

# Desexing Legislation – what's the optimal solution

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Getting 2 Zero



# THE DATA

# Double euthanasia rates – Australia-wide

Pound/Shelter pets  
euthanased in Australia  
annually  
= 5.9 (1.9 dog and 4 cat)  
per 1000 head pop.

G2Z2013 Presentation

*Diana Chua The unwanted dog and cat  
problem in Australia presentation -  
available*





# City of Gold Coast (pop. > 570 000 people)

AWLQ have managed  
all the stray and  
surrendered cats and  
dogs in 6<sup>th</sup> largest city  
in Australia  
for almost 20 yrs—  
Whole of city data

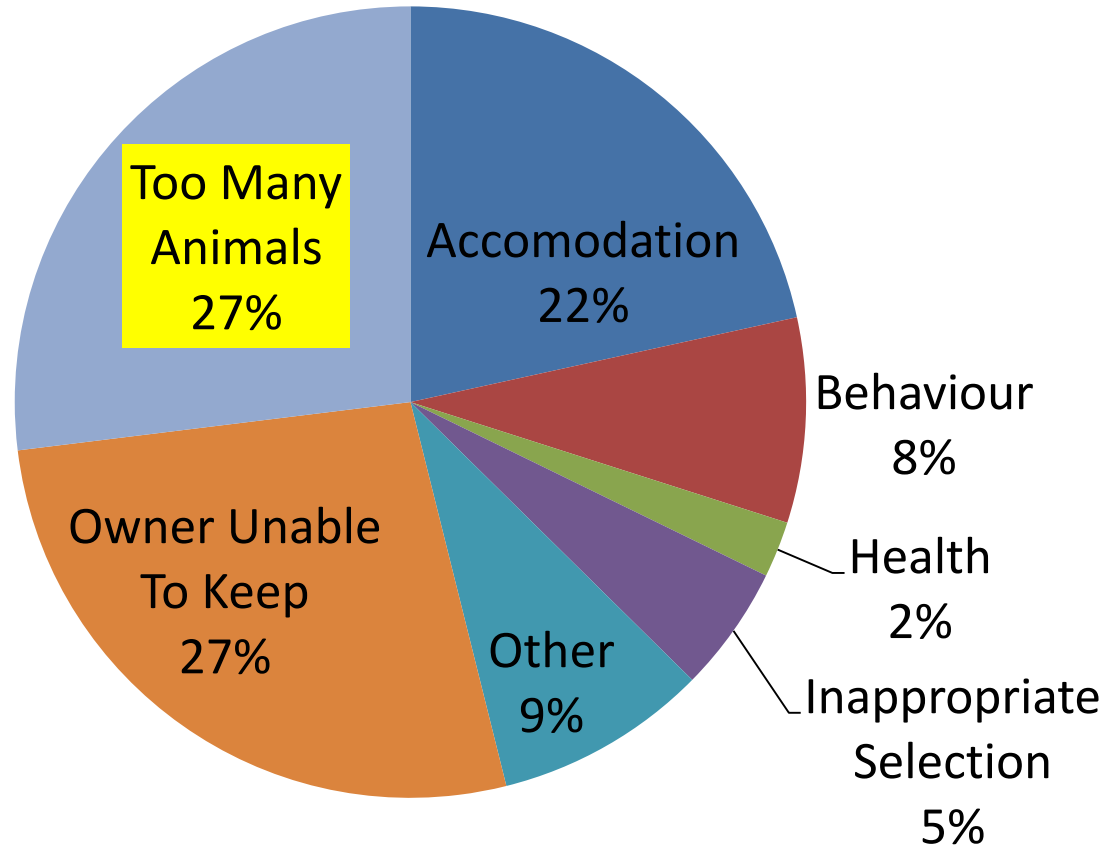


