban areas

Assist people in being 'responsible pet owners' by:

- making registration fees more affordable
- not imposing arbitrary limits on the number of cats per property or requiring permits. Each person and property have different capacities to care for cats

Recommendation: Provide funds to councils, shelters and rescue groups so that all NSW residents can access affordable cat desexing.

Refer to [Appendix 2](#) for more details.

Case study – Westside Community Desexing

In November 2021, two experienced veterinarians developed a community desexing clinic for cats, in the disadvantaged western suburbs of Melbourne, to offer more affordable desexing than at private clinics.

One vet has worked at shelters in both WA and Victoria and has studied shelter medicine.

They did this to improve cat and human welfare in disadvantaged communities.

Westside Community Desexing was much-valued by the community and desexed approximately 6,500 cats and kittens. However, the absence of a reliable and ongoing source of funds led to the clinic closing this month, after three years of operation, due to financial uncertainty.

I was a committee member of this clinic. It is now clear that and community desexing clinics must be partly funded by the entities that benefit from higher desexing rates – governments, including federal, state and local.

Community cat programs

Embrace, support, legalise and fund [community cat programs](#), so that semi owned and unowned cats can remain living in the area where they are now.

Throughout the world, these have been found to quickly and cost-

effectively semi owned and unowned cat populations and reduce cat-related calls to councils.

Say no to cat curfews

Cat curfews, also known euphemistically as 'containment', are not an effective management tool. They:

- have not demonstrated any benefit to communities where they are in place in other states
- lead to ongoing increases in cat-related calls to councils, not decreases
- increase impoundment and killing of cats
- lead to a perception that 'all cats are bad'
- unreasonably imply that the only impact to wildlife are cats when, in fact, it is our destruction, degradation and disconnection of wildlife habitat that is the greatest risk
- do not reduce stray cat numbers
- increase the likelihood of cruelty towards stray cats
- lead to the needless impounding of cats who are often on their own or a nearby property, by vigilantes who see a cat outside. In lost and found Facebook groups, I regularly see people posting 'I've found a cat' when, in fact, they have seen a cat who was minding their own business.

Cats being impounded opposite their own home

In my area, a resident did a social media post in the local community group that they had 'found' a cat. To avoid the cat facing stressful impoundment, and their cat potentially being imposed with a costly release fee, I scanned the cat for a microchip. The cat lived over the road.

This mentality of cat curfews and people deeming that any cat they see 'needs help' is proving to be very costly on already-meagre resources.

Geelong council recently rejected a cat curfew.

Costs to ratepayers and councils

In Victoria, two councils that have imposed 24 hour curfews (Casey and Yarra Ranges) have seen a significant and ongoing increase in impoundments and killing. This means significant and ongoing costs, with no benefits.

Manage semi owned and unowned cats using evidence-based methods

Officially known as 'semi-owned' and 'unowned' cats, classing these cats as 'feral', as proposed by the federal government, will prevent their populations from being effectively managed.

These cats are somewhat dependent on humans, either for shelter or food, unlike free-living cats (assigned the demonising name of 'feral').

Methods to effectively and economically manage them are well known and proven in many parts of the world, but rarely in Australia.

Free desexing and community cat programs (aka trap-neuter-return-manage) lead to steady reductions in their numbers over time, with no killing.

Unsocialised cats As part of my years of volunteer work in animal rescue, I have socialised many semi-owned and unowned cats – cats who may be incorrectly labelled as ‘feral’ by pounds and shelters and, if the federal government had its way, be legally killed through cruel methods instead of humanely managed.

These cats have not had a close relationship with people when growing up and are initially fearful of them but can develop trust over time. They are often given the incorrect label of ‘feral’ by pounds and shelters and are killed.

People who have adopted these cats from me are delighted to have them as part of their family.

They must not be classed as ‘feral’. Their management needs are different to free-living wild cats.

Correct the misperception that urban and semi urban cats are impacting wildlife

All field-based research has found that cats in urban and semi urban areas **do not impact wildlife populations**.

