



**NSW Government initiatives to assist local councils  
manage pet overpopulation in their communities**

# The Division of Local Government

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## Department of Premier and Cabinet

- Provides the legislative and policy framework within which NSW local councils exercise their companion animals management functions, primarily by way of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*.
- Has implemented a number of measures to help councils reduce euthanasia rates, encourage desexing and limit pet overpopulation in their local communities.

## Legislative context

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- Since July 1999, the microchipping of companion animals has been compulsory in NSW under the Act and Companion Animals Regulation 2008.
- Local councils are the primary enforcement body and the key point of contact for members of the public with regard to companion animals issues.

# Identification and registration

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- Two stage process:
  1. permanent identification (or microchipping) from 12 weeks of age, at point of sale or change of ownership (whichever occurs first), and
  2. lifetime registration from 6 months of age.
- Forms the cornerstone of NSW's actions to limit pet overpopulation.
- Evidence suggests this system has increased the rate of desexing and contributed to a downward trend in the euthanasia rate.

# Compulsory identification

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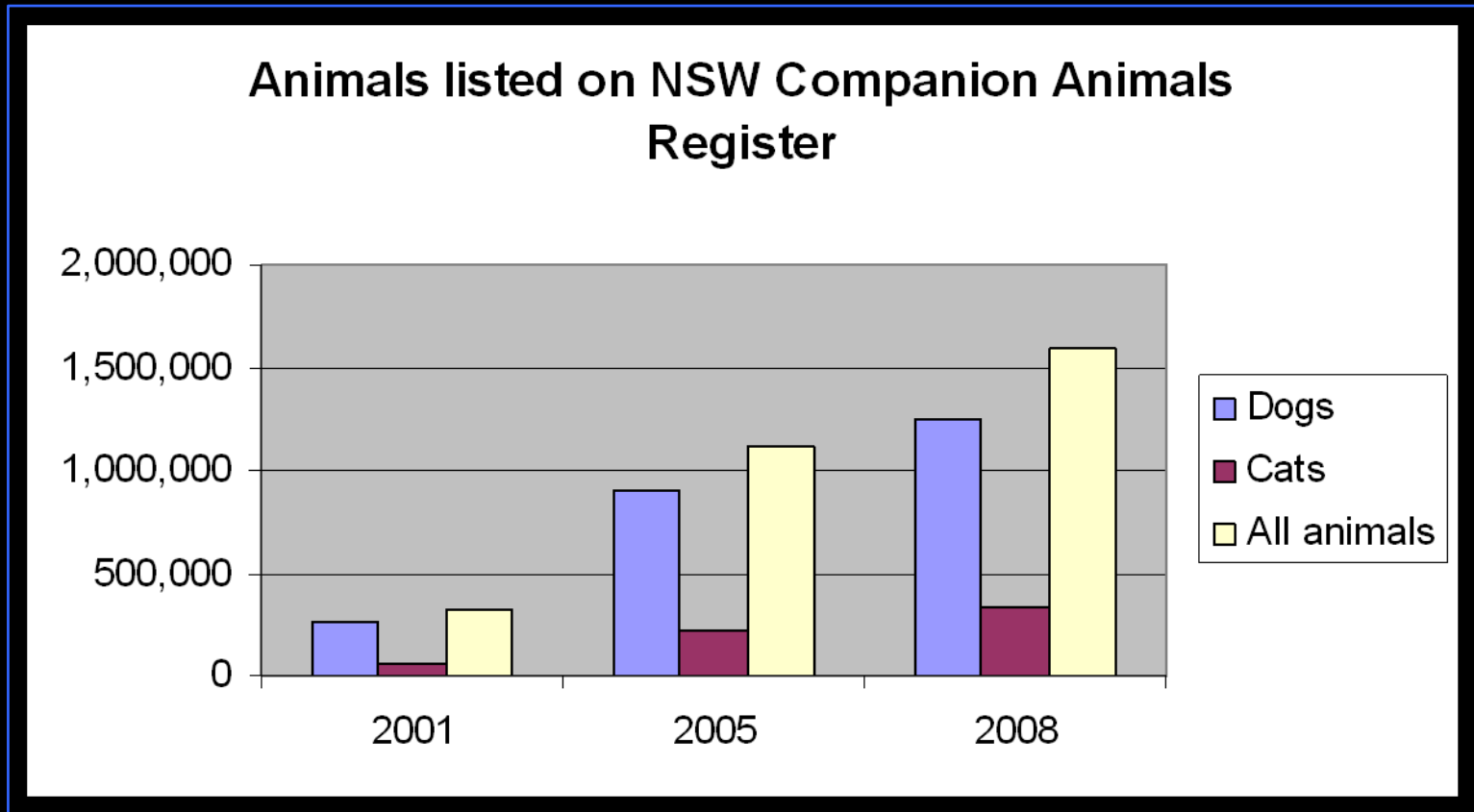
- Widely accepted as providing the most effective mechanism to reunite lost animals with their owners.
- A 2008 Regulatory Impact Statement found that *“...given the large numbers of stray animals each year and the high proportion that are reunited with their owners by means of the microchip, [the cost of microchipping] is considered to be outweighed by the benefits”* (Groenhout, 2008).