# Reducing euthanasia rates in City of Gold Coast (Population >560 000)

Euthanasia Rates	2001	2017/18
Dogs	32%	5%
Cats	57%	7%

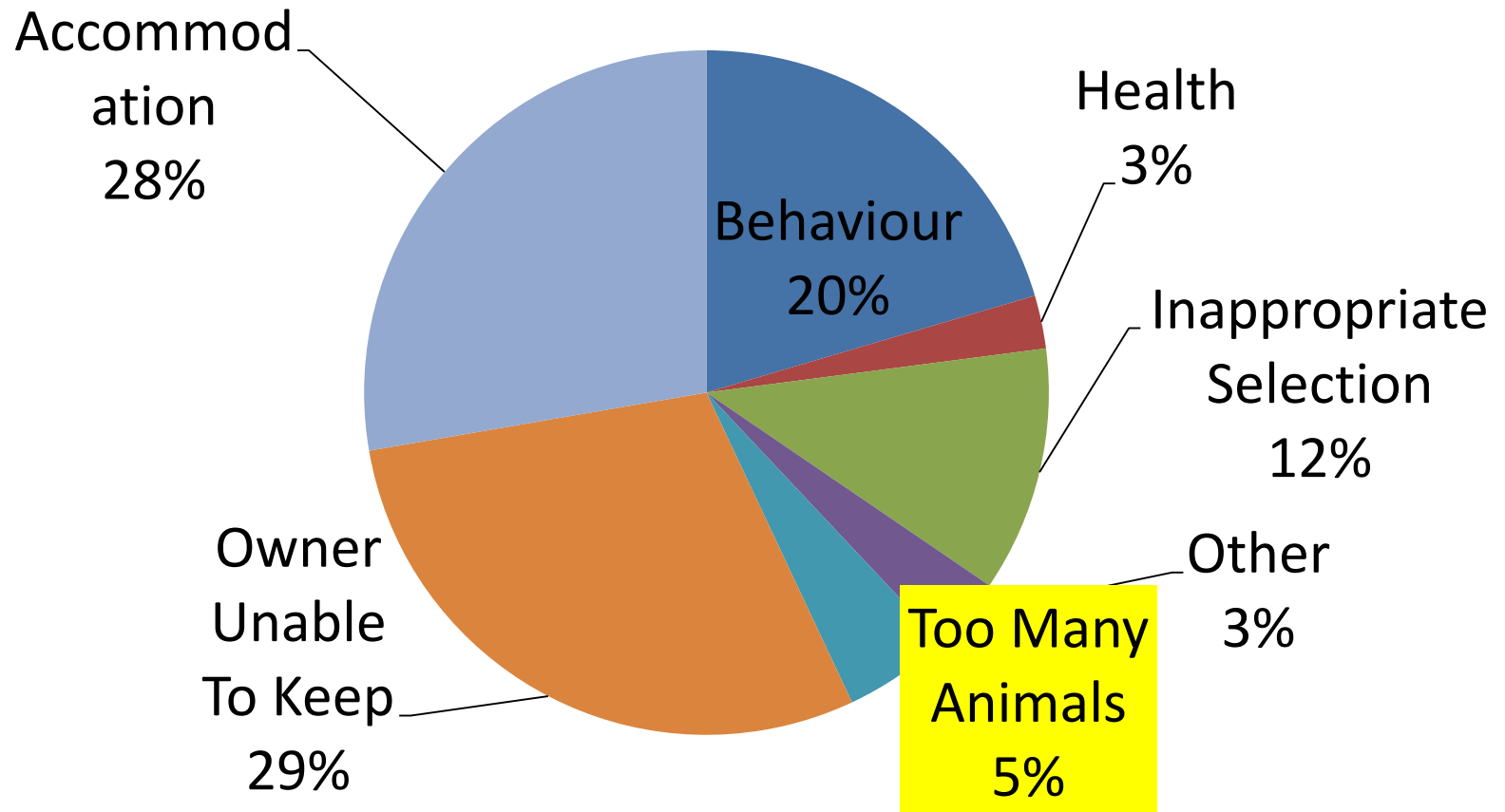
# Cats - Reasons for Surrender

## Gold Coast City 2009 - 2010



# Dogs - Reasons for Surrender

## Gold Coast City 2009 - 2010



# Whole of City Figures - Gold Coast 2017/18

A greater proportion of unwanted kittens than puppies in pounds shelters

- Kittens - 45% of all 2000 stray and surrendered feline intake
- Pups - 6% of all 2500 stray and surrendered canine intake were pups





# Strays are usually socialised and therefore have been or are owned cats

Whether handed in as strays or surrenders varies depending on policies.

