



The Benefits of Councils Funding NDN Co-operative Desexing Programs

INFORMATION FOR COUNCILLORS, ANIMAL MANAGEMENT COORDINATORS & VETERINARIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Euthanasia rates of both dogs and cats are a significant community concern in pounds and shelters around Australia, particularly for cats, with euthanasia rates at least twice, sometimes three times, that of dogs in most places. In NSW, the only state that has gathered and published its state-wide Council figures, over 60% of impounded stray and surrendered cats have been euthanized for many years.

However, Gold Coast City has reduced its cat euthanasia rate from 50% in 2001/2 (2000 cats euthanized) to 8% in 2016/17 (150 cats euthanized) of **all** incoming cats for the whole city of over half a million people.

A range of strategies has been used by AWLQ, working with Gold Coast City Council to achieve this sustained reduction, summarised in the Getting to Zero model <http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/G2Z%20Brochure%200912.pdf>. One of the most important strategies has been low cost desexing and desexing promotion **to prevent unwanted animals** rather than Councils having to Collect/Hold/Euthanase, the traditional strategy which is expensive and fails to sustainably reduce incoming numbers.

This document focuses on the benefits and procedures for organising a Cooperative Cat Desexing Program, an essential strategy for reducing unwanted cats in your community. Its relevance to dogs is also discussed at the end of this paper.

BENEFITS of CO-OPERATIVE DESEXING PROGRAMS TO COUNCILS AND COMMUNITIES

Council Funding for a Desexing Program makes economic sense.

Here's an example: In Gold Coast City, the cost of collection of an abandoned cat or dog, holding the animal for an average of four days and euthanasing the animal is on average **\$220, and \$260 for a litter** collected and housed together, then euthanized. The statutory holding period is up to 14 days in other Australian states, which can add another \$200 to the cost i.e. total cost of approximately **\$420 per animal or \$480 for a litter**.

In contrast, the cost to Gold Coast City Council of a Co-operative Cat Desexing Program, working with local private practice veterinarians and the Animal Welfare League of Qld (AWLQ), is on average **\$60** per cat. The savings from funding this desexing cost rather than the costs of collecting, holding and euthanizing the progeny of the undesexed cat are presented in Table 1. These savings are conservative, as they do not account for these unwanted cats having their own litters, so that the number of animals to be collected, and the associated costs, grows exponentially.

Table 1 COSTS & SAVINGS BY FUNDING DESEXING SUBSIDIES

Cat management strategies	Collect/Hold/Euthanase one cat/one litter	Council Desexing Subsidy (average) One cat	Savings by preventing one unwanted kitten / or one litter	Savings in 1 year if 300 cats desexed (cost \$18 000), preventing one litter each *
COSTS/SAVINGS held 4 days(on average)	\$220/260	\$60	\$160/200	\$48 000
COSTS held 14 days (on average)	\$420/480	\$60	\$360/420	\$108 000

**These savings increase exponentially as for each prevented litter, thousands more kittens who would have been produced by this litter are also prevented.*

Immediate savings

As can be seen from **Table 1** above, the more cats desexed, the fewer excess animals will be born, to be collected, housed and euthanized or rehomed by Councils. Data on source of surrendered (i.e. owned) cats of for the whole of Gold Coast City shows that the greatest source of surrendered cats (one quarter) is owners' unwanted litters. In addition, the majority of strays in pounds and shelters are sociable with humans and therefore are most probably currently owned and not properly contained to their property, or have been owned.

