



Public opinions on strategies for managing stray cats in Brisbane



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Problems with stray cats

Concerns relating to urban free-living cats

- Nuisance behaviours – fighting, soiling property
- Threat to human, pet and wildlife health
- Predation of native wildlife
- Welfare of stray cats



Stray cats in Australia



- Australian urban stray cat population approx. 1.2 - 2 million
- 60–100 cats / 1000 residents in urban areas
 - Strays - 85% of cat admissions to municipal animal facilities
 - Strays - 50-70% of cat admissions to animal welfare shelters
 - **Approx. 50% of all cat admissions euthanased**



Costs for Managing Stray Cats



- Monetary - \$400 to respond to complaint, deliver trap, train residents, pick up trap/cat & deliver to shelter
- Cost to manage – by 3rd party payment \$20-\$500
- Cost to manage in shelter - \$1000-\$1500 for 30 day average length of stay



Costs for Managing Stray Cats



Cost of damage to staff mental health
 Exposing staff to euthanasia results in:

- Mental and physical health issues, post traumatic stress disorder
- Depression, substance abuse, high blood pressure, insomnia, and suicide

Increased staff turnover
 Recruitment and retraining costs



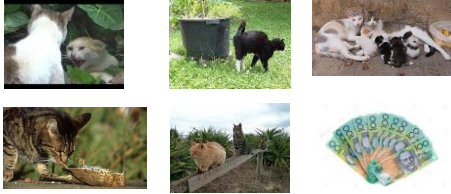
Suicide



- Suicide rate for animal rescue sector in USA reached number 1 with police and firemen



General agreement that fewer free living cats in cities would be advantageous



Strategy – decrease cats by culling

- Requires culling 30-50% of the cat population every 6 months for 10 years
- In population of 60,000 stray cats, 40,000 need to be killed in the first year
- Unrealistic - beyond most local government budgets
- Increase in mental health issues
- Unacceptable in the community



Strategy – decrease cats by culling

- No published studies reporting successful culling programs for cats in a suburb or city
- Currently, only low-level culling stray cats (killing 2-5 % annually)
- Encourage population rebound or even growth
- = Sustainably farming cats and harvesting juveniles annually



Alternative – trap, neuter, and return (TNR)

- Effectively reduces cat numbers in targeted area – 30% in 2 years & 50% in 5 years (USA and Australia)
- Similar to culling, at least 50% of cat population need to be desexed annually, or initial 85% -100%
- Best practice - adopt kittens & cats for quick initial decrease in cat numbers



Alternative – trap, neuter, and return (TNR) impacts

- Reduces strain on shelters – intake decreases $\geq 30\%$, euthanasia decreases $\geq 50\%$
- Support from the community defrays government costs
- Less fighting & less nuisance behaviours, less nuisance calls
- Reduces risk of disease transmission – fewer kittens shedding eggs/oocysts & less FIV transmission
- Decreased exposure of staff to euthanasia and risk of mental health issues.
- BUT no large-scale studies from Australia

Stray cats in Brisbane

- Population of 1.2 million with high urban biodiversity
- Target to trap 1000 cats per year (90%+ killed)
- Additional 700 cats euthanased annually in pounds and shelters = cull rate of only 2.5% of stray cat population
- Restrictive legislation – TNR illegal
 - Both urban strays & truly feral cats considered non-domestic cats, despite fundamental differences
 - “must not be moved, fed, given away, sold, released into the environment without a permit”





Aims of the study



- To determine the attitudes of Brisbane city residents toward urban stray cats and factors which affect their management preferences



Methods



- Surveys distributed to 84 medical and dental practices across Brisbane City
- Randomly selected within equivalent SEO & population size



Results

- 305 responses
- 43% people aware of stray cats near home or work
- Variety of locations
 - private residences - 21%)
 - commercial businesses -15%
 - alleyways - 15%
 - suburban parks - 13%
 - industrial areas 10%



Respondents



- 56% owned a cat, most desexed & microchipped
- 15% fed stray cats
- 3% fed *daily* one or more stray cats
- = 36,000 people in Brisbane feeding 1 or more unowned cats daily**



Attitudes to nuisance behaviors

Please indicate if you agree or disagree that urban stray cats:	Strongly disagree & disagree	Neither disagree/agree or do not know	Strongly agree & agree
Cause a nuisance by urinating and defecating in people's gardens	28%	27%	45%
Are annoying because they fight and make loud noises	26%	28%	46%
Spread diseases to humans	39%	44%	18%
Spread diseases to owned pets	17%	34%	48%

