

**All Correspondence:**

Australian Pet Welfare Foundation
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The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is a non-profit, tax-exempt Foundation.

Dear Committee Members,

I am the founder and director of the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF). Our mission is to promote and utilise evidence-based research within the community to improve the lives of both pets and people.

I am writing to you regarding the petition tabled in the House of Assembly on May 3rd, 2023, which requests the House to urge the Government to include the funding of free cat desexing programs in the revision of the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995.

The APWF fully supports this petition. We are currently operating free community cat desexing programs in the Redbank Plains, Rosewood and Goodna suburbs of Ipswich in Queensland (please refer to our flyer in Appendix I). As of January 2023, we have successfully desexed 1,958 cats, resulting in a remarkable decrease in euthanasia rates ranging from 57% to 93% over 18 to 24 months in the Community Cat Program locations.

Most owners and semi-owners deeply care for the cats they enrol in the free desexing program. They already engage in a variety of responsible pet ownership practices with their limited resources. Cost is the primary reason why owners and semi-owners have not yet had their cats desexed. When this financial barrier is removed, the proportion of un-desexed cats in the community rapidly decreases. It also offers an opportunity to educate residents about responsible pet ownership, including the importance of identification and confinement.

We have demonstrated that free targeted desexing programs are an efficient strategy for managing urban cats. We are not alone in agreeing to this. For instance, the Office of Local Government commissioned a review into the factors driving rehoming and euthanasia of homeless pets in NSW. The Centre for International Economics was commissioned to produce a report and its primary recommendation was for the state government to provide funding of \$2 million/year for community cat programs targeted to councils with highest cat intakes.¹ As a result, the NSW Government announced large funding initiatives for community cat desexing programs, including \$6.7 million for a desexing facility at RSPCA NSW and \$1.5 million for cat desexing programs through Cat Protection Society NSW.²

Since 2014, the Victorian Animal Welfare Fund has been providing support to non-profit animal shelters, foster groups, and community veterinary clinics engaged in promoting companion animal welfare, which includes low-cost or free desexing programs. Since its establishment, the fund has disbursed over \$8.2 million in funding.³

Similarly, in Western Australia, an \$800,000 funding boost for six animal shelters was announced in May 2023. Additionally, \$1.2 million has been allocated to expand the Animal Welfare Grant Program, which supports various not-for-profit organisations and provides low-cost veterinary care for the animals of disadvantaged individuals.⁴

¹ [The Centre for International Economics \(2022\) Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW](#)

² [Liberal NSW \(2023\) Record investment of \\$40.6 million for animal welfare and rehoming](#)

³ [Premier of Victoria \(2023\) More Support For Rehoming Victoria's Furry Friends](#)

⁴ [Government of Western Australia \(2023\) Major Funding booster for animal welfare organisations](#)

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In addition, the Federal Environment Minister released on September 7th, 2023, a 10-year feral cat plan that primarily addresses the threat of predation by feral cats but also includes measures to manage the urban cat population. Community cat desexing programs align with the actions selected for Objective 9, namely to: *'Develop incentive programs for registration, identification and desexing packages, especially in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.'*⁵

There is recognition both at the interstate and federal levels that part of urban cat management involves funding for organisations that can provide low-cost or free desexing services. However, South Australia currently lacks such an arrangement, resulting in a dire state of the care system for cats in the state. On March 10th, 2023, the RSPCA reduced its cat intake according to its 'capacity to care' model, marking the first such reduction in more than 40 years of operation.⁶ Then, on May 15th, 2023, AWL, the largest shelter in SA, closed its doors to cats and kittens.⁷ Consequently, smaller rescues are also now at full capacity. This leaves the cats with nowhere to go, and their unchecked reproduction continues on the streets.

The alternative to desexing is euthanasia, which comes with a significant human cost. Research indicates that many shelter workers directly involved with euthanasia develop health problems such as post-traumatic stress leading to depression, substance abuse, and high blood pressure. Tragically, in some cases, it can even lead to suicide. In the USA, the animal rescue sector now experiences a suicide rate comparable to the most traumatic professions, including firefighters and police. In Australia, veterinarians are up to four times more likely than the general population to be affected by suicide.⁸ Following the heartbreaking suicide of a South Australian veterinarian, Sophie Putland, her parents launched the Sophie's Legacy national campaign in May 2023 to address and mitigate the alarming rate of suicide among veterinarians.⁹

In conclusion, the issues involved are complex and challenging. However, when multiple evidence-based strategies are applied together supported by funding, outcomes are dramatically improved for animals and humans.

It is for these reasons that I urge the Committee to recommend that funding is included in the Dog and Cat Management Act currently under review.

Dr Jacquie Rand

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⁵ [Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water \(2023\) Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2023, p.77.](#)

⁶ [RSPCA SA \(2023\) Temporary Suspensions on Animal Intakes at Lonsdale](#)

⁷ [AWL \(2023\) AWL is currently at its highest capacity ever for cats and kittens](#)

⁸ [Australian Veterinary Association - Suicide](#)

⁹ [Australian Veterinary Association \(2023\) We're Only Human – Sophie's Legacy to curb mental health crisis among veterinarians.](#)

 **Australian Pet Welfare Foundation**
15 August at 08:53 · 🌐

Waitlist:
http://www.bookitlive.net/.../australian_pet_welfare...

For more information:
Contact our officer at ccp@petwelfare.org.au

Australian Pet Welfare Foundation

COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM

Rosewood, Redbank Plains, Goodna



**Free Cat
Desexing!
Owned &
Stray cats**

INCLUDING:

- Desex
- Microchip
- Vaccination
- Flea, Tick and Worm treatment

Waitlist link above!

For additional information,
get in touch!
ccp@petwelfare.org.au

Implementation of a Community Cat Program

BENEFITS:



30-50%

reduction in cat intake/impoundments in first year*.

50-80%

reduction in numbers of cats and kittens euthanased in first year*.



Long-term reduction in cat management costs for councils & animal welfare groups.



Reduced calls regarding found cats & nuisance complaints.

Less burnout of animal management & shelter staff.



Reduced wildlife predation.

Improved environment for residents - less noise disturbance and nuisance behaviours from cats & less disease risk for humans, pets and wildlife.

Residents are more satisfied & supportive of council animal management services*.

Donors & supporters happier with fewer cats being euthanased in shelters & pounds*.

**Based on observed results from high-intensity desexing programs recently conducted in Australia.*