

Protecting veterinary teams from euthanising healthy cats for population control

Jacquie Rand
Emeritus Professor, UQ
Executive Director & Chief Scientist
Australian Pet Welfare Foundation



A black and white cat with striking orange eyes is lying on a sandy surface. The cat is looking directly at the camera, with its head slightly turned towards a dead bird lying on the sand in front of it. The bird has blue and white feathers. The cat's fur is black and white, and its eyes are a bright orange color. The background is a plain, light-colored surface, possibly sand or concrete.

[illegible]

What are our management options for stray cats?

Do nothing OR accept strays from public & council officers trap nuisance cats &/or provide traps for complainants

- Removing approx. 5%-10% of urban stray cat population annually
- BUT at least 3% of adults feeding average 1.5 cats they don't own

City of 100,000, 1,800 female cats producing average of 5 kittens/yr = 9,000 kittens (75% free-living kittens die before 6 mths)

= same number or even more kittens & cats next year

= sustainably farming cats & harvesting juveniles

Who is tasked with doing the killing?



Victorian state data – 2024 (2018 =27% euthanized)

Cat admissions	Reclaimed	%	Rehomed	%	Transferred	%	Euthanised	%
45,119	3,170	7	19,429	43	7,794	17	12,666	28

Lost Dogs Home - 2024

Cat admissions	Reclaimed	%	Rehomed	%	Transferred	%	Euthanised	%
11,445	687	6	5,898	52	278	2	4,190	37



IT'S NOT JUST THE ANIMALS

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

“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”

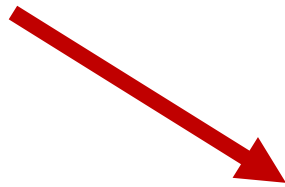
Do we just need cat owners to be responsible..

Have we got it, right?



Free-roaming cats

Owned & identified 3%-6%



- On average, **20%** of Australian households (2.4 people) live **\$800/week**, percent **higher in disadvantaged suburbs**
- One in 3 Australians live in rental properties
- Containment systems \$700-\$2000 plus
- Mandating 24/7 containment criminalises cat ownership for low income owners, renters & people with “door-dasher” cats
- Most people who can are containing their cat - **65% confined inside**; 85% contained on property - **only 15% could leave property**



Mandated containment



Owned & identified 3% - 6%



Does it work? 79 Victorian LGAs (councils)

Data from Domestic Animal Management Plans (every 4 years)
+ direct requests and right to information requests

Containment: **31%** had no containment mandate
44% nighttime (dusk–dawn); **25%** full-time (24-hour)

Duration - 2 to 32 years (median = 7.6 years)



No differences in cat-related complaints, impoundments & euthanasia per 1000 residents **when SEIFA & LGA type accounted for**

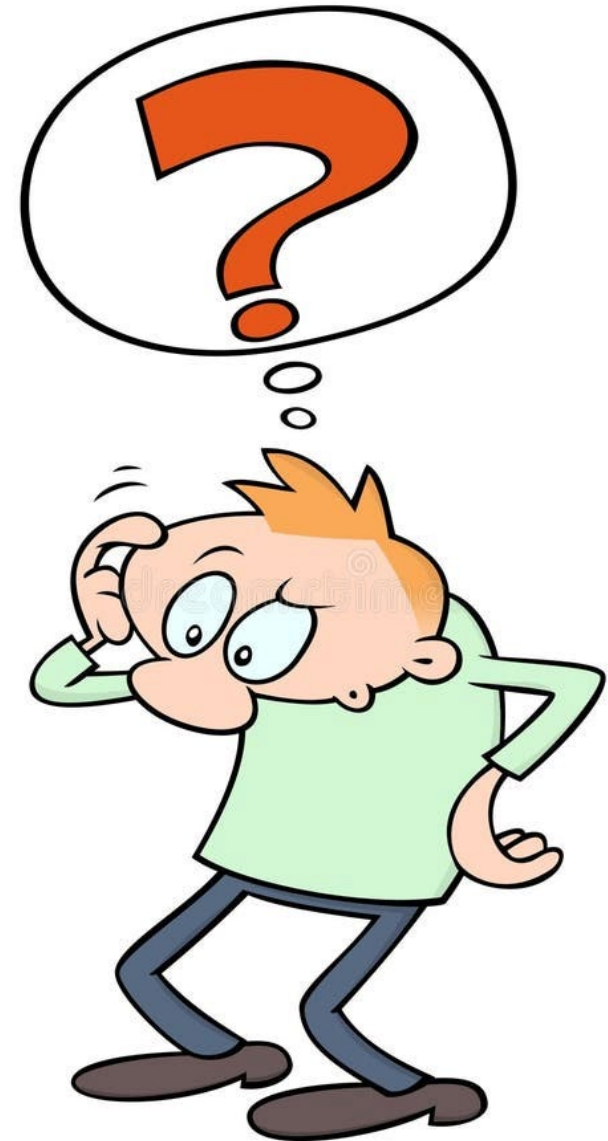
Most of differences due level of disadvantage/advantage with some impact of whether metro or rural city