‘Research’ funded by the ‘war on cats’, and published by the likes of the Threatened Species Hub and promulgated by the likes of the Invasive Species Council, is all based on computer modelling and guesstimates. The first casualty of war is the truth, and it is the case in the ‘war on cats’.

I urge the NSW government to not perpetuate the myth that cats in urban and semi urban areas impact wildlife populations. Such myths prevent the effective management of cats, whether they be owned, semi owned or unowned.

Refer to [Appendix 1](#) for a summary of field-based research which shows that urban and semi urban cats have no impact on wildlife populations.

Align NSW’s microchip system with that of other states

Ensure NSW microchip contact information can be accessed via the registries used in other states. Presently, it is complicated for vets etc to access owner details for cats who are microchipped in NSW.

Do not participate in the 'war on cats'

The 'war on cats', schemed up and implemented in 2015 under the guise of helping wildlife has not demonstrated any benefits to wildlife.

Killing cats has never been shown to achieve positive outcomes.

Be a leader in cat management, rather than a follower of poor policy and scapegoating, as has been happened since two successive federal governments have been running a 'war on cats'

Cease the use of vilifying terminology. Adopt the nationally--recognised definitions of different cat in urban and semi urban areas, as proposed by the national at working group:: owned, semi-owned, unowned
Cease the use of 'feral' to describe those cats who have been failed by people and now live in the bush, completely independent of any resources provided by humans

Embrace non-lethal management of free-living cats who are independent of humans. Research in many parts of the world has shown that killing leads to a rapid rebound in population, within months

Statewide registry of all impounded cats

Develop a statewide online registry of all impounded cats, regardless of which shelter or pound they are at. This will enable anyone whose cat is missing and who has been impounded to easily determine where they are. Presently, each pound and shelter impounds are not connected via any central registry.

If a person 'finds' a cat in Suburb X which is in Pound X's jurisdiction, but takes them to Pound Z as it's on their way to work in Suburb Z, it is much more difficult for the cat's family to locate them.

Do not impose mandatory desexing

As with so many other cat policies that 'sound like a good idea', these have been found not to work.

Appendix 1 – Cats aren't the main issue for wildlife

Overview

Introduction

There is a common, but incorrect, perception amongst some people that cats are affecting wildlife populations.

Research shows that cats in urban and peri urban areas have NO impact on wildlife populations.

Further information about this research and the findings is given below.

I do hope Council will work to correct the misperception amongst residents and not make decisions based on false information.

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Cats and wildlife

Urban and peri urban cats do not affect wildlife populations

Not a single peer-reviewed research project has found that the presence, or absence, of cats impacts wildlife populations in urban and peri urban parts of Australia.

Studies have, however, found that wildlife are heavily affected by us destroying their habitat.

Dogs are also known to be an issue.

Cats and mammals

Medium-sized mammals are not impacted by cats; Antechinus are more prevalent when cats are present

A 10 year Perth study (Lilith et al 2010) investigated species diversity across three different bushland areas where cats were either:

- prohibited;
- required to be inside at night and wear a bell; or
- unregulated.

The study found that medium-sized mammals, such as Brush-tailed Possums and Southern Brown Bandicoots, were *not impacted by the presence or absence of cats*.

The smaller Mardo (*Antechinus flavipes*), which is highly susceptible to cat predation, was in *higher numbers in areas where cats were unregulated*.

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

Cats and birds

Increased housing density and distance from bushland causes declines in bird populations, not cats

A Perth study found that cat density has no effect on passerine bird populations.

Decreasing bird populations were associated with *increasing urbanisation and housing density*, and increasing distance from bushland. The study concluded that *habitat destruction and degradation*, rather than cats, were the main factors impacting on birds (Grayson et al 2007).

Cats protect nests

A Sydney study of nest predation in 24 forest patches in the Sydney metropolitan area found that *no nests were attacked by cats* (Matthews et al 1999). Black Rats, Ringtail Possums, Antechinus species and other birds were the main predators. Nest predation was *reduced when cats were present*.

Many birds killed by cats would not survive to breed

Most of the bird species that cats kill have an average life span of 2-4 years in the wild. This means that 25-50% are dying of other causes every year and would not survive to the next breeding season (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, 2017).