Studies show that they are similarly sociable/adoptable and so at some stage have had an owner or carer who could have desexed them.



# An oversupply of free cats on GumTree

- **The most common age group was up to 16 weeks** (23.6% of ads) with around half of the ads (53%) were for cats one year of age or less
- **62% of cat ads were for free animals (only 23% of dog ads)**
- Of cats advertised on Gumtree where breed type was mentioned, 61% were pure-breed.



*Hazel, S. et al. Online Relinquishments of Dogs and Cats in Australia, Animals 2018*

# Cats can be pregnant by 4 mths

Most owners (72% in the 2014 SA study) are unaware that cats can be pregnant from 4 months of age



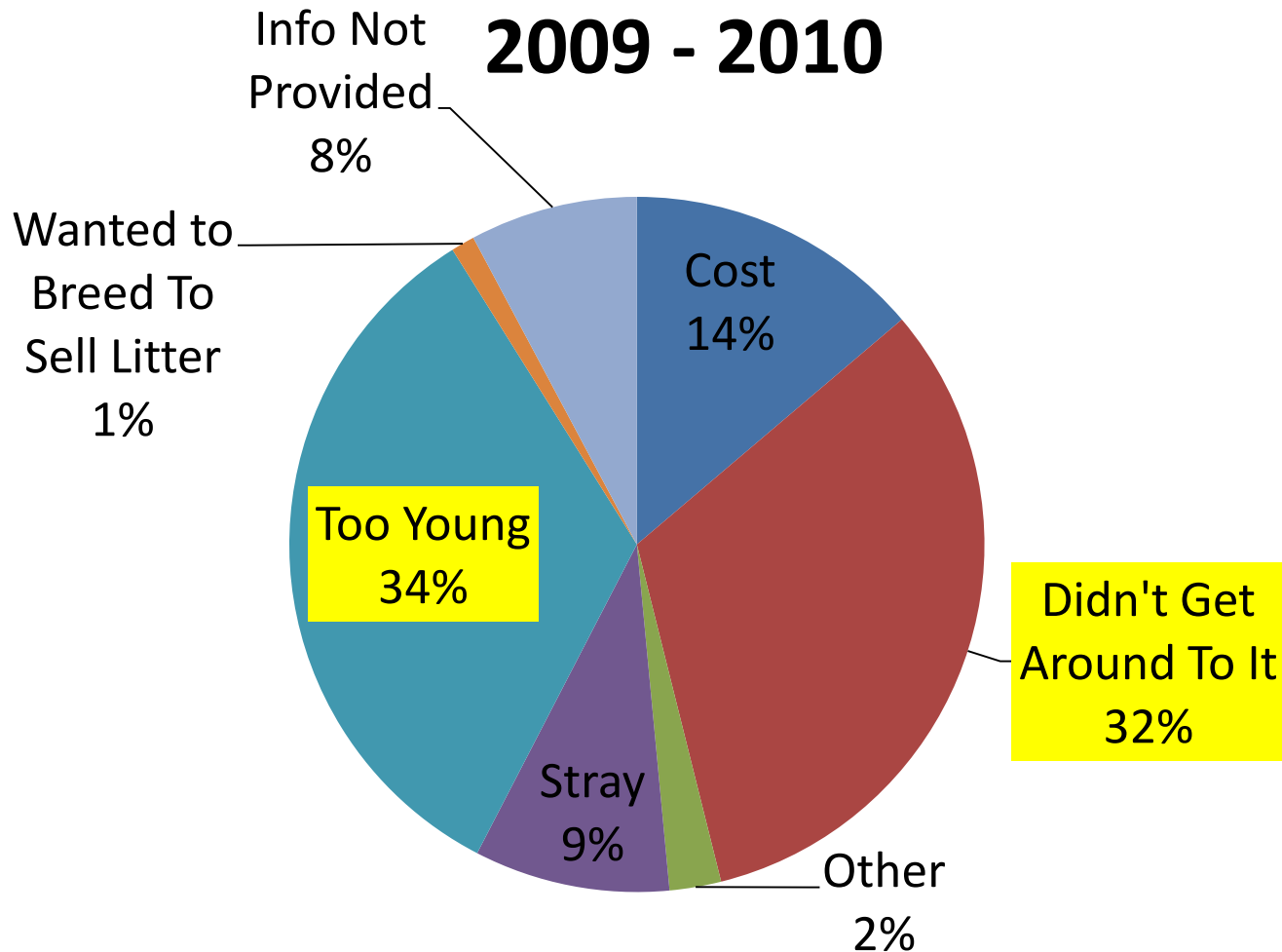
# Veterinarians not promoting EAD

- Two thirds of veterinary practices are not promoting the safety and benefits of desexing cats from 2-3 months of age
- (data from all veterinary clinics in Gold Coast City in 2010/11)