# Measuring the effectiveness of compulsory identification

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- There is no definitive way to do this, but there are two used by the NSW Government:
  1. by looking at the number of animals on the Companion Animals Register and
  2. by looking at trends arising from council pound data.

# Compulsory identification



# Animals listed on the Companion Animals Register

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	2001	2005	2008	% change 01 - 08
<b>Dogs</b>	263,365	891,772	1,252,415	376%
<b>Cats</b>	56,220	224,155	335,661	497%
<b>All animals</b>	<b>319,585</b>	<b>1,115,927</b>	<b>1,588,076</b>	<b>396%</b>

- Increases can be attributed to greater awareness of the benefits of microchipping, achieved through public education, positive media coverage and active enforcement by councils.
- Due to the unwillingness of some members of the community to comply and the limited resources available to councils, a large number of companion animals remain unmicrochipped.

# Measuring the effectiveness of compulsory identification – Pound data

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- The Division distributes an annual survey to all NSW councils to collect pound data.
- The survey records the number of animals entering pounds as well as how and why they end up there.
- It also records the outcomes for those animals such as return to owner, sale, rehoming and euthanasia.

# Pound data

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## *Outcomes for animals seized by councils*

- A preliminary analysis of 2005/06 – 2007/08 pound data indicates that:
  - animals seized by councils are most likely to be taken to the pound.
  - The number of dogs being returned to their owners instead of being impounded appears to have increased by a small amount.
  - Unfortunately, the pre-pound return rate for cats appears to have stayed constantly low over the period.

# Pound data

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## *Outcomes for animals in pounds:*

