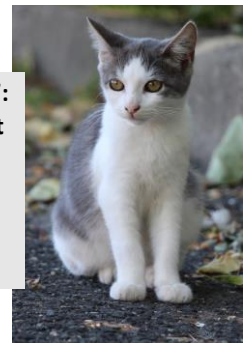
Get the best "bang for your buck": Microtargeting community cat programs

Jacquie Rand
Emeritus Professor
The University of Queensland
Executive Director & Chief Scientist
Australian Pet Welfare Foundation

COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM
Protecting people, cats & wildlife



1

Community Cat Programs

Why are they needed, what are they & what are the results?

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Why do we need community cat programs?

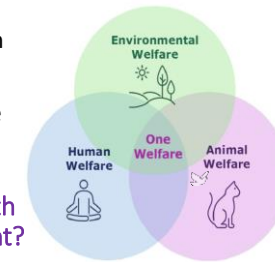


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One Welfare?

Policies & actions which balance and optimise the wellbeing of animals, people and the environment

How are we going with urban cat management?



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Score card for domestic cat mtg:

- **Animals:**
  - –33% of cats/kittens killed in pounds & shelters -Chau 2023
  - Worst quarter of Vic & NSW councils kill 67% - 100%
  - Most killed are young (<6 months), healthy & "strays"
- **People**
  - Extensive research documents negative mental health impact on people killing animals
  - Other staff impacted – AMOs- QOL, job satisfaction
  - People caring for cats being killed (*Scotney 2023*)
- **Environment (including wildlife):**
  - 2022 report to OLG NSW "Input of cats into pounds is stable across NSW" – killed 107,000 cats/kittens

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DEFINITIONS: 'FERAL' VS 'URBAN STRAY'



NON-DOMESTIC/FERAL CATS

Get NO food or support from humans

At least more than 1-3kms from habitation

Do NOT live around where humans live or frequent -NO complaints

Behaviour NOT valid test of feral or domestic



DOMESTIC - OWNED, SEMI-OWNED, UNOWNED

Get food intentionally or unintentionally from humans

Urban, peri-urban areas, & around farm buildings

Live around where humans live or frequent & cause complaints

- RSPCA Best Practice Domestic Cat Management 2018

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What are our management options for stray cats?

1. Do nothing or provide traps for complainants +/- provide impoundment service – accept strays from public

Kill approx. 5%-10% of urban stray cat stray population annually

- City of 100,000, 2,000 female cats producing average of 5 kittens/yr = 10,000 kittens (75% free-living kittens die before 6 months)

= same number or even more kittens & cats next year

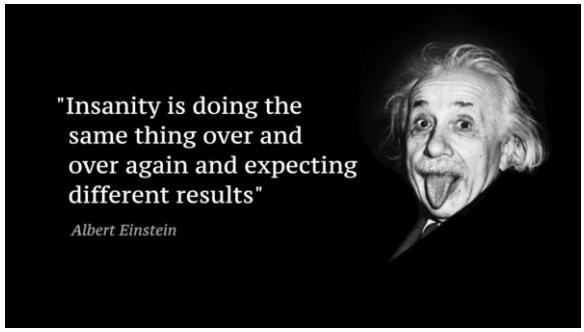
- Low level killing (30% pa) can increase numbers (Lazenby)

= **sustainably farming cats & harvesting juveniles**





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Does it work?

Cats: Council trends over time (NSW)

Agencies	Intake	Euthanasia	Euthanasia %	Year of data
Dept of Local Govt (includes animals admitted to pounds operated by RSPCA, SDCH)	24,586	16,605	68%	2008-9
	25,982	17,407	67%	2009-10
	26,477	17,991	68%	2010-11
	24,641	16,145	66%	2011-12
	22,714	13,351	59%	2012-13
	24,992	13,250	53%	2013-14
	24,080	12,507	52%	2014-15
	= 173,472	= 107,256	62%	

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- Most are **"stray",** most are **healthy**, **most are less than 12 mths old**
- **Pre-weaned kittens** and **timid adults** overrepresented in killed
- Most from socio-economically **disadvantaged suburbs**

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Stop the kittens!