# Reasons for not desexing Cats over 2 months

**2009 - 2010**





22% of  
OWNED  
female  
cats have  
an  
unplanned  
litter.

2014 South Australian  
Dog and Cat  
Management  
Board-  
commissioned  
study



# A SOLUTION

# DESEXING KITTENS PRIOR TO SALE OR TRANSFER

**All breeders  
(purebreed,  
accidental) required  
to desex kittens prior  
to sale or transfer**



# Responsible Breeding Legislation

Since there are already more cats and dogs needing homes than the homes available, and cats are getting pregnant prior to their owners getting around to it, every person who contributes more animals should take responsibility for preventing the social cost of unwanted animals that they produce and sell/give away.





# Why require desexing

## – what are laws for?

- Set the standards of what is acceptable practice in the community e.g. smoking, drink-driving, seat-belt legislation i.e. require sellers of cigarettes, and alcohol and cars to act responsibly
- Complement community education and support programs e.g. know the impacts, support to help people give up smoking
- Supports breeders who are doing the right thing.
- Provides an incentive and expectation to prevent accidental breeding PROVIDED THERE IS DESEXING SUPPORT TO COMPLY



# How does this help?

- Avoids new owners having an accidental litter
- Easier to check compliance as kittens have to be promoted to find homes



# IS IT SAFE ?

# Desexing of cats at 8-10 weeks and 1 kg in weight as safe as traditional age desexing

- “Based on the available evidence, EAD does not appear to be associated with an increased occurrence of any serious medical or behavioural conditions in either male or female cats compared to traditional age desexing. Indeed, EAD may offer additional behavioural benefits in male cats.”



*RSPCA Research Report: Early-age desexing of dogs and cats, 2010.*

# No effect of desexing age on undesirable behaviour development during 24 months after adoption

- No difference between EAD and traditional age desexed groups in mean number of potentially undesirable behaviours
- **Undesirable behaviours such as inappropriate elimination, fearful behaviour, non-play related aggression and destruction were associated with other social and environmental variables e.g. the use of punishment and reaction toward a stranger.**

*Porters, N. et al. Development of Behaviour in adopted shelter kittens after gonadectomy performed at an early age or at a traditional age. 2014*

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# More identified risks of EAD for dogs

## Cats

## Dogs

### Behaviour –

0 no difference between intact and EAD

### Behaviour -

✓ separation anxiety, escaping behaviours, inappropriate elimination when frightened and relinquishment for any reason were decreased

x noise phobias and sexual behaviours were increased ; 7 weeks or 7 months higher activity levels than intact ; increased excitability if desexed at 7 weeks

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### Musculoskeletal development

0 slightly longer bone growth but no increased risk of fractures

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Musculoskeletal development x slightly longer bone growth and conflicting results re increased risk of hip dysplasia



# Long Term Benefits / Risks of EAD

## Cat

## Dog

### Obesity –

0 desexing may predispose to obesity but no difference between EAD 7 wks and traditional age desexing 7 mths; can be managed with appropriate diet

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### Cancer –

✓ decreased risk of ovarian and testicular cancers, and mammary cancers/tumours

### Obesity –

0 desexing may predispose to obesity but no difference between EAD 7 wks and traditional age desexing 7 mths; can be managed with appropriate diet

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### Cancer –

✓ decreased risk of ovarian and testicular cancers, and mammary cancers/tumours;

X osteosarcoma was found to be higher in desexed female Rottweilers, particularly if desexed prior to 5.5 months of age