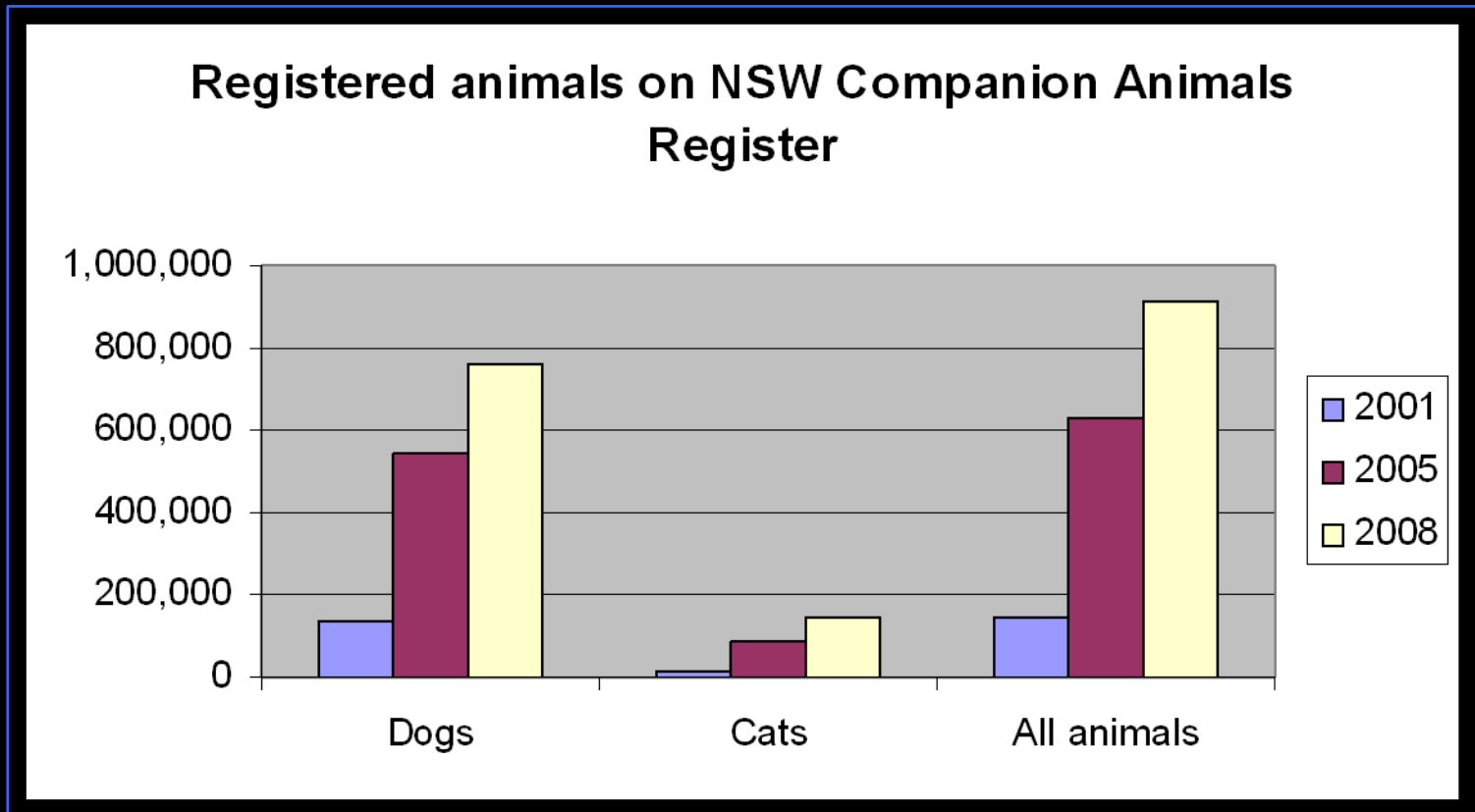
- 2005/06 – 2007/08 pound data appears to indicate that:
  - the percentage of impounded dogs returned to their owners has increased by a small amount.
  - the percentage of impounded cats returned to their owners has increased only marginally, from a very low base.
  - there was a significant fall in the euthanasia rate for dogs and small increases in the number of dogs being sold and released to organisations for rehoming.
  - the euthanasia rate for cats has dropped only slightly, from a high base.
- Highlights the need to do more to reduce the number of cats that are euthanased.

# Compulsory lifetime registration

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- The second stage of the NSW companion animal registration process is the payment of a compulsory lifetime registration fee for all cats and dogs from 6 months of age.
- A number of exemptions exist including for certain working dogs, greyhounds, police dogs and for animals in the care of approved animal rehoming organisations.

# Compulsory lifetime registration



# Registered animals on the Companion Animals Register

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	2001	2005	2008	<i>Change in % of animals registered 01 - 08</i>
<b>Dogs</b>	135,241 (51%)	546,098 (61%)	763,808 (61%)	10%
<b>Cats</b>	13,206 (23%)	85,714 (38%)	147,096 (44%)	21%
<b>All animals</b>	<b>148,447</b> <b>(46%)</b>	<b>631,812</b> <b>(56%)</b>	<b>910,904</b> <b>(57%)</b>	<b>11%</b>

- While registration is on the rise, there are still a significant number of animals in the community who are microchipped but not registered.
- This also means there is a large, untapped pool of funding available to councils and the Government for companion animals management programs.