Cats do not cause additional deaths, as most birds caught by cats are unhealthy

Research also shows that birds caught by cats in urban areas are on average less healthy than birds killed by flying into windows and cars (Baker et al 2008, Møller and Errøtzøe 2000). The researchers concluded that most cat-related bird deaths are not additive to the number dying each year. That is, *cats did not cause additional deaths of birds than would have occurred through other means*, in most cases.

Most birds caught by cats would have died from other means

In the UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has similarly concluded that there is [no scientific evidence that cats are causing bird populations to decline](#). It, too, found that most birds who were killed by cats would have died from other causes before the next breeding season.

Habitat loss is affecting bird populations

Just as in Australia, UK research has found that declines in bird populations are usually caused by habitat change or loss.

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

Cats mainly predate introduced and common species



A further study (Franklin et al 2018) found that the main prey items of cats are mice, followed by rats, small lizards, then common species of birds.

A Brisbane City Council analysis of the stomach contents of 25 cats found only one species – the Black Rat (Brisbane City Council 2015).

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

Cats reduce use of poison that kills wildlife



Mice and rats are cats' preferred prey.

Most people are intolerant of mice and rats in their homes or, if they have chickens, on their properties at all.

Whilst there are recommended strategies that will prevent mice and rats coming inside or entering chicken coops, a review of social media posts in relation to mice and rats shows that very few people implement them. Instead, they resort to using rodenticide – either by themselves or by hiring an 'exterminator.'

Species affected by secondary poisoning

Rodenticides kill native wildlife through secondary poisoning. This includes [Barn Owls](#), Boobook Owls (Lohr 2018), Kites, Tawny Frogmouths, Kookaburras, Wedge-tailed Eagles (Pay et al, 2021), other meat-eating birds and likely reptiles (Lettoof, 2020).

In autumn and winter, when mice and rats may come inside warm homes, wildlife rescuers see a spike in the number of poisoned wildlife coming into care. Most die. Very slowly. Very painfully.

Research has indicated that anticoagulant rodenticides pose a serious threat to native predators in Australia, particularly in species using urban and peri-urban areas, such as those in Frankston, and species with large home ranges. (Lohr 2018).

Rodenticides also build-up in animals over generations, with one generation passing on the poison to their young.

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

**Other research
doesn't
measure actual
impact**

Other than the research studies cited, existing research related to cat predation in urban areas is based solely on modelling or hypothetical predation studies.

It does not measure the *actual* impact urban companion and stray cats may have on native wildlife populations.

Funding is needed to conduct this research. Funding for research is difficult to obtain and is mostly from the government.

Given the 'war on cats', any funding that does not vilify cats is unlikely to be forthcoming. Most current research related to cats would seem to be solely to provide justification for the 'war on cats'. This is why research related to the 'war on cats' is more recent than many other research papers.

Cat – and wildlife - behaviour is unlikely to have changed since research that was not part of the 'war on cats' was conducted.

In the absence of any data that urban and peri urban cats impact on native wildlife populations, it would be inappropriate to introduce lifetime lockdown on the basis of the 'cats kill wildlife' argument.

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

Dogs more of a threat than cats



Research has found that dogs are responsible for more reported attacks on wildlife than cats (Holderness-Roddam et al, 2014). They concluded that dogs are a significant, but poorly recognised, threat to native wildlife in natural urban areas, second only to vehicles.

Australian Wildlife Health Centre data – Cause of injuries by companion animals	
Dog	59.3%
Cat	40.7%

As there is no current ‘war on dogs’, the impacts of dogs on wildlife are not regularly highlighted in the media. This is leaving people with the false impression that dogs have no impact on wildlife when, in fact, research suggests that they harm wildlife more than cats.

Other studies have also determined that dogs may play a significant role in impacting wildlife, through disturbance and killing (Doherty et al 2017, Hughes and MacDonald 2013, Twardeck et al 2017).

This impact of dogs on wildlife is occurring in spite of existing laws that require dogs to be confined to their properties and to be walked on a lead except in off-lead areas.