Jenny Cotterell MPhil

Mandated desexing

- In states with mandated desexing (by 4 or 6 months of age), **per-capita cat intakes/1000 residents higher than states without mandates** (Chua et al., 2023).
- In 190,000 cats admitted to RSPCA facilities, **no differences in desexing status** between states with and without mandatory sterilisation (Alberthsen et al., 2016).
- **Shelter intake increased (per 1000 residents)** after ACT introduced mandated desexing by 6 months (Cotterell et al., 2025)
- **Household income is the strongest predictor of whether cats are desexed**, yet such legislative approaches emphasise compulsion rather than access (Chu 2007).
- Affordability, not willingness, is the primary constraint on desexing

What can we do?



Stop the kittens!

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

Stop birth of kittens to become stray or surrendered

Stop problematic behaviours – fighting, yowling, less roaming

➡ Targeted (microtargeted) free desexing programs



Community Cat
Programs:
Reduce
complaints,
shelter intake
and euthanasia

Targeted &
microtargeted

- a. **Desexing owned cats** to stop kittens being born to become strays or surrendered to shelter
- b. **Converting semi-owners to owners** to stop timid and shy cats and kittens coming into shelter
- c. **Managing multi-cat sites** Desexing & microchipping cats for caregivers (semi-owners) to stop timid and shy cats & kittens coming into shelter
- d. **Protecting human & animal lives - Working cat programs and Return to field (RTF) -**
Working cats – horse barns, farms, factories, etc
RTF = return to home location of healthy cats unlikely to be adopted (they are getting care)
- e. **Assisting and supporting** cat owners and carers to **care for their cats** – rather than enforcement & punishment first
- f. **Resolving** cat-related nuisance issues

Guess what? It works!!

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

33% decline in free-roaming cats over 4 years

Shelter intake down 60%, **euthanasia 86%**
and cat related complaints by 39% in 3 years

Rand et al. 2025; Ma 2025, 2026, Cotterell 2024

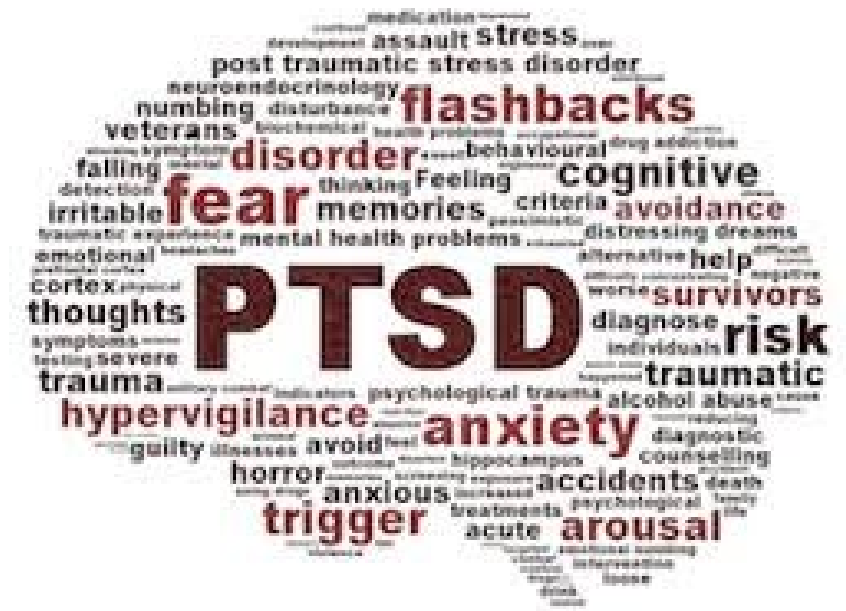


Rosewood Camera Placement 2021 WINTER



Without Community Cat Programs

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





“Do the best you can
until you know better.

Then when you
know better...

Do better.”

- Maya Angelou