

Compelling Evidence of Australian Desexing Initiatives with Owned & Semi Owned (Community) Cats



In Australia, there is significant experience and support for operating desexing programs by the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF), Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) NSW, the Cat Protection Society (CPS) NSW, Animal Welfare League (AWL) NSW, and others. This was included at the Inquiry Managing cat populations NSW. The Inquiry outcomes were approved by the NSW government, and the NSW government funded support for further desexing initiatives across 30 councils [R1]

This summary document includes a large number of successful Australian desexing programs by a range of organisations and councils (local governments). These have been grouped based on characteristics, and many included owned and semi owned (community) cats.

- Parramatta Council and others under the RSPCA managed Keeping Cats Safe at Home and Stray Care programs.
- CPS high volume desexing across various councils.
- APWF community cat programs predominantly in Ipswich over several years, and research across other councils.
- Several council coordinated desexing programs, some operating over years.
- Current / new desexing initiatives, including KCSAH phase 2 expanded to 30 councils.
- Significant vet driven desexing programs.

Related information is also included in an annexure:

- Underlying research on cat management strategies, their effectiveness, and financial justification etc
- Concerns for strategies and potential impacts to the carers and rescuers.

SUMMARY OF EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL AUSTRALIAN CAT DESEXING INITIATIVES

This summary, will be updated when more information becomes publicly available.

1. The initial **Parramatta** program (**Keeping Cats Safe at Home** program funded by the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Environment coordinated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA) NSW) [R2] included: a council allocation of \$90K; an aim “to locate unowned cat hotspots and engage with overwhelmed cat carers and volunteer cat rescue groups”; and results where **cat-related nuisance complaints decreased by 49% and cats arriving at the council pound decreased by 41%.**

The **StrayCare** program [R3] outcomes include: “after just 1 year, we've seen a **33% decrease in pound intake, and after 2 years, an incredible 73% reduction!** Alongside this, **cat euthanasia rates have also dropped dramatically—with a staggering 92% decrease in year 1 and an amazing 98% in year 2.** Last year, only 3 cats were euthanised compared to 145 in 2018-19”.

Several other councils were included in the first KCSAH program with a published study including the following. **“A collaborative targeted desexing approach was associated with large reductions in council pound intake, euthanasia, and, in most areas, nuisance complaints, alongside independent indications of reduced free-roaming cat density.”** [R3].

2. The CPS strongly supports desexing programs and their own initiatives include Adopt-A-Stray, and the **CPS Diva** programs with many Sydney councils. The CPS has assisted **1,800 cats** under NSW grants, which has been **estimated to avoid the birth of 16,200 kittens in 240 days**, (around 8 calendar months). [R4]
3. The **APWF Community Cat Programs** with extensive research over several years and by April 2024 **desexed 2,750 cats**, “80% were considered owned, 11% were considered semi-owned but became owned by the carer when desexed... 7% remained semi-owned” and including benefits of **“greater than 30% reduction in cat intake & 50% less euthanasia in target areas”** [R5]. These commenced in Ipswich.

These community cat programs and others have been part of published studies and research [R5], including the following findings.

“Traditional management strategies, such as containment laws, impounding, and fines, have proven ineffective, particularly in low-income areas, where most free-roaming cats are found. Some are unidentified owned cats, but many are stray cats being cared for by semi-owners—community members who care for them without formally adopting them.”

“Offering free cat sterilization, microchipping, and registration services to owners and semi-owners, especially in disadvantaged areas, promotes a more effective, humane solution that advances animal welfare while addressing social and community well-being and decreasing the risk to wildlife. Such programs have significantly reduced the numbers of cats impounded and euthanized, lowered cat-related complaints, enhanced cat welfare, and strengthened trust and cooperation between authorities and communities. Legislative changes are required to optimize the effectiveness of these programs.”

4. Other successfully completed **Council Desexing programs & initiatives**

The **Banyule council in Victoria** operated their own self-funded desexing program over several years, where the investment was returned 4 times in terms of savings. For owned and semi-owned cats this included **“decreases in impoundments by 66%, euthanasia by 82%, and cat-related calls by 36% over 8 years, with savings to council of AU \$440,660 for an outlay of AU \$77,490”**. [R6]

An update was included in more recent published studies [5] which includes “such a program reduced cat impoundments by 66%, euthanasia by 82%, and complaints by 36% between 2013 and 2021... However, **following the loss of key program staff and the reintroduction of financial barriers in Banyule, cat intake rose by 140% between 2022 and 2024, demonstrating the detrimental impact of financial barriers and punitive approaches.**”

The **Rosewood council NSW** operated a pilot APWF community cat program and achieved successful outcomes with **308 cats sterilized**, including in its third year “**cat intake had decreased by 60%, numbers euthanized by 85%, and there were 39% fewer cat-related calls to council**”. [R7]

The **Weddin council NSW** KCSAH project invested all funds to a **desexing program under local vets** [R1], including microchipping and collaboratively working to achieved **rapid results for over 100 cats**. This was considered to represent “**the future of local cat management, it is the answer to reducing cat euthanasia rates and keeping cats out of pounds and shelters**”. [R8]

Liverpool council NSW has over several years offered free desexing services. Another program is currently on offer, repeating previous successful efforts. Liverpool council self-funded.