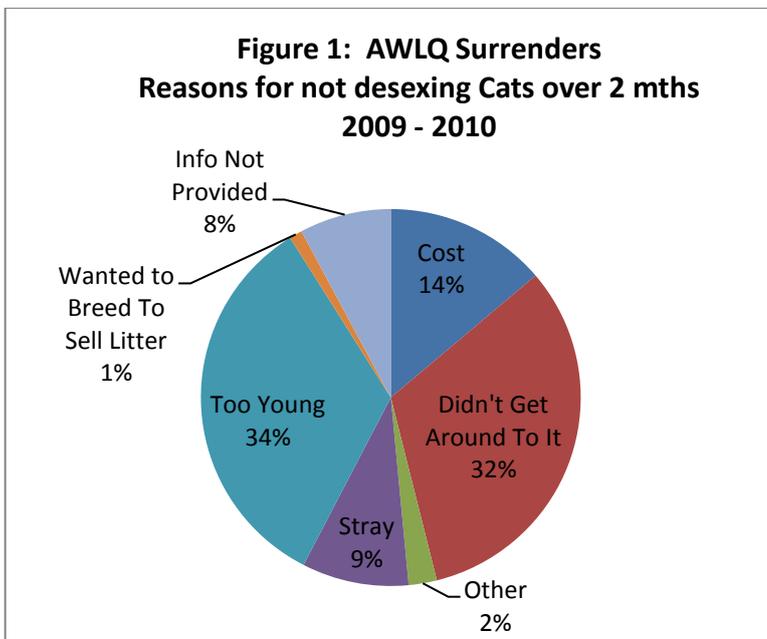
While most owned cats will be desexed, they may have an "accidental" litter before they are desexed (22% of female cats in a 2014 South Australian Dog and Cat Management Board-commissioned study had an unplanned litter¹) because:

- a. Most owners (72% in the 2014 SA study¹) are unaware that cats can be pregnant from 4 months of age, and
- b. Two thirds of veterinary practices are not promoting the safety and benefits of desexing cats from 2-3 months of age (based on data collected by AWLQ from all veterinary clinics in Gold Coast City in 2010/11).

The South Australian Dog and Cat Management Board study found the following reasons for not desexing:

Reason for not desexing	%
Too young	41%
Cost of desexing procedure	25%
Want to breed	20%
Too old	2%
Other	12%
Total	100%

On the Gold Coast one third of surrendered undesexed cats of desexing age (from 2 months) were not desexed because their owner didn't get around to it, one third because owners thought their cat was too young, and 14% due to cost of desexing (**Figure 1**). Promotion of desexing prior to 4 months of age and making desexing accessible and encouraging through a Desexing Subsidy Program helps to address all of these reasons for not desexing i.e. 80% of people who surrender cats. **As well, by offering and promoting desexing subsidies to people in financial need, the whole community becomes more aware of the importance of desexing, and the need for early age desexing.**



Long term savings

The long term effect for Councils of investing in desexing, rather than catch/hold/euthanize, is a decrease in the number of kittens coming in to the pound and shelter over time. The number of incoming **stray** kittens almost halved from 656 in 2009/10 to 372 in 2016/17 since the introduction of a requirement to desex kittens prior to sale or transfer and the City of Gold Coast Council/NDN Cooperative Desexing Program. However this also follows a decade of emphasis on community desexing from 2001/2 – 2009/10 which also saw a huge reduction in incoming and euthanized kittens

Figure 2 shows the decline in all incoming stray and surrendered kitten numbers in Gold Coast City up to 2016/17