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Cats and wildlife, Continued

Changes that would help wildlife

If the council and its residents truly care about wildlife, we would:

- **protect remaining habitat** – protect all remaining wildlife habitat. This would mean prohibiting subdivisions and destroying native trees. Bass Coast would need to not approve any subdivision or tree destruction and applicants would need to take all refused planning applications to VCAT
- **mandate indigenous plants** - require all residents to only have indigenous plants on their properties. Mandate that residents replicate, as far as possible, the mix of canopy trees, shrubs, under storey and ground covers that would have existed before their homes, workplaces and schools were built. Whilst this doesn't compensate for the building footprint, it would provide some wildlife habitat that our buildings and roads have destroyed. Lack of habitat (and water) is a key determining factor of whether wildlife can live in an area or not
- **mandate wildlife-safe water** - require all properties to have wildlife-safe sources of water at all times ie gradually-sloping edges that all animals can navigate, not too deep
- **prohibit residents from feeding wildlife**, as it:
 - disrupts animals' natural fear of humans
 - affects foraging behaviour
 - leads to unnatural groupings of animals close together
 - leads to unnatural behaviours
 - can lead to dependence on human-provided food sources
 - usually entails feeding food that is dangerous or unhealthy
 - can lead to spread of contagious diseases like beak and feather disease in parrots
 - can lead to lumpy jaw in macropods
 - can spread zoonotic diseases to people
- **mandate bird-safe windows** - require that all windows in all buildings are made bird-strike proof, as [New York City has done](#). Australian data is lacking, but in the US, an estimated one billion birds die from hitting building windows
- **prohibit rodenticides** - prohibit the use of rodenticides, which cause secondary poisoning to wildlife
- **mandate litter collection** - mandate that all residents must pick up any littered items they see which could harm wildlife (eg looped items such as face masks, plastic rings, elastic hair ties, fishing line), cut them and bin them
- **minimise new roads** - not build roads through wildlife habitat
- **enforce rendering assistance** - enforce the state law that anyone who hits wildlife with their vehicle must render assistance
- **prohibit barbed wire fences** – many species, including birds, gliders, macropods and gliders become entangled, injured or killed in barbed wire fences
- **reduce night time speed limits on wildlife roads** – reduce the speed limit of all local roads that cut through wildlife habitat to at least 40 km/h, as is done when children arrive at and leave school

- **include wildlife crossings and fences** - on wildlife roads, install wildlife crossings that are suitable for each species, with the associated necessary habitat to encourage their use, with land modifications and fences to direct wildlife towards the crossings

When reading this list, I expect councillors, and most people, would likely not support these provisions, even though they would do more to protect wildlife than a lifetime lockdown for cats will, as it would impact our own lives.

If so, perhaps any concerns about wildlife only apply when it doesn't impact us and that the argument seeking a lifetime lockdown for cats to 'protect wildlife' is based on flawed premises and double standards - one for us so that our lives aren't impacted, one for other animals whose lives will be impacted significantly.

Urban and semi urban cats are affected by the ‘war on (wild) cats’

‘War on (wild) cats’ Urban cats are being affected by the federal government’s so-called ‘war on (wild) cats’, which it devised in July 2015. I have been informed by a reliable source that this concept was devised by a group of politicians over lunch – not by scientists.

It aimed to kill 20 million wild cats, under the guise of protecting wildlife. Modelling then indicated that this is nearly 10 times the number of wild cats who may live at any one time (Legge et al, 2017).

This highlights the lack of scientific rigour of this plan.

Since the ‘war on cats’ began, many attention-getting headlines of the estimated total number of animals (both introduced and native) that wild cats who live in the bush are believed to kill each year in Australia have been published.

These **estimates are based on modelling and hypothetical situations**, not actual numbers. The numbers aren't tailored to specific habitats, climates etc.

People’s companion cats have been affected by this ‘war’, as people now believe that cats in urban and peri urban areas are impacting wildlife populations.

This is not true.

Unfortunately, the research has also failed to indicate whether this total number is significant for each species.

For example, each day, we all likely kill ants and other small insects, in large quantities. Is this having an impact on the overall population of ants and other insects? Possibly not.