# Long Term Benefits √ / Risks x of EAD or No difference 0

## Cats

- Infantile External Genitalia –  
0 smaller but no clinical problems found

- 
- Urinary problems-  
0 no increased risks found

## Dogs

- Infantile External Genitalia-  
0 smaller but no clinical problems found

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Urinary problems -

X increased incidence of cystitis, and urinary incontinence in female dogs, conflicting results

# EAD Benefits may outweigh risks for pups in some situations/communities

- Where community dogs are roaming, breeding excessively and at risk of being harmed or a health or safety risk to each other or people
- In breed types that are at high risk of euthanasia e.g. larger cross-breeds that are hard to find homes for



# Some progress in earlier desexing

- A 2012 survey<sup>2</sup> identified that participating veterinarians had already reduced their age for desexing cats to on average, 3.4 months for queens and 3.2 months for toms.

*Farnworth MJ et al. (2012) Veterinary attitudes towards pre-pubertal gonadectomy of cats: a comparison of samples from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom NZ Vet J(12)*



# Ways of educating current and future veterinarians

- Roadshow by Vic Govt and AVA around Victoria in 2004
- Information on the safety and benefits of EAD into the UQ vet curriculum from around 2008. Cost of providing one on one hands on experience has been prohibitive, but shelter work experience can help.
- Information evenings on safety of EAD for kittens with wet workshop for GC veterinarians in 2010, when legislation requiring EAD was introduced
- Professional development on-line EAD training – Cat Prot Soc NSW





# Current AVA Position on age of desexing

- “Desexing can be performed from as early as **8 weeks of age** and at a **minimum of 1kg bodyweight.**”
- “Veterinarians may **recommend desexing before puberty** unless there is a valid reason to delay the procedure.”



# Current AVA Position on age of desexing

- “Early age desexing is particularly important in cats, which may be able to reproduce from 4 months of age”



# DEVELOPING THE LEGISLATION

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## 2. Preface

In 2008, the City of Gold Coast (City) was requested to participate in a pilot project following the introduction of the *Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008*. The aim of the project was to develop a code of practice (Code) for breeders of cats and dogs.

A key component of the pilot program was a new local law that required residents to obtain a permit should they intend to keep, or currently keep, dogs and cats for breeding purposes. Eligibility for a permit is based upon compliance with our Local Law.

The purpose of the project is to encourage owners to consider their responsibilities, reduce the oversupply of cats and dogs, and excessive euthanasia rates by desexing their animals.

The Code was developed in consultation with the Gold Coast Companion Animal Stakeholder Coalition which includes AWL Qld, Dogs Qld, Gold Coast Dog Obedience Training Club, Qld Feline Association, Queensland Independent Cat Council, Little Paws Kitten Rescue Association, Council of Federated Cat Clubs of Qld Inc, RSPCA Qld, Wildcare Australia Inc, Wildlife Preservation Society QLD, AVA Qld and the Pet Industry Association of Australia.

# Model Responsible Breeding Legislation

## FOR CATS AND DOGS

- ✓ **All breeders** (pure-breed, cross-breed, planned or accidental) required to have a govt. breeder permit
- ✓ **Breeder pays for the permit**
- ✓ **Independent accredited inspection required to demonstrate Standards prior to getting a permit**
- ✓ **Compulsory standards in a Breeder Code of Practice and in the local law**
- ✓ **KITTENS TO BE DESEXED PRIOR TO SALE OR TRANSFER BY THE BREEDER**
- ✓ **Requirement to publish Breeder Permit numbers**

## 12.2 Desexing

### Standards:

**S38.** The holder of the permit must not sell or otherwise dispose of an animal which is a cat or an animal of a litter of a cat, unless:

- a) prior to the sale or disposal, the holder obtains from a veterinary surgeon a certificate stating, or other evidence of, either of the following:
  - that the animal has been desexed
  - that desexing the animal is likely to be a serious risk to the animal's health
- b) the animal is sold or otherwise disposed of to the holder of a current animal breeder permit.

