

December 2022

Dog and Cat Management Act Review

Funding Free Desexing Programs



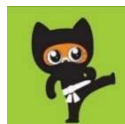
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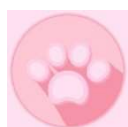
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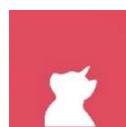
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Executive Summary

With the Dog and Cat Management Act under review, it is our purpose to bring to the Board's attention the magnitude of the problem of semi and unowned cat populations in South Australia and the successful programs tackling this issue in other Australian jurisdictions.

We are requesting that such programs be provisioned by the Act under present review.

The current legislation does not address the semi and unowned cat population. As the result the population is increasing, leading to poor welfare outcomes for many cats taken in charge by the system. The mental health of those involved is adversely affected and this will continue to worsen as the cat population continues to increase.

The community involved in the care of these cats is exhausted and burnt out and yet there is a simple solution lying in targeted free desexing programs. For example:

Gold Coast City Council (pop 600,000):

- has been running a subsidised and free desexing program since 2001-2. Since then, the intake has more than halved and euthanasia rates went from 50% to 9.5% in 2020-1.
- The program has saved the council substantial amounts as the cost of desexing is cheaper than euthanasia and rehoming for the pound.

Banyule City Council, Victoria (pop 130,000):

- Over 80% reduction in intake between 2010 and 2020
- Euthanasia rates decreased from 58% to 16% over the same period
- Costs to impound cats over that period were around \$240,000, whereas the council spent \$60,000 on desexing.

Rosewood, Ipswich, Qld (pop 2,800):

- 55% decrease in intake and 93% decrease in the number of euthanased cats in just 17 months from 2019.

Redbank Plains, Ipswich, Qld (pop 20,000):

- reduced their intake by 45% and the number of cats euthanased by 57% during 2021-2.
- Note they ran an untargeted desexing program during 2021 which had no measurable effect.

Greenacres, South-West Sydney (pop 20,000):

- Intake decrease by 31% in the first year of targeted desexing program from 2020-1, 46% in the second year
- Savings from the sheltering costs are calculated as over \$100,000 in the first year

Cat management legislation in SA is not working

What needs to be done?

With the Dog and Cat Management Act under review, the purpose of this submission is--

- to bring to the Board's attention the magnitude of the problem of undesexed cats, both owned and unowned, in metropolitan Adelaide, and in regional South Australia
- to highlight the successful programs implemented in other Australian jurisdictions.

We request that such programs be provisioned in the current review of the Act.

The problem is getting worse

"We know that over 11,400 cats enter RSPCA and AWL shelters in this state every year, and **this number is steadily increasing.**"

RSPCA & AWL (2019). Cat Management Plan for South Australia

Current cat management in South Australia is not effective because the population is increasing. Placing more and more restrictions on owners of cats—desexing, microchipping, confinement, registration—is not reducing shelter admissions. For example, the RSPCA shelter intake **grew by 20%** between 2018-19 and 2021-22 (RSPCA Annual Reports).

Where do shelter admissions come from?

Shelter admissions in NSW (Report on Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW 2022):



Current legislation focuses on owned cats, yet most shelter admissions are semi-owned or unowned cats. These are largely cats no-one takes responsibility for, from areas of financial disadvantage where people can't afford desexing, and kittens born because desexing rates are low. Note the **high financial as well as welfare costs** of shelter admissions.

The current strategy **relies on charities** to be undertaking the bulk of the burden of unowned and semi-owned cat management."

RSPCA & AWL (2019). Cat Management Plan for South Australia

With cat numbers continually increasing, the resources of rescue charities both large and small are overwhelmed. This leads to poor welfare outcomes for both cats and the people charged with handling them.