In some cases, wild cats are listed as a threatening process for some species. But for most species, habitat loss and climate change are the key threatening processes.

The regular headlines have led to people confusing the possible impact of wild cats with companion cats. They have also led to people failing to reflect upon the impacts to wildlife of our constant destruction of their habitat.

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Urban and semi urban cats are affected by the ‘war on (wild) cats’,

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Key threatening processes are not being addressed

Governments of all stripes, both state and national, have taken no meaningful action on the threatening process that affects most native species: degradation and destruction of habitat and climate change.

In fact, Australia continues to have the worst worldwide rate of deforestation amongst developed nations (World Wildlife Fund, 2021). It is the only developed nation on the World Wildlife Fund’s global list of deforestation hotspots.

Rates of deforestation and habitat destruction are so high that Koalas are predicted to become extinct in NSW (New South Wales Legislative Council, 2020).

One could therefore wonder what prompted the government to put cats in its spotlight, when taking action on deforestation would achieve far more for wildlife. Could it be that cats are being scapegoated, to earn 'green points'?

Bass Coast, too, is suffering loss of habitat, due to increased development and population growth.

As the research previously cited shows, it is this loss of habitat that is having the greatest impact on wildlife populations in urban areas – not cats.

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Urban and semi urban cats are affected by the ‘war on (wild) cats’, Continued

Suppression of
research is
occurring



Scientists have raised the alarm that research findings that are not in accordance with governments' environmental policies are being suppressed, on a large scale (Driscoll et al 2021). They have stated that this is particularly occurring in relation to habitat loss.

What the public hears in terms of threats to wildlife is therefore very much focused on whether it aligns with government priorities, not whether it is the most significant environmental impact.

Because of the ‘war on cats’, cat-related information is more often being heard by people than research about the impacts of habitat loss and climate change, which are the key threatening processes for most wildlife.

This is likely further skewing people’s perceptions of companion cats and wildlife.

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Urban and semi urban cats are affected by the 'war on (wild) cats',

Continued

Threatened Species Commissioner

Soon after announcing the 'war on cats', the government created a new role, the Threatened Species Commissioner (TSC).

In line with government priorities, the TSC has focused heavily on cats, ignoring the more pressing issues of land clearing and climate change.

One of the TSC's KPIs was to 'increase acceptance of killing cats.'

Below are some posts which were made on the TSC Facebook page and which remained there, with no moderation. This seems to suggest that conservation is, perhaps, not a primary issue of the TSC role.

It is questionable whether the TSC has achieved much for threatened species. It has, however, emboldened people to omit gross acts of cruelty towards cats, in the mistaken belief that killing a small number of cats is helping wildlife. It isn't. It is likely increasing their numbers.

Selection of comments on Threatened Species Commissioner facebook page

Selection of comments on Threatened Species Commissioner facebook page

it is not always instant like cutting off a cats head, tying it and cutting it with a knife just two examples of what has been occurring and there are other multiple examples. Not humane at all and encouraged by the war on feral cats. There are a lot of sadistic cat haters out there and i for one don't support the war as it is currently being waged.

With the enormous feral cat problem we have in Australia, any cat found outside should be treated as feral and dealt with accordingly.

TSC re post on feral cats:

I feed cats to my Lace Monitors. They come in my yard, They are fair game.

got a mate that does the same

My scrub pythons dont mind a cat hear and there ya just got to remember to take the bell off them 1st

If i seen a cat tussling with a snake i would stomp the cats head and crack its skull with my boots fuckem all get rid of them !!

They should be used in crayfish pots.

Like · Reply · 3y

A complete cat kill is the only answer

Like · Reply · 3y

↳ 4 Replies

A good cat is a dead cat

Any cat outside not on a lead, should be culled

Like · Reply · 48w

We used to have a cat problem... Ran out of cats...

Like · Reply · 48w

Urban and semi urban cats are affected by the ‘war on (wild) cats’, Continued

**Effect of
constant
vilification and
scapegoating**



Any person, animal or minority group that has been targeted with vilification knows the outcomes: persecution, hatred, scapegoating and, ultimately, killing.