5. Current / new desexing initiatives underway

NSW 30 councils RSPCA KCSAH second phase July 2025 through July 2026

By July 2026 RSPCA NSW reported over 6,000 cats and kittens had been desexed!!

Phase two with \$6M is to encourage responsible cat ownership and voluntary containment [R9]. The scope involves “targeted desexing and microchipping initiatives, along with a statewide education and social marketing campaign to help cat owners create enriching home environments and understand the benefits of keeping cats safely contained”, with specific aims:

- **“Reduce free-roaming cat populations in project areas by 30%.**
- **Increase the proportion of cat owners keeping their pets safely contained to over 50%.**
- **Lower council pound cat intake by 20% across participating regions.”**

Councils involved (* were in Phase 1):

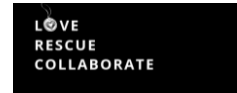
Blacktown City Council

Brewarrina Shire Council

Blue Mountains City Council*

Broken Hill City Council

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Byron Shire Council*	Liverpool City Council
Camden Council	Maitland City Council
Campbelltown City Council*	Muswellbrook Shire Council
Canterbury Bankstown Council	Newcastle City Council
Central Darling Shire Council	Northern Beaches Council*
Cessnock City Council	Penrith City Council
City of Parramatta*	Port Stephens Council
Cumberland Council	Shoalhaven City Council*
Fairfield City Council	Singleton Shire Council
Hawkesbury City Council	The Hills Shire Council
Hornsby Shire Council*	Tweed Shire Council*
Kyogle Council*	Walgett Shire Council*
Lake Macquarie City Council	Weddin Shire Council*

The commitments from a number of councils is evident, though specific results/ outcomes are not yet available.

Georges River council NSW has commenced a three-month program in 2025 to provide cat desexing and microchipping services free for residents [R10].

Canterbury Bankstown council NSW has commenced a short program with **CPS Diva** commencing April 2025.

Bendigo council Vic “have implemented a very strategic and **very intensive free microchipping and cat desexing program**...their reclaim rate for cats has increased to 50 per cent and the intake of cats has reduced by 60 per cent... in the middle of kitten season, they ran out of cats a number of times and were able to take cats from neighbouring municipalities to offer them up for adoption. This is only over 12 to 24 months that they've been running this program. That's how quickly the results can occur when you're implementing the kinds of strategies that we're talking about today.” [R11]
Nell Thompson

AWL NSW with Far South Coast and Glen Innes councils operated cat management pilots for cat colonies: includes desexing and ongoing management and ownership “It's early days, so we've only been doing this now for eight months”. Stephen Albin [R11]

6. Vet related desexing initiatives

In 2024, several **Greencross Vet NSW practices**, provided funded desexing services for community cats and their rescuers/carers [R12]. This enabled around **500 cats** to be rapidly desexed reducing the number of new kittens being born in these areas, minimising the number of roaming cats and the potential impact to wildlife.

The impact of 250 breeding pairs of cats, may be **estimated to be several thousand in a single year**, e.g. avoiding 1,000 kittens in <3 months, then by around 12 months another 7,000 from grandparents and two litters becoming parents themselves.

The **Logan City council pound QLD partners with young vets** to achieve high desexing numbers, including "4,700 dogs and cats were impounded... last financial year, 3,945 in Brisbane and more than 2,700 in Ipswich" and their chief vet advises "**desexing is the 'single biggest thing' that will reduce the number of unwanted animals**". [R13]

Providing vet-based services and the benefits, aligns with the **Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)** concerns and recommendations to the NSW government:

- "major gaps; in acknowledging the role of veterinary practices in rehoming processes, in recognising the support that local veterinary practices provide for the community and the negative impacts on the sector by this lack of consideration", and supporting "establishment of a community cat program with ongoing funding arrangements needs to include formal provisions for veterinary practices reimbursement when receiving stray cats", [R14]
- funding desexing initiatives "these programs should be funded by the government to ensure they do not financially strain private veterinary practices". [R15]

ANNEXURE RELATED INFORMATION

Cost effective urban cat management

Recent Australian research [R16] on **desexing abandoned cats, reinforces the integrated focus areas for cost effective urban cat management**, including:

- traditional methods of trapping and euthanasing fail to address root causes i.e. the start of the “supply chain” with a high number of cats continuing to breed,
- “One Welfare” programs providing support for cat sterilisation etc, provide better outcomes for cats and owners/ care givers/ rescuers, vet and pound staff, minimise the populations and reduce the impacts to wildlife,
- a number of Victorian councils acknowledge that mandatory confinement is not enforceable and comes with high ongoing costs and have abandoned this approach,
- enforcement approaches disproportionately burden vulnerable communities, strain government resources, and include mental health impacts to council and shelter staff and rescue volunteers,
- TNR (desexing community/ colony cats) programs in urban areas have been reducing cat populations by 30% within two years, and reduce the mental health impacts to rescuers and staff, of euthanasing healthy but fearful cats (especially those abandoned recently by irresponsible owners).