- While there are no state-wide figures published, we estimate that at least 43% of the annual intake is euthanased between AWL and RSPCA. Using the 2019 intake figure of 11,400, this represents 4902 cats.
- Using the \$400 cost shown below for Gold Coast City to hold and euthanase a cat in a shelter, this amounts to just under \$2 million spent on killing cats, without addressing the root cause of the problem.
- Many more cats currently euthanased could be rehomed if the system was not as overloaded. For example, RSPCA Qld reduced the euthanasia rate by a third for cats classified as 'feral' just by lengthening the time spent in care (Kerr et al, 2018).
- Shelter staff suffer mental health problems as a result of being tasked with killing healthy animals. Several studies have shown that these workers suffer higher rates of post-traumatic stress, depression, and substance abuse. This results in low job satisfaction and high turnover.

Cat Adoption Foundation: one of many charities under pressure

Cat Adoption Foundation is a charity entirely dependent on donations and volunteers. In spite of the dedication of its carers, it can't cope with the demand from the public. Here are some recent examples of those demands **from just one typical day**.

"It is really stressful when newborn kittens come into care. They are found everywhere: in factories and shopping centres, under school buildings, in boxes by the side of the road, in backyards ... They have to be fed every few hours, they may have health problems, and the lack of sleep and ongoing worry leads to exhaustion. This wouldn't happen if more cats were desexed." Suzanne, neonate carer Cat Adoption Foundation

"There are so many people who need help with cats. They are desperate and don't know where to turn, and it breaks my heart when I have to tell them we just don't have the resources to help them. We depend entirely on donations and volunteers and it just isn't enough to meet the demand. I give

them the names of other rescues, but they're probably in the same situation we are." Kathy, administrator Cat Adoption Foundation

"Hello Kathy, I got your number from the Cat Adoption Foundation Facebook page. My mother in-law has a cat problem, some cats were dumped at her property and are breeding. She hasn't the money to take care and feed them as well as desexing. Some are feral and attack her. Are you able to help? Or give advice? Kind regards Gordana."

"Got your number from Riverland police. We have wild cats around our place and they are having kittens. The local vet does not take in cats/kittens and we have to wait till next April to book to have a couple desexed that we were considering to keep. But in that time numbers are going to multiply. Before the initial mother arrived we had no cats. We understand that you come out and collect the cats. We are in Barmera and would like some advice. Thank you."

"Hi Kathy, I sent through a message on the Facebook Page and was advised to contact you or Trish. I work at Flinders Uni, where there are a few cats around and on Friday we caught 2 new kittens. Approx 5 weeks old, appear healthy, eating well, using a litter tray. No success catching mum, she's pretty skittish. I can't foster the kittens as I have 3 cats (2 are foster/adopts from last year's work kittens) and I don't have anywhere to isolate these two. Are you able to take them on please? Kind regards, Leslie"

"Hello Kathy. My name is Chrissy. I live next door to Alberton Primary School. Yesterday some cretin dumped 4 kittens around 5 weeks old, their mother and another 2 kittens around 8 weeks old, in the dumpster area of the school. I have taken them in so I can find them an adoption agency. I unfortunately can't keep them as I have 3 rescues already. Would you be able to take them and rehome them?. I appreciate it's a tough time of year for rescue centres, and I am willing to help as much as I can. Thanks for the work you do."

What works—and what doesn't?

What works—carefully targeted, free desexing programs. While subsidised, low-cost programs help, they do not achieve the desexing volumes necessary to achieve a substantial reduction in population.

The recent announcement by the Dog and Cat Management Board of a \$100,000 fund for subsidised desexing is a step in the right direction, but not enough.

- It depends on councils being motivated to become involved. As the Board notes, "not all councils have yet taken up the offer."
- It is not targeted to areas of highest need.
- It still requires co-payment, which those in the most severe financial need cannot afford.

- It fails to address problems such as those described in the Cat Adoption Foundation calls above, where members of the public find themselves landed with many cats that are not their own.
- The amount is not enough to address the scale of the problem.

What doesn't work to reduce overpopulation?

1. Compulsory desexing (on its own). In a 2021-2 survey cat owners and semi-owners from targeted areas of Ipswich were asked: "What is the single most important reason why you have not had this cat desexed?" 90% answered that that **couldn't afford the desexing costs**.