### Guidelines:

Desexing cats and dogs - including puppies and kittens - prior to sale or transfer contributes to reducing unwanted cat and dog populations. Early age desexing of cats

## 12.3 Pre and post adoption information and support

### Standards:

**S39.** If the holder of the permit sells or otherwise disposes of an animal, including an animal of a litter, to a person (the receiver) – the holder of the permit must give written notice to the receiver of:

- a) the number allocated to the permit by the local government
- b) particulars of:
  - i) the typical lifespan of the animal
  - ii) the common physical and behavioural characteristics for the age and breed of the animal
- c) the standard of care appropriate for the animal, including specific information about:
  - i) diet



# Breeder Permits City of Gold Coast

## October 2018

- There are presently 113 dog breeders and 7 cat breeders registered with the City of Gold Coast.
- Inspections are scheduled by local government inspectors. They attend the property and assess the conditions for the permit. Checklist is completed for each property which relates to the Breeder Code of Practice embedded in the local law.

# Need for national consistency

- Animals from breeders outside the Gold Coast can still be purchased by Gold Coast residents – purchased from Gumtree or non-Gold Coast breeders
- **SUCCESS IS LIMITED BY THE WIDE RANGE OF DESEXING & BREEDER PERMIT LEGISLATION IN OTHER STATES**

# State/territory cat desexing legislation

- Only Tasmania and WA require breeders to take responsibility for desexing the kittens they breed
- Tasmania - Kittens must be **desexed prior to sale or transfer**, unless a certificate from vet due to health risk, or a care agreement with buyer to have cat desexed, or purchased by registered breeder
- WA – Kittens must be **desexed prior to sale or transfer** unless to an approved breeder or with a pre-paid voucher to buyer; and all cats desexed by 6 months

# States not holding cat breeders accountable

- ACT - it is an offence if you sell a cat that has not been desexed and the cat is at least **3 months** of age (**6 months up to 2007**).
- NSW: From July 1<sup>st</sup> 2019 an annual permit required (within 21 days or when the cat is **4 months of age** whichever is later) unless a cat is desexed, or registered prior to this date, or owned by a breeder who is a member of a recognised breeder organisation;
- SA - Cats must be desexed by **6 months**, from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018, exemptions for registered breeders
- Victoria, Qld, NT – no state legislation requiring cats or dogs to be desexed

# Local Government

- Some local governments have desexing legislation e.g. Fraser Coast May 2016 - all dogs and cats must be desexed **by 22 weeks** of age, unless a vet certificate, a Council breeder approval, member of a breeder organisation or show association, a pound or shelter.
- PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU HAVE SOME DESEXING LEGISLATION AND DESEXING SUPPORT IN PLACE



# Gold Coast Model

## Responsible Breeding Legislation CATS & DOGS

### AT VARYING STAGES IN EACH STATE

All breeders (pure-breed, cross-breed, planned or accidental) required to have a govt. breeder permit (YES: ACT, SA, TAS & Vic (some breeders), WA (Cats only), Qld(dogs only))\* **Not Yet: NSW, NT**

\*Based on responses from State Governments , local govts please notify)

Breeder pays for the permit ( Vic - three or more fertile female dogs AND they sell dogs ) **Not Yet: ACT, NSW, NT, Qld, SA, Tas, WA)**

Independent accredited inspection required (Vic – some breeders) **Not Yet: ACT (may be req.), NSW, NT, Qld, SA, Tas, WA)**

Compulsory standards in a Breeder Code of Practice (ACT, NSW, SA, Vic, Qld (dogs only) ) **Not Yet: Tas, WA, NT)**

Requirement to publish Breeder Permit numbers (Yes: ACT, NSW, SA, Vic, Qld (dogs only); **Not yet: Tas WA, NT)**

State/Territory Government database of permitted breeders (linked nationally) (YES: NSW, SA, Qld (dogs only), **Not Yet: ACT, NT, Qld, Tas, Vic(from July2019),WA)**

## 2. DESEXING ALL CATS AND DOGS REHOMED FROM POUNDS & SHELTERS

- IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GOOD ANIMAL MANAGEMENT
- to reduce the number of unwanted cats and dogs over time, to minimise public nuisance, health risks and expenditure on public services.