Ongoing impacts to community cats and rescuers, if proactive humane steps are not taken

There has been **an unreasonable and unfair financial burden on volunteer community cat rescuers and, in our opinion, a blatant form of emotional abuse / blackmail** where those who care about cats who are carrying the load for cat welfare in their communities.

Desexing programs involving community cats and their rescuers/ carers start to rectify this unfair burden.[R17]

It is strongly recommended that the research [R18] into the Australian Newcastle breakwater cats culling is taken into consideration including:

- the **extremely strong bond between volunteer carers and rescuers with colony cats** “known by authorities for at least five years, and included using a TNR program to reduce numbers from 100 to about 40” with rehoming many cats abandoned by others,
- the advice “...the severity of the adverse psychological impacts, and the morbidity rate amongst the cat caregivers... was far greater than would be expected as a risk to the community if the cats had remained at the site. We therefore suggest that **potential legal ramifications should be considered before authorities intentionally choose a method of management that is likely to inflict substantial harm on community members.**”

Reference Sources

R1: Inquiry Management of Cat Populations NSW, Terms of reference, submissions, transcripts, further documents from various organisations December 2024 including RSPCA NSW, CPS NSW and APWF:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011>

The associated findings and recommendation and government approval

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011#tab-reportsandgovernmentresponses>

Government communications confirming funding for desexing programs

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding/keeping-cats-safe-at-home-phase-2-regional-expansion>

R2: KCSAH RSPCA managed program and the initial impact report 2023:

<https://www.rspcansw.org.au/information-and-advice/caring-for-animals/cats-and-kittens/keeping-cats-safe-at-home/about-the-project/>

R3: RSPCA NSW Facebook post

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPCANewSouthWales/posts/pfbid0nAV9NvfFSUJ3VWUgZFDLYwL7M5pNAHQyF3XSuHteFhSP7bQZy3TCVp5xXsCp2F6il>

Published study StrayCare Metro: Evaluation of a Targeted Cat Desexing Program to Manage Free-Roaming Cats <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/16/8/1216>

R4: <https://catprotection.org.au/desexing/> & CPS Answers to Supplementary questions

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011#tab-otherdocuments>

R5: APWF 2024 Report etc <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-programs>

Urban Cat Management in Australia—Evidence-Based Strategies for Success

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/15/8/1083>

R6: Impact of a Local Government Funded Free Cat Sterilization Program for Owned and Semi-Owned Cats <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/11/1615>

R7: Outcomes of a Community Cat Program Based on Sterilization of Owned, Semi-Owned and Unowned Cats in a Small Rural Town <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/21/3058>

R8: <https://weddinlandcare.com.au/milestone-for-keeping-cats-safe-at-home-project>

R9: RSPCA NSW Keeping Cats Safe at Home with Phase 2

<https://www.rspcansw.org.au/information-and-advice/caring-for-animals/cats-and-kittens/keeping-cats-safe-at-home/about-the-project/>

July 2026 update:

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPCANewSouthWales/posts/pfbid02K8RJeCC32wg72aJrVMfSEPgtrycE99KHR8aEX1JW23mriC9WaQx7yBaWi2T1GScGl>

R10: <https://www.georgesriver.nsw.gov.au/Community/Events/What%E2%80%99s-On-Event-Information/Free-Cat-Desexing-Program-Council-Led-Event>

R11: transcript from various organisations April 2025 for Inquiry Management of cat populations NSW: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011#tab-hearingsandtranscripts>

R12: Practice Manager, Greencross Vets North Parramatta, www.greencrossvets.com.au

R13: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-02-24/queensland-young-vets-reducing-stray-animal-numbers/104932452>

R14: www.ava.com.au/member-updates/nsw/ava-submission-to-nsw-rehoming-practices-review/

R15: <https://www.ava.com.au/member-updates/submissions/nsw-inquiry-into-the-management-of-cat-populations/>

R16: Rethinking Urban Cat Management—Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Traditional Cat Management <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/15/7/1005>

R17: “‘You can’t ban compassion’: helping stray cats is illegal in much of Australia – but for some, it’s worth the risk” <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/feb/23/you-cant-ban-compassion-helping-stray-cats-is-in-much-of-australia-but-for-some-its-worth-the-risk>

R18: The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>