- **> 50% born in previous 6 months**
- **Targeted free desexing programs**

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2. Desexing – <u>high intensity</u> free desexing, <u>targeted</u> to locations of highest cat impounds

Owned, semi-owned, unowned cats
= **Community Cat Program**

A sustainable solution supported by the community





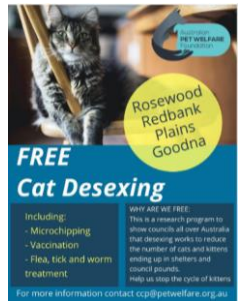
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Intake into RSPCA shelter: Ipswich 15 cats/1000 residents (Qld = 7 cats)



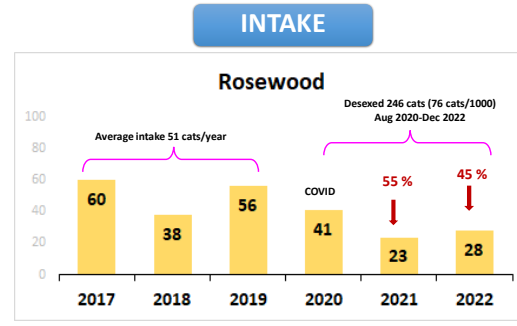
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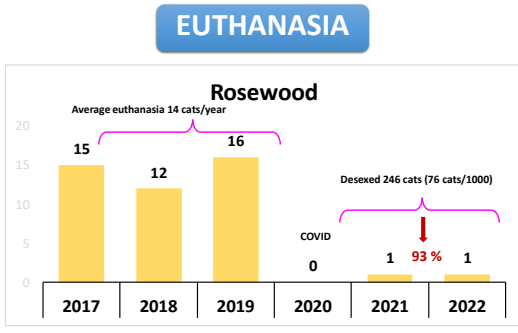


Flyers offering free sterilization

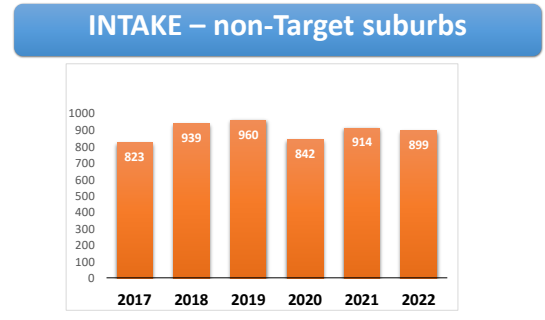
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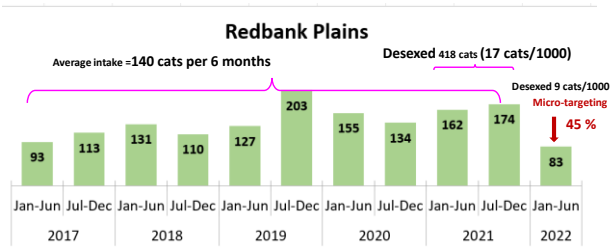


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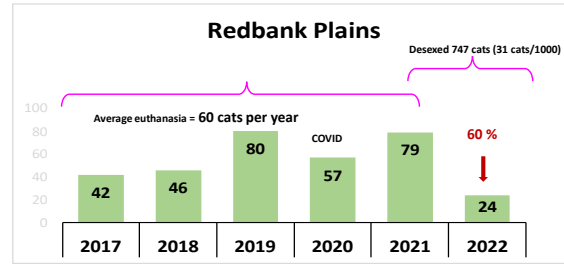
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Intake



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EUTHANASIA



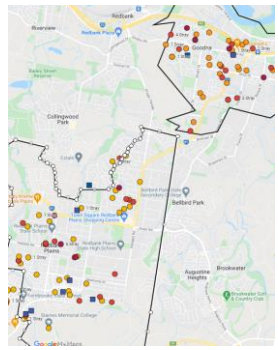
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What is micro-targeting?