This is occurring right now with cats.

It is not cats who are causing the sixth wave of mass extinctions in the world. It is us, through our destruction of habitat and carbon emissions.

Even though we know this, governments of all types continue to fail to take meaningful action. Instead, they scapegoat other animals.

Conclusion

Cats in urban and semi urban areas have been shown not to impact wildlife populations. In fact, research suggests that more wildlife may be harmed by dogs than cats.

It is very important that Council does not make decisions that will affect cats and their families based on misinformation.

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Appendix 2 - Free desexing – the many benefits

Overview

Introduction

Providing free desexing, targeted to areas of high intake, is known to:

- Increase desexing rates
- Increase responsible pet ownership rates
- Reduce stray cat numbers
- Reduce calls to Council regarding cats
- Reduce number of cats impounded
- Reduce killing in pound and shelters
- Reduce animal management costs.

With fewer stray cats, this naturally reduces any wildlife predation (even though research has found that cats in urban and semi urban areas have no impact on wildlife populations).

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Why don't people desex their cats?

Desexing rates correlate to socioeconomic factors

In Australia, multiple surveys report that most owned cats are desexed, at rates typically exceeding 90%.

The most common reason people don't desex their cats is financial.

Cat and kitten intakes are significantly higher in suburbs where 20% to 30% of households are classed as low income. In Australia, this is often defined as 2.4 people living on less than \$650 per week.

In these suburbs, there are many "free to good home" kittens and cats, because the cost of desexing cats is unaffordable.

People who take on the care of a cat or kitten often do it because they fear the cat or kitten may be killed at the pound.

Many such people can afford to feed a cat and provide inexpensive items, such as beds, but the cost of desexing, microchipping and registration is unaffordable.

Desexing and microchipping commonly costs from \$350 to \$500 for a female cat.

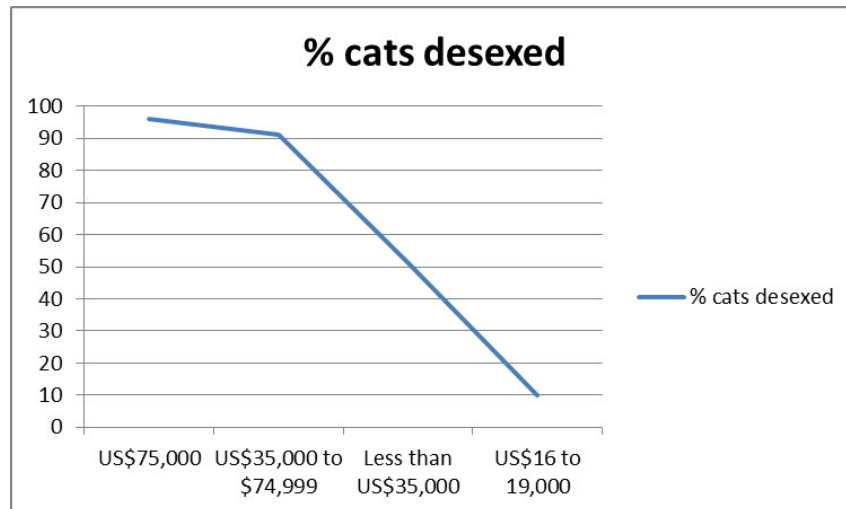
Mandating that people pay for something they cannot afford, and which is difficult to enforce, doesn't make it happen. It merely drives people underground.

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Why don't people desex their cats?, Continued

Relationship between desexing rates and income

The US data below highlights the link between financial disadvantage and low desexing rates (Chu 2007).



Household income	% cats desexed
US\$75,000	96
US\$35,000 to \$74,999	91
Less than US\$35,000	51
US\$16 to 19,000	10

Why haven't you got your cat desexed?

People enrolling a cat in a free desexing program in Banyule were asked, 'What was the single most important factor why you have not already had this cat desexed?' (Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 2021).

90% said it was because desexing was unaffordable.

The program was targeted to low socioeconomic suburbs with high cat intake and cat-related calls to council. In these suburbs, 20-30% of households were living on \$650 a week or less.