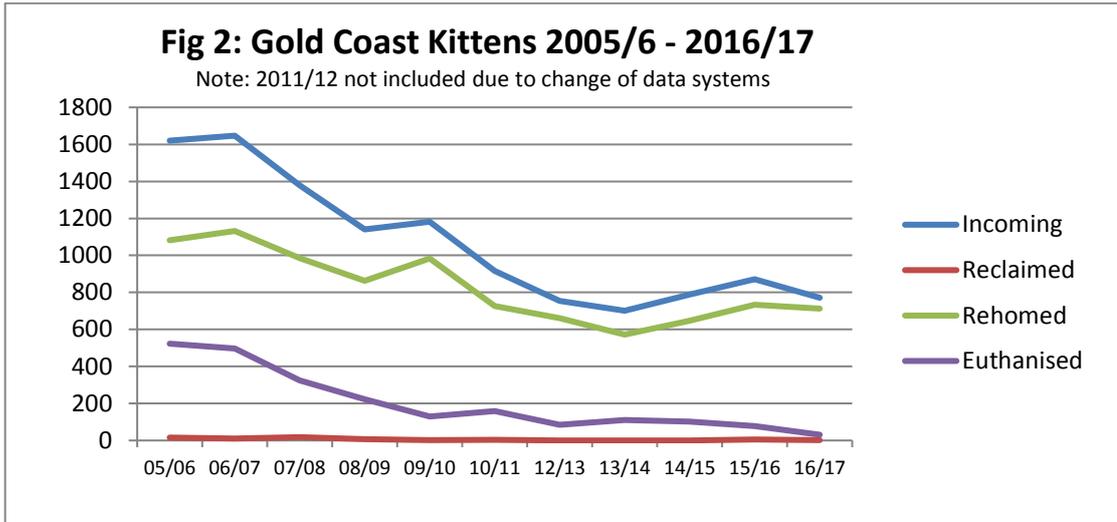
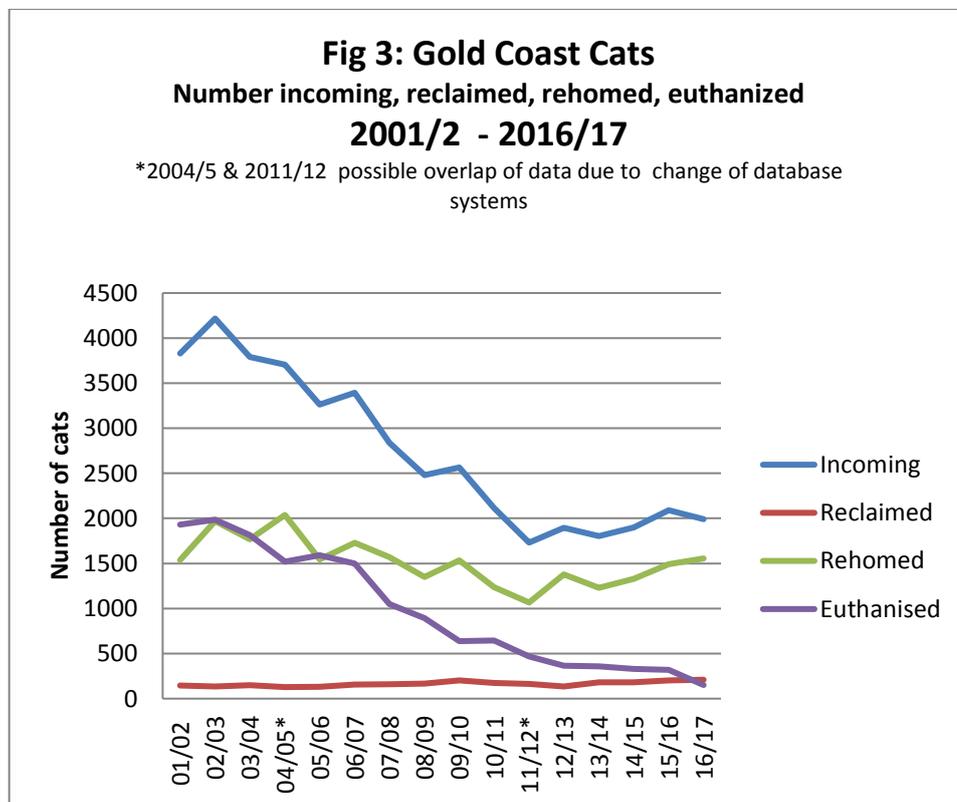


Figure 3 shows the reduction in numbers of incoming Gold Coast cats between 2001/2 and 2016/17.