"To desex and microchip a female cat typically costs from \$350 to \$500. In these low socio-economic areas >20% of households (with 2.4 people) live on < \$650/week." (Community Cat Program Poster)

2. Cat confinement

- Cats entering shelters are often not desexed or identified, so they are either unowned or owners have not complied with even basic requirements. In either case, **confinement legislation is irrelevant to these cats**.
- The cost of confinement can be a deterrent to people wishing to adopt a cat from shelters

3. Cat registration

- People on low incomes, whose cats are most likely not be desexed, will be deterred from getting cats desexed if they then become liable for even more costs. Plus, registration is irrelevant to unowned cats, who are the main source of shelter admissions.

Conclusion: The most effective strategy by far is free desexing targeted at postcodes with high shelter admissions. As the RSPCA and AWL represent the majority of intake in Adelaide, they are in a position to identify these problem areas. The Board should focus its desexing efforts in such areas.

Allowing rescue charities to apply for funding grants would expedite desexing efforts and not rely on the motivation of individual councils.

Gold Coast City Council Co-operative Desexing Program

AWL Queensland receives all cats impounded from Gold Coast City, involving 600,000 residents. The City, through a co-operative desexing program with AWL and local vets, has reached its target of zero euthanasia of healthy animals.

Euthanasia 2001-2: 50%

Euthanasia 2020-1: 9.5%

The desexing program:

- improves cat management and animal welfare
- assists residents who need help
- saves the council money, since the cost of \$125 for desexing is cheaper than both euthanasia (\$400, save \$275) and rehoming (\$1000, save \$875) from the pound.

COSTS AND SAVINGS BY FUNDING DESEXING SUBSIDIES

Management strategies	COST desexing subsidy	COST collect/hold/euthanise	COST collect/hold/rehome
COST hold av 4 days	\$125	\$400	\$1000
COST hold av 10 days	\$125	\$750	\$1360