# STATE GOVERNMENT REQUIRES DESEXING ALL **CATS** REHOMED FROM POUNDS & SHELTERS

**YES**

ACT

Vic

Tas

SA

WA

**NO**

Qld

NSW

NT

# STATE GOVERNMENT REQUIRES DESEXING ALL **DOGS** REHOMED FROM POUNDS & SHELTERS

**YES**

ACT

Vic

SA

**NO**

Qld

NSW

Tas

WA

NT

# Legislation by itself is insufficient!





# The 4 elements of G2Z

1. COMMUNITY VET  
CLINICS &  
DESEXING  
PROGRAMS

**PREVENT  
ABANDONMENT**

4. COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION  
LEGISLATION &  
SUPPORT



**GETTING 2 ZERO**

2. SHELTER VET  
CLINIC

**SAVE EXISTING  
LIVES**

3. MAXIMISE  
REHOMING

# Must help people comply with desexing & breeder permit laws

- Councils need to support those in your community who have limited capacity to desex their cats
- or who are trying to help a stray cat who has arrived on their doorstep



# NDN Cooperative Desexing Program

Ongoing  
targeted  
low cost desexing  
program  
to help those in need  
in your city/town



**How the program works  
will be explained in a  
presentation at 3.55 today.**

# In summary

Desexing of kittens prior to sale or transfer by 8-10 weeks with responsible breeding legislation is not the only solution.

However it can be a useful strategy based on:

- The data about unwanted cats
- Stakeholder involvement
- **It must be accompanied by desexing support and many other preventative strategies**



# Contact

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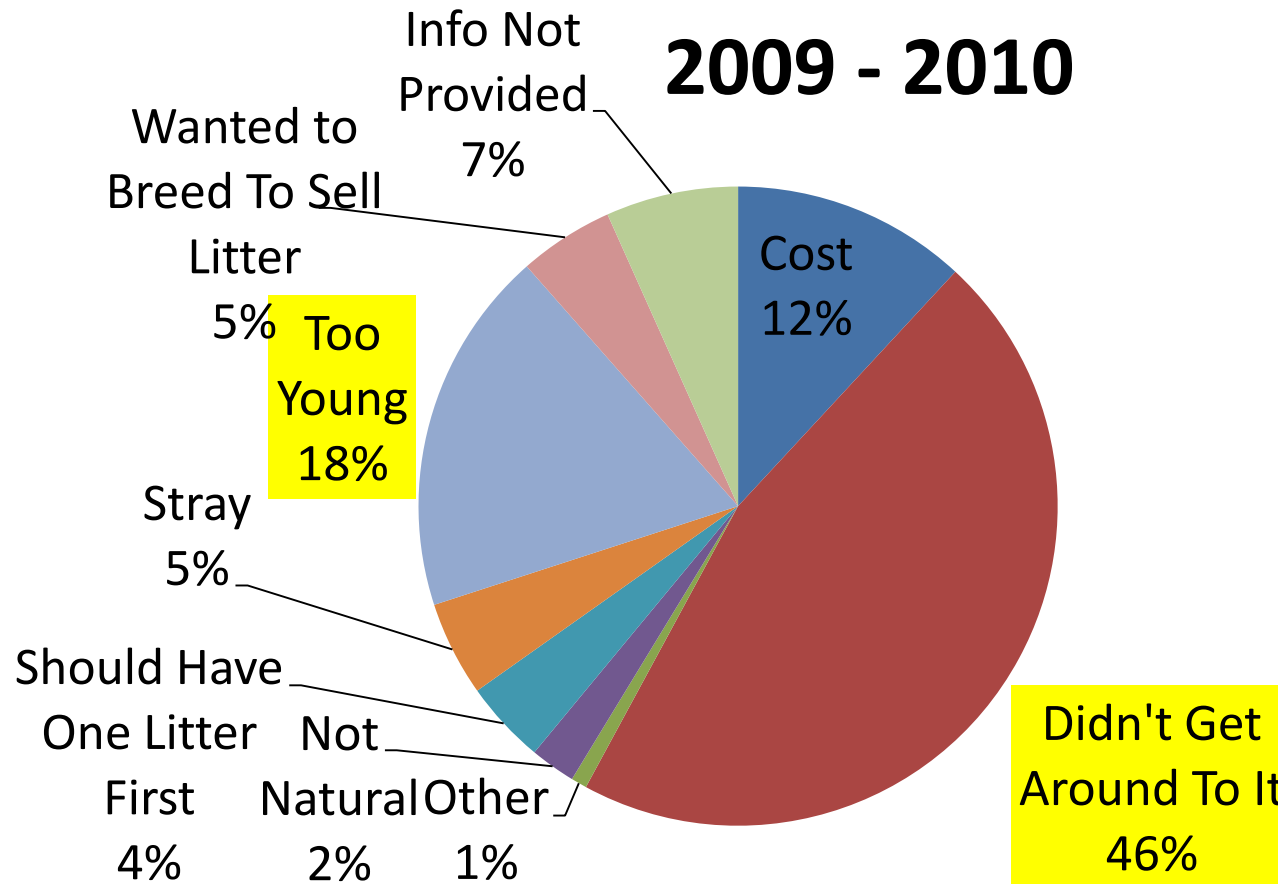
# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