# Funding for councils

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*Registration fees fund council companion animal operations and activities*

- Any money paid to councils from the Companion Animals Fund must be applied only for companion animals management purposes.
- Provides a constant stream of income to councils for companion animals activities but also acts as an incentive for councils to enforce the legislation.
- Many councils use these funds to educate the community about responsible pet ownership practices, often in conjunction with animal welfare organisations.

# Encouraging responsible pet ownership

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*Registration fees reinforce the concept that ownership of animals is associated with responsibility and the fee reflects that this responsibility is to be taken seriously.*

- Registration fees are set at such a level to reinforce the concept of responsible pet ownership, but are not so high as to discourage ownership entirely.
- The lifetime registration fees are currently:
  - \$15 for an animal owned by a pensioner (animal must be desexed)
  - \$40 for an animal owned by a recognised breeder
  - \$40 for a desexed animal
  - \$150 for an undesexed animal.

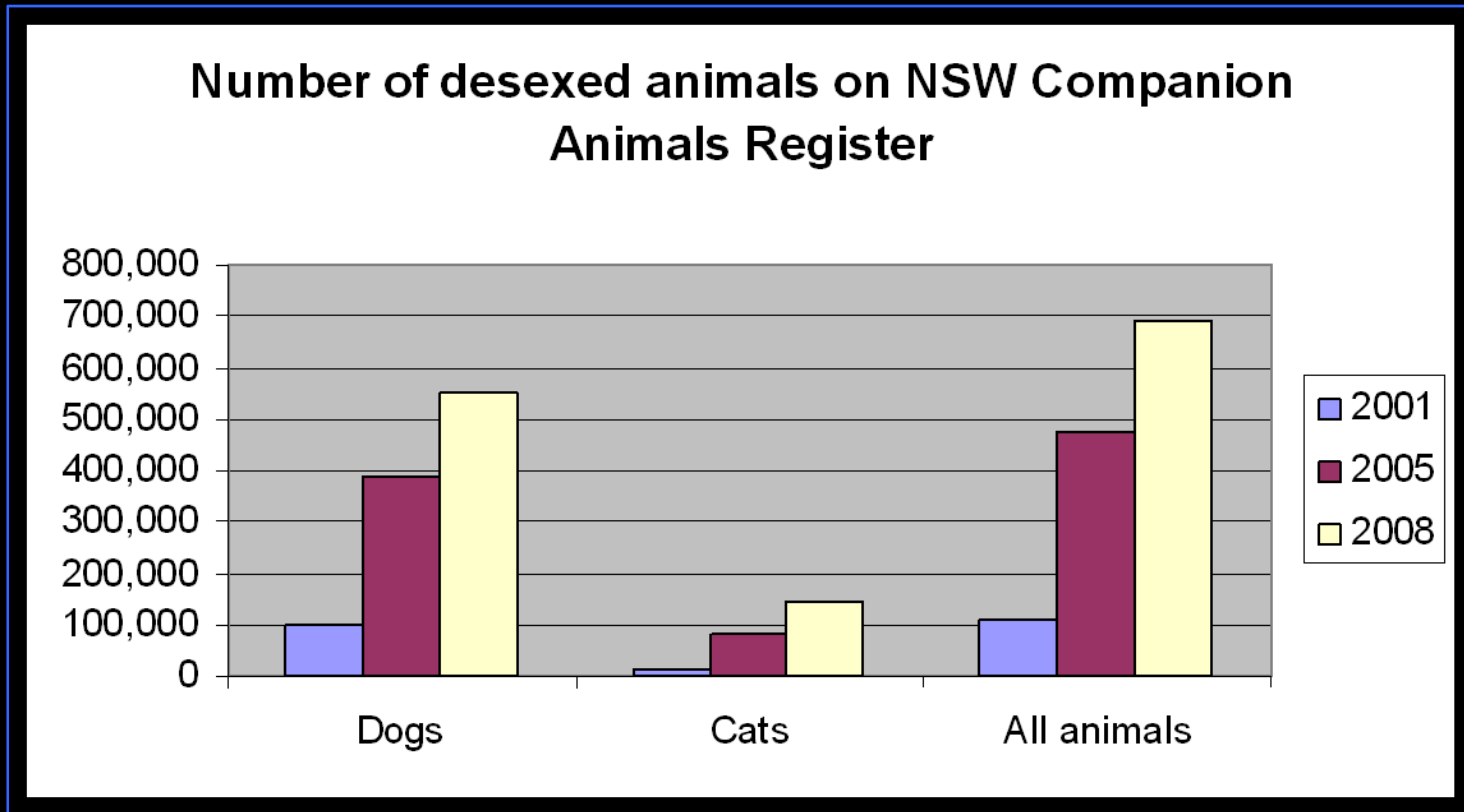
## Desexed animals

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*The variation of \$90 in the registration fee provides a strong incentive for owners to have their companion animals desexed.*

- Compulsory desexing was considered in the 2004 Act review but was not supported.
- Providing incentives for owners to desex their animals is considered a more effective response.
- A significantly discounted lifetime registration fee of \$40 for desexed animals, compared to \$150 for undesexed animals.
- Several councils have arrangements with local vets and animal welfare organisations to provide low cost desexing of animals sold from council pounds.

# Desexed animals



# Desexed animals

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	2001	2005	2008	<i>Change in % of animals desexed 01 - 08</i>
<b>Dogs</b>	99,534 (38%)	390,719 (44%)	548,176 (44%)	6%
<b>Cats</b>	12,936 (23%)	83,795 (37%)	143,795 (43%)	20%
<b>All animals</b>	<b>112,470</b> <b>(35%)</b>	<b>474,514</b> <b>(43%)</b>	<b>691,971</b> <b>(44%)</b>	<b>9%</b>

- Since 2005, almost half of the animals on the Register have been desexed, which indicates that scaled registration fees are working.
- A major contributor to pet overpopulation continues to be unidentified animals that are undesexed, in particular cats.

# Education

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*Registration fees fund State Government education initiatives.*

- Community education has been a central component of the NSW companion animals legislation since its introduction.
- The Division funds various educational initiatives from the Companion Animals Fund including information brochures, posters, a website, and the Register helpdesk.