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Why don't people desex their cats?, Continued

'Who's for cats' program has not worked

In 2007, the Victorian government launched the 'Who's for cats' program, which later went national. It encouraged people who were feeding stray cats to either officially adopt them (and get them desexed, microchipped and registered) or take them to a council pound.

It did not succeed in reducing stray cat numbers or intake, because people who are feeding stray cats :

- care about them
 - often don't have the funds to get them desexed
 - derive health benefits from caring for and interacting with them
 - do not wish the cats to be killed at the pound, which will likely occur at most pounds, as the cats will take time to be sufficiently socialised to people before they can be adopted. Few shelters/pounds provide the necessary time.
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Free, targeted desexing – the many benefits

Free, affordable and accessible desexing is more successful

Free and affordable desexing has been found to increase the desexing rate to 90% (Chadwich, Emancipet, AIAM 2019 conference).

If Council wishes to reduce:

- costs
- impound numbers
- number of undesexed cats
- number of stray/semi-owned and unowned cats

providing free or affordable desexing in high intake or socioeconomically disadvantaged areas is a worthwhile investment. It is a better use of money and resources than mandating desexing and trying to enforce compliance.

Overcoming other barriers to desexing, such as lending cat carriers, helping to catch the cat if needed and transporting them to/from the vet may also be needed.

Free cat desexing improves people's mental health

90% of people who brought their cat to a free desexing program in Queensland said their cat helps them get through tough times (Australian Pet Welfare Foundation 2021).

One person said, 'I love my cats with everything I have. And now that they're safe, desexed, and healthy, it's bettered my mental health a lot knowing this. So I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart and my little cats' hearts too'.

People who have low incomes want to do the right thing in caring for pets. High desexing rates can be achieved when voluntary, free/affordable and accessible desexing programs are available, together with information on why it is important to desex.

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Free desexing – the many benefits, Continued

Case study – Banyule City Council

Since 2013, Banyule City Council in Melbourne has provided free desexing to residents in low socioeconomic areas twice a year. The council organises the desexing, provides carriers and transports the cat, if required.

Between **2013 and 2020, 780 cats** were desexed, microchipped and vaccinated for free (Banyule Cat Management Case Study, 2020).

The program has:

- led to these 780 semi-owned cats becoming fully-owned and registered
- reduced wandering
- reduced the number of unwanted kittens
- reduced impounds
- reduced euthanasia rates
- reduced costs.

Banyule uses their pound provider, the Cat Protection Society, and a nearby private vet clinic for desexing.

Banyule also:

- issues excess animal permits to reduce the possibility of nuisance complaints
- investigates nuisance cat complaints, including letterbox drops to homes surrounding that of the complainant
- works with residents experiencing mental illness/animal hoarding to gradually reduce the number of pets they have and ensure those they keep are healthy, manageable and registered
- works with the Department of Housing to ensure compliance in relation to their properties and known hoarders.

Banyule does not intend to impose a cat curfew, as it would be difficult and costly to enforce. Instead, Banyule encourages people to confine their cat to their property and is proactive in addressing nuisance complaints.

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Free desexing – the many benefits, Continued

Banyule’s cost savings and reduction in impounds

Between 2013 and 2020, **cat impounds reduced by 62%**, from 396 cats to 152 per year (Cotterell J 2020). The free desexing program has saved the council \$337,500 in impound costs.

Year	Cats impounded	Cost (at \$150 per cat)
2012-2013	396	59,400
2013-2014	359	53,850
2014-2015	481	72,150
2015-2016	487	73,050
2016-2017	284	42,600
2017-2018	274	41,100
2018-2019	217	32,550
2019-2020	152	22,800
Total impound costs		397,500
Less cost of desexing		-60,000
Cost savings		337,500
Decline in impounds	61.6%	

Current research project into free cat desexing

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is currently [conducting research on providing free cat desexing – for both owned and stray cats](#). At the time of writing, more than 600 cats have been desexed.

Three Victorian councils are participating in the research.

Interested Council staff and councillors who wish to follow the progress of the research can email info@petwelfare.org.au with subject line of ‘request for email updates on CCP’.

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