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

1. Owners contribute

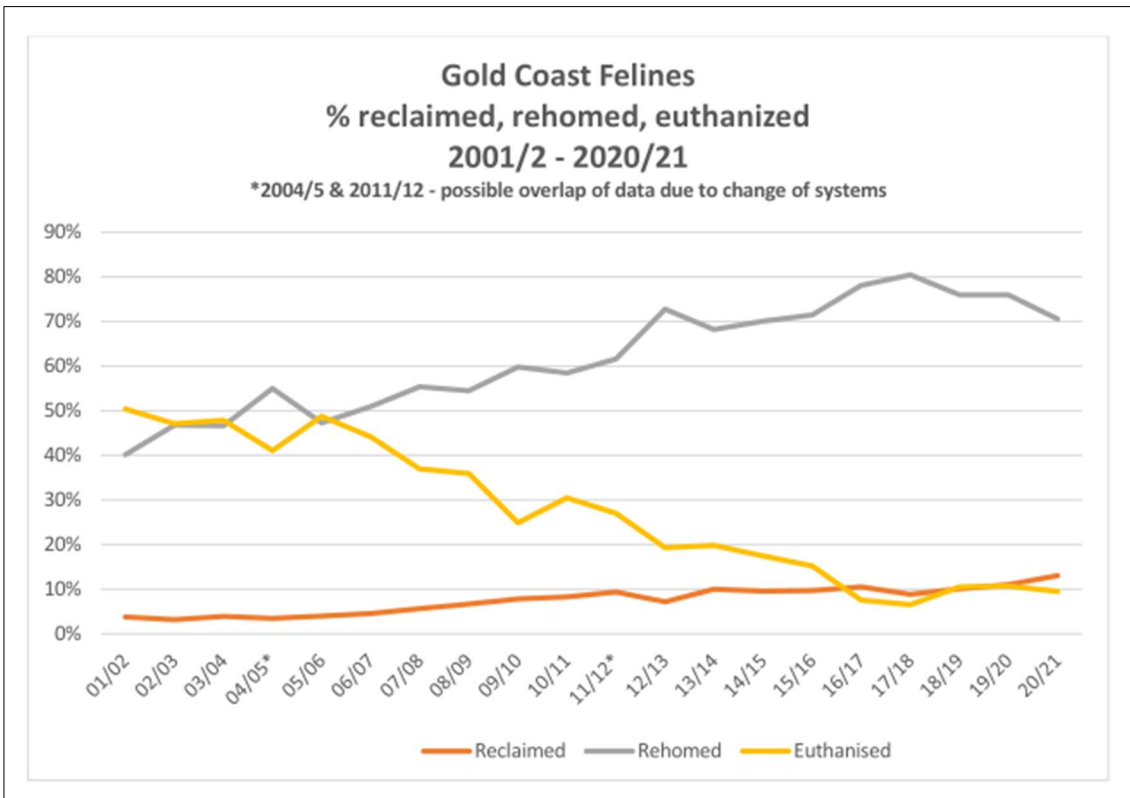
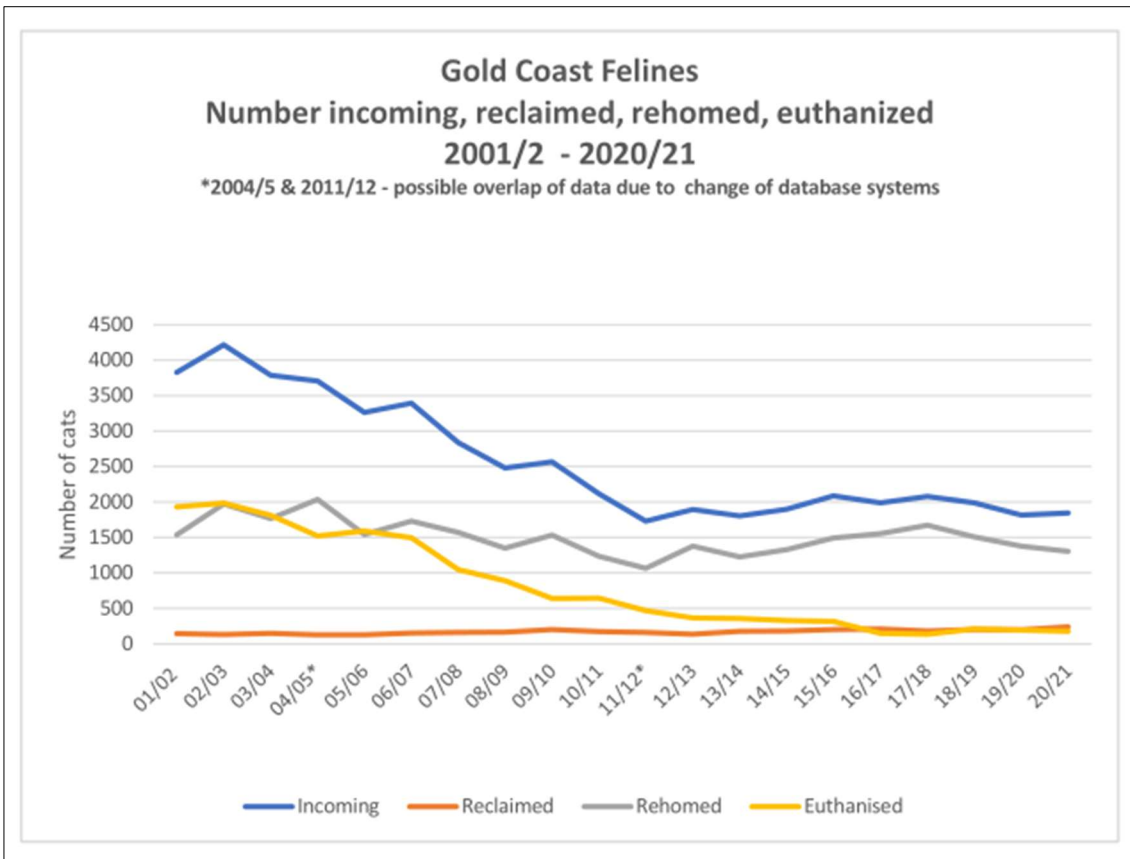
	Owner pays	Council pays	Vet receives
Male cat	\$50	\$70	\$120
Female cat	\$50	\$150	\$200

2. Free desexing for owners in need

	Male cat desexed	Female cat desexed
Council pays	\$120	\$200

The program can be targeted to capture all residents in low socio-economic areas.