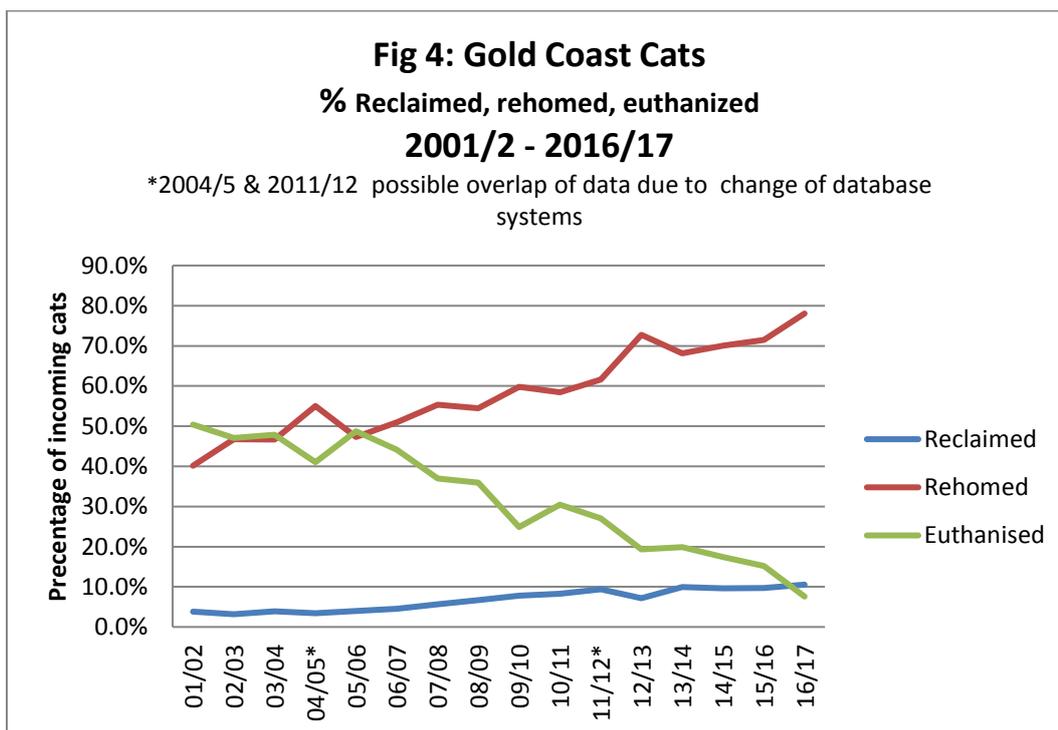


The cost and workload of Animal Management Departments in **managing unowned cats** is also reduced. A 2014 report for the SA Dog and Cat Management Board showed that 46% of owned cats were not contained to their property at all times.¹ As only 47% of owned cats were desexed at 3-6 months,¹ and cats can be pregnant from 4 months of age, many wandering cats can breed to contribute to the unowned cat population. Council desexing programs of owned animals therefore help to limit feral populations, which are difficult to control.

Desexing is more effective than focussing on registration and microchipping. NSW state-wide pound data has demonstrated that long term compulsory registration and microchipping alone have not significantly reduced the proportion of cats euthanized in NSW. On average, 64% of cats were euthanized in NSW regions in 2010/11,² a reduction of less than 4% since 2005/6.³ Gold Coast City data (Figures 3 & 4) show a reduction in euthanasia rate of 20% over the same period, with evidence of sustainability with a continuing 10% reduction in the following 3 years, by tackling the issues on a city wide basis with ongoing desexing subsidy programs and desexing promotion.

Other benefits to Councils from Funding Cooperative Desexing Programs

1. **Meeting community expectations** through a reduction in abandoned and euthanized animals. As most Animal Management Departments know, communities are increasingly aware of, and disapprove of, the euthanasia of impounded healthy and treatable cats and dogs. Communities also appreciate any reduction in nuisance issues from unwanted animals. **Figure 4** shows how a community can change from higher proportions of euthanized than rehomed animals to the reverse.



2. Desexing subsidy programs can help **increase microchipping compliance**. Microchipping can be offered at reduced rates while an animal is being desexed under a subsidised scheme, as there are no additional labour expenses incurred by veterinarians. Free registration and microchipping for the first year at the time of desexing can also be offered as an incentive, which saves having to impound these cats if they wander in the future.
3. Desexing subsidy programs are **essential to achieve compliance with breeder permit and desexing legislation**. Owners in need of financial support can be offered subsidised desexing to prevent them having

to apply for a Breeders Permit or face a fine. See explanation of a complete Breeder Permit system on the G2Z website at <http://www.g2z.org.au/recommended-legislation.html>.