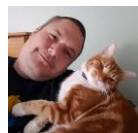


Predictors for attitudes



Nuisance behaviours - defaecating & urinating, fighting

- Older respondents & those aware of strays - greater agreement
- Cat owners less agreement





Perceptions of ecological impact

Please indicate if you agree or disagree that urban stray cats:	Strongly disagree & disagree	Neither disagree/agree or do not know	Strongly agree & agree
Urban stray cats have decreased the number of native birds in my suburb	18%	50%	32%
Urban stray cats have decreased the number of small native animals in my suburb	19%	48%	33%
Urban stray cats in my suburb kill mice and rats	12%	41%	46%



Predictors for attitudes



- Ecological impacts:
- Females and cat owners less agreement.
- Those aware of stray cats more agreement



Quotes from the comments



"Perhaps we could have community run death squad(s), trap and eradicate them all. I hate cats"

"Every animal has the right of life"

"Any cat past the letterbox (domesticated or not) is a pest"

"Stray cats are a human-generated problem; of course we must seek a human solution to that problem"



Questions on preferred cat management How should cats be managed?



Option 1: Urban stray cats should be caught, desexed, microchipped and vaccinated. Suitable cats should be adopted to new homes where possible. Those that cannot be found new homes, but are healthy, should be returned to where they were found. Cats that are too sick to be treated should be euthanased (put to sleep)

Option 2: Continue the current practice of the Brisbane City Council which is to catch urban stray cats and to euthanase (put to sleep or kill) most of them

Option 3: Urban stray cats should be left alone where they are



Future management - how many support TNR?



Option	Uninformed original opinion
1. Use sterilization (TNR)	68%
2. Continue current practice (capture and euthanase)	28%
3. Leave undisturbed	4%

Additional Information was then given to respondents

- Fact 1:** Urban stray cat population can be reduced by culling or sterilisation
- Fact 2:** To decrease stray cat population through culling requires killing 40% of the population over 10 years
- Fact 3:** In other countries, sterilizing, and adopting friendly cats or returning others to where they were found, reduces cat-related complaints, euthanasia in shelter/pounds and stray population
- Fact 4:** Sterilizing and adopting or returning is often co-funded by community groups, reducing government costs
- Fact 5:** Most cats are as healthy as domestic cats, only 1% of cats are too unhealthy to return to where they were found

Future management - how many support TNR?

Option	Uninformed original opinion	Informed opinion
1. Use sterilization (TNR)	68%	78%
2. Continue current practice (capture and euthanase)	28%	18%
3. Leave undisturbed	7%	3%

Demographic attribute		Option 1: Support a TNR program	Option 2: Euthanize urban stray cats	Option 3: Leave cats alone
Gender	Female	76%	21%	3%
	Male	45%	48%	7%
Own Pets	yes	70%	25%	5%
	no	62%	35%	3%
Age (yr)	<40	72%	24%	4%
	≥40	63%	32%	5%

Demographic attribute		Option 1: Support a TNR program	Option 2: Euthanase urban stray cats	Option 3: Leave cats alone
Have pets other than cats	Yes (pets but NOT cats)	56%	39%	5%
	No (cat owners)	74%	22%	4%
Have seen stray cats	Yes	57%	36%	7%
	No	75%	22%	3%
Feed stray cats	Yes	79%	12%	9%
	No	67%	30%	4%

Demographic attribute		Option 1: Support a TNR program	Option 2: Euthanase urban stray cats	Option 3: Leave cats alone
Believe cats decrease local birds	Agree	52%	48%	-
	Disagree	82%	8%	10%
	Uncertain	74%	20%	5%
Believe cats spread diseases to humans	Agree	45%	53%	2%
	Disagree	82%	8%	10%
	Uncertain	74%	20%	5%

Conclusions

- Stray cats commonly seen in Brisbane (43%)
- Variety of views concerning the problems they pose (some strongly held, many neutral)
- Low levels of support for continuation of Brisbane City Council practice of low-level culling -18%
- High level of support for a TNR trial – give 78%



Conclusions: Messaging



• Most of the community respond to humane / non lethal messages

Additional messages to incorporate

- Reduced risk of spread disease to humans, pets, wildlife
- Reduced wildlife predation through reduced cat numbers
- Cost-effectiveness compared to current methods
- Reduced nuisance behaviours & complaints – fighting, soiling
- Reduced exposure of shelter staff to the traumatising effects of euthanasing healthy kittens & cats
- Health and welfare of desexed free-living cats not different from pet cats



Questions?



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