The graphs below show that **strategically targeted, free and heavily promoted desexing** is the most effective approach to cat management, in fact, the only one that reduces the number of cats impounded and the number euthanased.

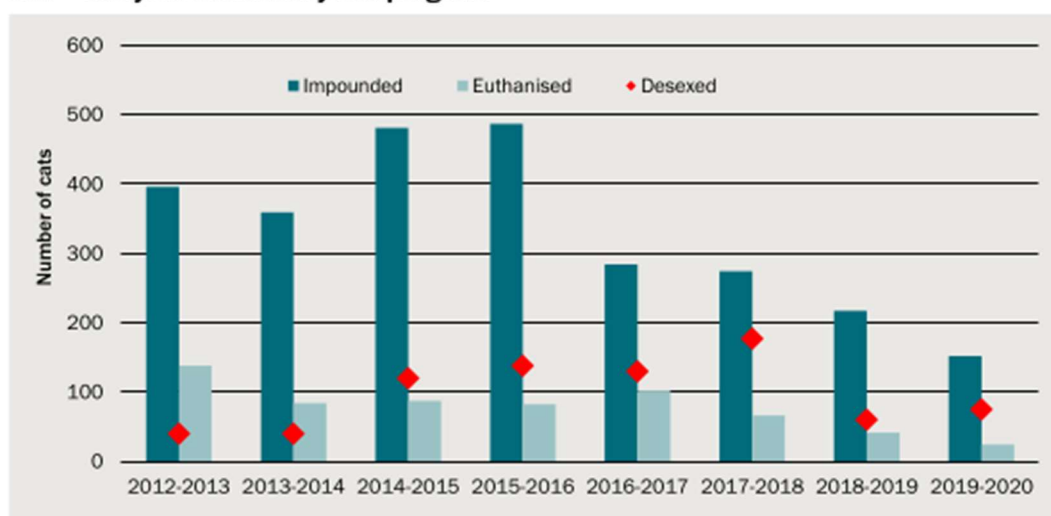


Banyule City Council, Victoria

In 2010-1, cat intake statistics were appalling – 1004 cats were impounded and 58% were killed. Impounded cats were sent to the Cat Protection Society, which charged the council \$80 per cat until 2018, and thereafter \$150 a cat.

AVA desexing vouchers were not well used, because **some residents could not afford even subsidised desexing**. Therefore from 2012 to 2014 free desexing was made available to residents in a postcode with particularly high shelter admissions. From 2014, the desexing program was made available to all residents, but shelter admission rates went up again. From 2017, one postcode was again targeted and admissions went down, as shown in the graph:

5.1 Banyule Community Cat program



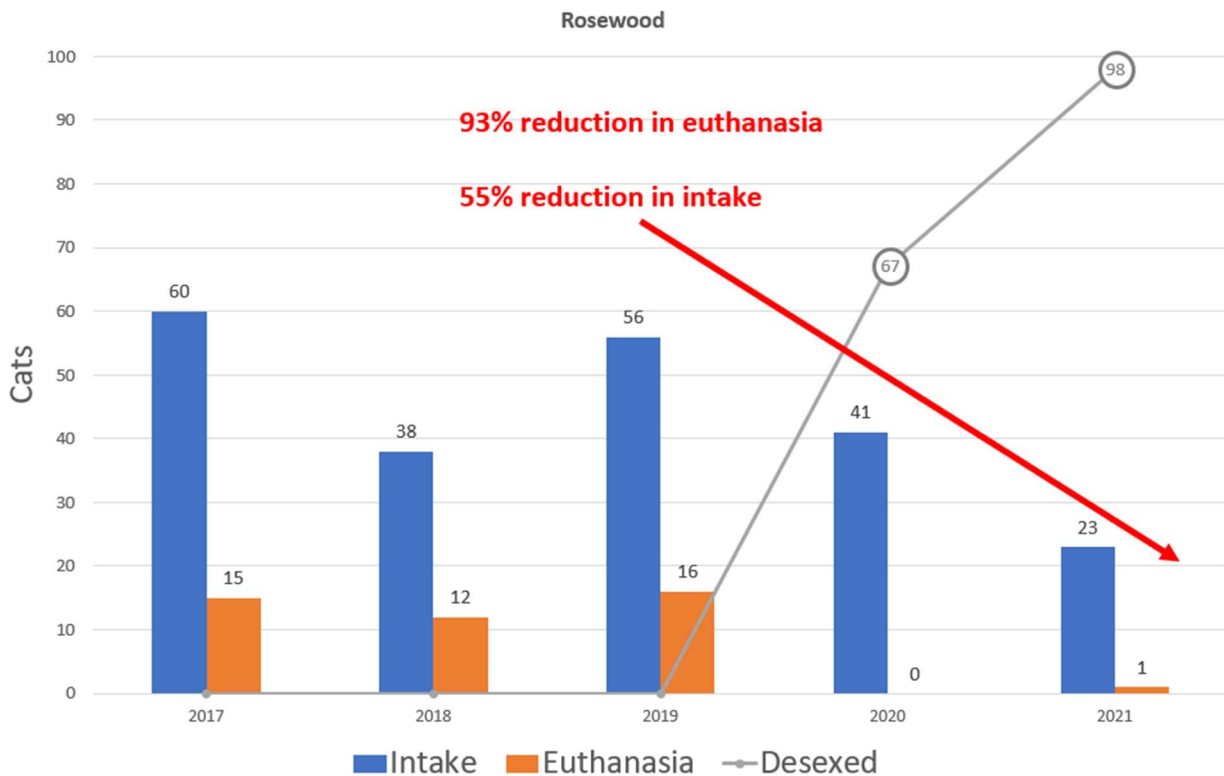
Data source: Banyule City Council, Submission to The House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy into the "Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia", <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=29ab9b81-391c-459c-8eed-ff6253b0293d&subId=691320>.

Costs to impound cats over this time period were around \$240,000, whereas the council spent \$60,000 on desexing. So, a much better result was achieved at about one-quarter of the cost. **High intensity effort to target areas with high shelter intake, and offering free desexing** is crucial to achieve this outcome.