4. **Increased job satisfaction for animal management staff.** Councils will be more likely to recruit and retain enthusiastic staff members who are able to achieve job satisfaction and take a more positive approach through offering desexing support to the community, a fall in euthanasia rates and fewer complaints about wandering unwanted cats over time.

BENEFITS of CO-OPERATIVE DESEXING PROGRAMS TO VETERINARIANS

- a. Co-operative Desexing Programs help end the killing of healthy and treatable cats and dogs which many veterinarians are faced with in their own practices, and in pounds and shelters.

The Queensland AVA President, Dr Tony Thelander, noted in his Report on the 4th National G2Z Summit to End Companion Animal Overpopulation⁴ that:

“All stakeholders involved with G2Z (including the veterinary profession) have a genuine desire to end the annual carnage of unwanted companion animals at refuges. ... The most successful and common model at the Summit ... is the collaboration between welfare agencies, the local council and the local veterinary practices. Where the three groups are committed, resourced and co-operating, the unwanted animal numbers in these communities are drastically falling. Obviously a more coordinated approach (between welfare agencies, councils and the veterinary profession) would save resources and better target the problem.”

- b. Low cost spay/neuter programs are effective in raising total community spay/neuter levels (i.e. they do not merely cause substitution in sources of spay/neuter procedures).^{5(p.740)} The effects of growth in discount spay/neuter on regular spay/neuter procedures for both cats and dogs are positive, to a highly significant degree. This means that discount desexing and regular desexing procedures “complement each other, rather than crowding each other out”.^{5(p.744)} This positive relationship is understandable if marketing of the discount desexing sells the benefits such as “reduced risk of health problems, reduction in behavioural problems such as aggression, elimination of the possibility of a ‘surprise’ litter, and the social benefits (or ‘warm glow’ benefit) of helping to address animal overpopulation”.^{5(p.744)} The marketing “can also address misconceptions people commonly have regarding the risks or downsides of the spay/neuter procedure”, and “exert social pressure that spay/neuter is the socially proper thing to do”.^{5(p.745)}
- c. Veterinarians can meet new clients and offer other services and products at the time of the surgery or in future appointments. One private practice vet clinic which participated in the first cooperative desexing program available to all cat owners on the Gold Coast recorded that of the 88 bookings for the Desexing Month, 83% were new clients and 60% of the clients had additional services e.g. vaccinations, microchip. Having an ongoing subsidy to offer to owners in financial need means additional business which can be scheduled in slower times, as these owners are not likely to be able to, or consider they can, afford the service otherwise.
- d. **In the long term, the number of unplanned animals given away to people who may be ill-equipped to care for or afford veterinary treatment for their animals will be reduced. This means more responsible ownership, less pressure on veterinarians to provide free services, and fewer distressing euthanasias of unwanted pets.**

HOW A CO-OPERATIVE DESEXING PROGRAM WORKS

1. **Councils fund an annual amount e.g. \$5 000 - \$50 000 to subsidise desexing costs for residents in need i.e.**
 - holders of pension, concession or health care cards
 - people on low incomes
 - people with large numbers of cats
2. **Costs are shared between owners, Council, animal welfare groups and veterinarians.** Prices must be low enough to allow cat owners on a pension or low income to contribute, yet still cover veterinary costs. The NDN Cooperative Desexing Program will consider the most reasonable rates possible in your community, taking into consideration existing subsidy programs that might be offered currently by animal welfare groups and veterinarians.

EXAMPLE: Gold Coast Co-operative Desexing Program

Participants: Owners, Gold Coast City Council, Animal Welfare League Qld's National Desexing Network, participating Gold Coast vet clinics

In 2016/17, cat owners pay **\$35 to desex a male cat, \$55 for a female cat, and \$35 for additional female cats**, receive a voucher (worth **\$55, \$65 and \$85 respectively** from the council subsidy fund), so that **vets receive \$90 to desex a male cat, and \$120 to desex a female cat**. This covers current costs of wages and materials plus GST.

Owners with unwanted kittens who cannot afford to desex and rehome them, are able to surrender the kittens free of charge, if they keep the mother cat and desex her with a \$55 desexing voucher. Further funding is offered if owners cannot afford this amount, as it is more economical and efficient for owners to keep the mother cat.