# Safe Pets Out There (SPOT) Program

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- A partnership between the former Department of Local Government, the Australian Companion Animals Council, Australian Veterinary Association, RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and Delta Society Australia.
- Has operated since February 2007, teaching children about animal welfare, safety around dogs and responsible pet ownership.
- \$600,000 per annum was allocated for a three-year period ending 30 September 2009.
- A new three year companion animals education program targeting children from Kindergarten to Year 2 is expected to commence at the start of the 2010 school year.

# Companion Animals Register

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*Registration fees fund the Companion Animals Register.*

- Records the details of all microchipped dogs and cats but is also a companion animals management tool for councils.
- Access to the Register has been provided to Approved Persons to streamline the process of returning seized, lost and injured animals to their owners.
- Over 900 individuals have been approved in this capacity since June 2007.

# Exemptions for rehoming organisations

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*Lifetime registration fee exemptions promote the rehoming of animals*

- An exemption from registration has been provided to approved animal rescue organisations for animals in their temporary care for the purposes of re-housing.
- Provides financial relief to approved organisations and an incentive for them to continue their work.
- Organisations must comply with guidelines and their activities are monitored by the Division.

## Other initiatives to limit pet overpopulation

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- Councils are obliged to consider and undertake alternative action to destroying animals surrendered to the council, where practicable.
- Some councils have adopted local policies which require animals to be desexed before being rehomed.
- To prevent animal hoarding, councils also have powers to issue an order to the occupier of a property restricting the number of animals that can be kept there.

# Options for consideration

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- The Division of Local Government is currently preparing an issues paper which will consider strategies to better manage pet overpopulation.
- The outcomes of the 3rd National Summit to End Companion Animals Overpopulation will also be considered.

# Conclusions

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- Some positive developments, but outcomes for dogs appear to have been better than those for cats.
- The issue of how to manage undesexed cats and dogs in the unidentified companion animal population continues to be a key concern for policy-makers.
- It appears that, while compulsory microchipping has been a successful method for reuniting animals with their owners, there is still more to be done to reduce the number of unwanted animals in NSW.