Within target suburb, focus on locations where (multiple) cats are originating OR complaints (better)

AMOs are the key

Microtargeting will produce greatest reduction in intake & euthanasia per cat desexed



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Stop the timid-shy cats!

High risk of complaints, impoundments, euthanasia

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Semi-owners

- Cat semi-owners represent a **significant avenue to "rehome" timid-shy cats**
- Assist semi-owners to adopt!
- High risk of euthanasia in shelters and pounds
- Benefits:
- Reduces **unnecessary euthanasia & impact on staff**
- **Lower cost** than trap, hold, rehome/euthanase

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- **Annual family income** was the strongest **predictor** of whether cats in the household were **desexed** (Chu 2009)
- **On average**, 20% of Australian households (2.4 people) live on < $800/week
- In disadvantaged suburbs, ≥ 30% households on < $800/wk
- $300+/ to desex & microchip female cat
  Own or care for average 1.5 cats



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Remove barriers

1. Free desexing for semi-owners' & owners' cats
2. Free microchipping
3. Free registration
4. +/-Free preventative health care – vacc, flea, worm

"Since being desexed my male cat is a lot calmer, he doesn't attack the children anymore and enjoys just a pat or cuddle"



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- Assist them to care for these cats – desexing, microchipping, health care, food, litter
- Resolve complaints – assist with fencing or deterrents

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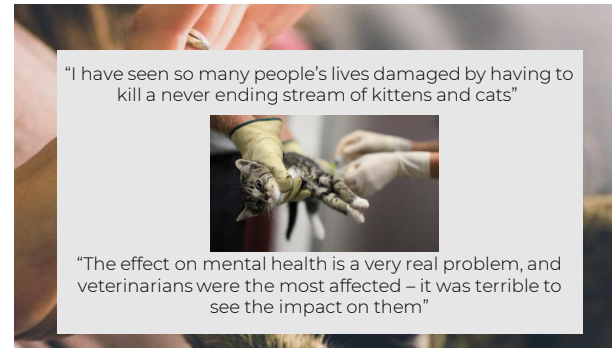
Without Community Cat Programs

- 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 police & firefighters

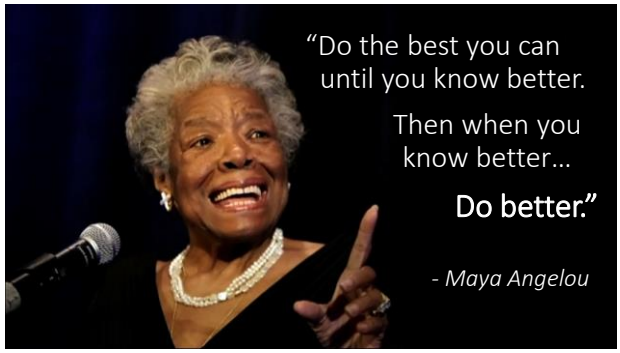




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Diverse & highly respected partners

4 national & international funders: **Brigitte Bardot Foundation**, Pets Regardless Foundation, Bissell Foundation, Waltham Foundation

3 major Australian universities (Queensland, New South Wales, and La Trobe)

9 Australian welfare and rescue groups (**RSPCA Qld**, RSPCA NSW, AWL Queensland, Maneko Neki, Cheltenham Cat Rescue, PetRescue, Sydney Dogs' and Cats' Home, Cat Protection Society, NSW, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation,)

4 Local governments **(**Cities of Ipswich, Banyule)

5 veterinary care, diagnostics and pharmaceutical companies, (Greencross, **MSD Animal Health**, PetStock, Rosewood Veterinary Service, Woolworths Pet Insurance) plus 10 veterinary clinics

2 international partners, Neighborhood Cats, Dr John Boone

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