Ipswich area Queensland, Community Cat Program

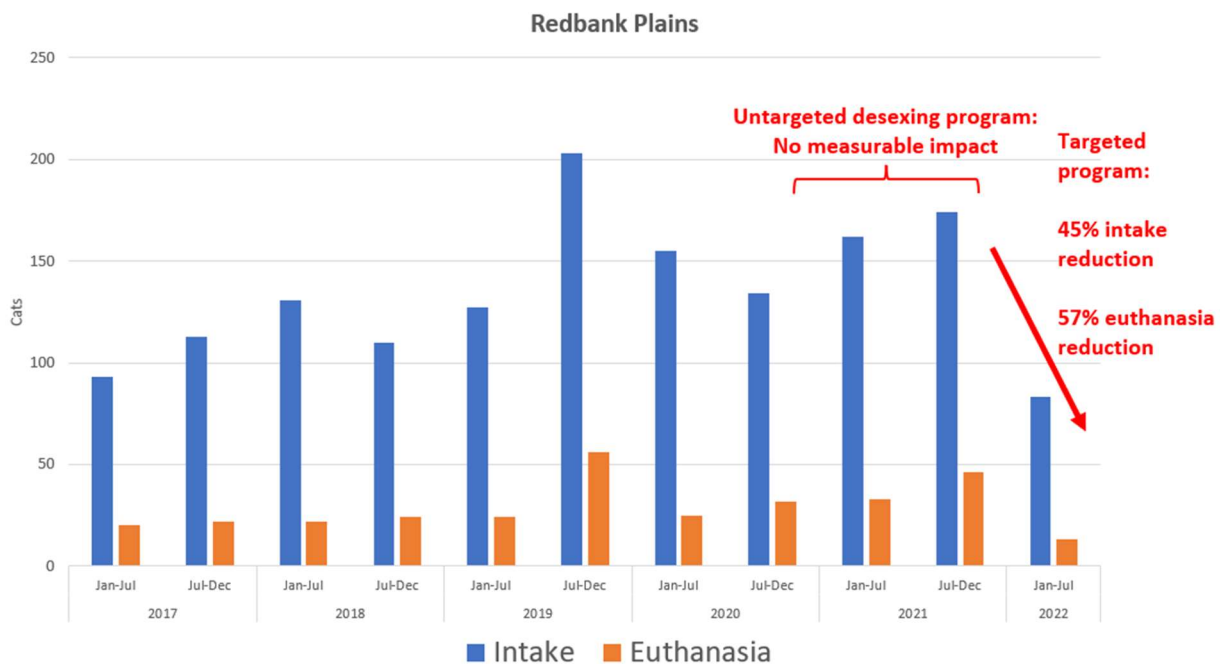
Specific areas with high shelter intakes were targeted for free desexing. Rosewood (pop 2,800) realised a 55% decrease in intake and 93% decrease in the number euthanased in just 17 months from 2019. Pre-desexing program, Rosewood took in an average of 51 cats per year, which reduced to 23 by 2021. It euthanased an average of 14 cats per year which reduced to just 1 in 2021.

Number of cats admitted, euthanised and desexed in Rosewood between 2017-2021



Redbank Plains reduced their intake by 45% and the number of cats euthanased by 57%. Note they ran an untargeted desexing program during 2021 which had no measurable effect. The micro-targeting project which saw the largest reduction in intake and euthanasia was realised by doorknocking to find feeders in locations of cat impoundments.

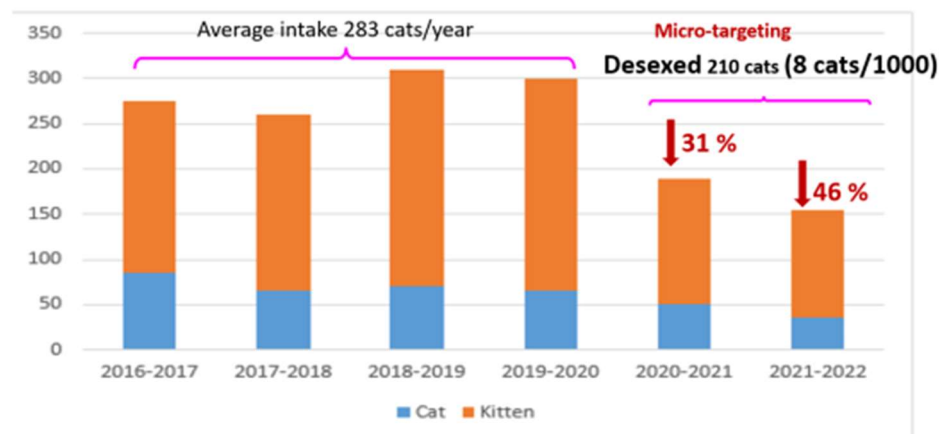
Number of cats admitted and euthanised in Redbank Plains between 2017-2022



Community Cat Program, south-western Sydney

Figure 6. Cat and kitten intake into the RSPCA NSW Yagoona shelter from the Greenacre suburb., Intake decreased by 31% in the first year, and 46% in the second year compared to the average intake over the four years prior to desexing. 8.2 cats/1000 residents were desexed over 2 years in the suburb with 163 cats were desexed in first year (6.4 cat/1000) and 47 cats in second year (2 cats/1000). The greatest impact is on kitten intake. Savings in sheltering costs were calculated as over \$100,000 in the first year alone whereas intake from other local government areas increased by 7% in the same time.

RSPCA NSW - Greenacre



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