# Report on Qld AVA survey EAD 2004

- There were 53 responses to this survey. This represents 5% of the QLD AVA membership base (including students).
- The majority of respondents (57%) never desex dogs and cats from 8-12 weeks of age. And most (38%) rarely desex dogs and cats from 12-16 weeks of age, followed by never (32%).
- 73% of those who rarely or never desex dogs and cats from 8-16 weeks of age would be prepared to desex them if scientific papers demonstrated it to be safe and effective.
- By far the majority (77%) of respondents are recommending to their clients to desex their dog and cats at 6 months of age or greater.

# Reasons for not desexing Dogs over 2 months 2009 - 2010



# Why legislation for kitten desexing by breeders but not pups

- **CAT REPRODUCTION** ~ in just 2 years, 1 female cat and her offspring could produce 225 cats.
- **DOG REPRODUCTION** ~ in just 2 years, a female dog and her offspring could produce 25 dogs.
- [http://animalalliesid.org/how\\_many\\_kittens.aspx](http://animalalliesid.org/how_many_kittens.aspx)
- **HUMAN REPRODUCTION** – An average of 1 baby per year, so in just 2 years – 2 children ONLY



# Surgery and anaesthesia benefits of desexing 8-12 weeks

- Faster and easier – less tissue trauma, smaller incision, less bleeding
- Less time under general anaesthesia – anaesthetic recovery is shorter
- Fewer surgical complications
- Reduced cost



*RSPCA Research Report: Early-age desexing of dogs and cats, 2010.*

# BENEFITS OF DESEXING 8-12 WEEKS

## Male cats

- prevention of testicular cancer
- decrease in interest in wandering/roaming to find female mates and therefore less likely to be get lost or be in a traumatic accident e.g. hit by car
- decrease in fighting with other male cats and therefore reduces risk of cat fight injuries and cat fight related diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
- reduction in urine spraying
- reduction in aggression
- increase in affection towards people
- reduction in interspecies aggression

*RSPCA Research Report: Early-age desexing of dogs and cats, 2010.*

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# BENEFITS OF DESEXING 8-12 WEEKS

## Female cats

- helps to prevent mammary cancer
- prevention of reproductive organ disease such as ovarian cancer
- prevention of unwanted/unplanned pregnancies
- prevention of potentially undesirable 'on heat' behaviours such as restlessness and being highly vocal
- increase in affection towards people
- reduction in interspecies aggression

*RSPCA Research Report: Early-age desexing of dogs and cats, 2010.*

# Have the veterinary profession progressed with enabling EAD?

- Results of a survey of Australian veterinarians in 2014 demonstrated a preference towards traditional (6 month) age desexing, but a willingness to perform desexing earlier in some situations.

*AVA Policy 2017*



# Current AVA Position on age of desexing

- “Earlier desexing than the traditional 6 months of age may be recommended based on the likelihood of failure to comply by a percentage of owners at 6 months (including failure to redeem discount certificates) and /or puberty being possible prior to this age in a percentage of dogs and cats.”



# Requirement for pups /dogs to be desexed by breeder/seller/owner

Only 2 states:

ACT – Yes from 6 months

SA – Yes by 6 months or within 1 month of acquiring the dog if older than 6 months

Some Local Governments eg. Fraser Coast requires dog desexing by 22 weeks with exemptions as for cats.

# We look forward to hearing from you!

- If you have a requirement to desex kittens, and/or responsible breeding legislation in your local laws, or offer desexing support, we would love to hear from you. Please come to our G2Z stand or contact us.