Our experienced NDN team organises and manages the issuing of subsidies and reimbursement of veterinarians. This service is currently provided free-of-charge to Councils.

Funding from Council Budget: Gold Coast City currently provides **\$13 000 per year, all of which is used for desexing subsidies for residents in need.**

Ongoing sustained subsidised desexing is important to produce a long term reduction in cat numbers. Low cost desexing has been offered on the Gold Coast since 2001 and cooperative desexing programs promoted since 2003 in Gold Coast City (both targeted and non-targeted) with a minimum of 2000 owned cats and dogs per year being desexed through the AWLQ Community Vet Clinic. In addition, special discounts have been offered with up to 12 clinics participating in National Desexing Month since 2003. (In the first well-promoted Gold Coast Desexing Month in 2003, 850 dogs and cats were desexed in July/August alone, supported by AWLQ and a \$10 000 Council-funded advertising campaign).

3. **Participating vets:** Local vets are invited to participate. The local animal welfare agency may also already have an established network of vets who will participate. Vets should receive recognition, acknowledging their contribution to preventing unwanted animals in the community e.g. through various media, and a Certificate of Appreciation for display.
4. To ensure that low income earners can participate, the following consistent conditions across all participating vet clinics are required:
 - a. 24 hour pain relief included at no extra cost

www.ndn.org.au

- b. no requirement to vaccinate before desexing. Vet clinics may choose to allocate a particular day for desexing and/or a section of the clinic if they are concerned about having unvaccinated animals in their clinic.
 - c. If animals are **pregnant or in season**, owners are not to be asked for additional payment. Instead **vets can claim an additional standard rate of \$55 from the Council Desex Fund**.
5. The program **runs all year** round and **must be heavily promoted** once or twice a year, preferably in low breeding season between June and September, and in conjunction with NDN's National Desexing Month in July. This is to capture as many cats as possible and minimise the number of more costly pregnant and in-season cats needing to be desexed.

High impact advertising over short periods is recommended to kick start awareness of the need for desexing and the benefits. Gold Coast City marketing programs have been used to increase knowledge of the benefits of desexing and early age desexing, and create a sense of urgency to act. Messages include:

- Cats can be pregnant by 4 months of age
- It is just as safe to desex kittens from 2 months of age
- Too many kittens, not enough homes
- Prevent an unwanted litter – desex now before the spring breeding season
- Desexed animals are less likely to wander, to mark their territory by spraying, or to be aggressive
- Your pet does NOT have to have a litter before its desexed
- Desexed pets are safer and healthier

The National Desexing Network www.ndn.org.au provides fliers and media release to help promote each Council's NDN Cooperative Desexing Program, and free posters and media in National Desexing Month in July.

STEP BY STEP PROCEDURE FOR ORGANISING A COOPERATIVE DESEXING PROGRAM

The National Desexing Network (NDN) team is experienced in running these programs and can set up the program in your city/shire, as follows:

- (i) Contact local animal welfare groups to see if they already have desexing subsidy programs running to organise a coordinated program. Some groups with a network of participating local veterinarians (sometimes with even lower prices than in the guidelines above) may just need additional funding to solve the problems of oversupply in your community.
- (ii) Consider whether free registration and Council subsidised free /low cost microchipping should be included with the desexing incentive. Participating vets may be encouraged to offer discounted microchipping for those getting the subsidised desexing vouchers or a co-operative cost sharing could be included e.g. owner pays \$10, Councils pay a \$10 subsidy which means veterinarians get \$20 to cover costs.
- (iii) Organise vouchers and reimbursement forms.
- (iv) Send letter to local veterinary clinics to invite them to participate.
- (v) Organise a Community Awareness Campaign in conjunction with Council's Animal Management Coordinator.
- (vi) When cat owners phone NDN, determine eligibility (based on pension, concession, health care card, low income, large numbers of cats).
- (vii) Send pre-numbered vouchers to eligible cat owners which include instructions. The voucher must be presented to the vet at the time of desexing. Vouchers are issued with an expiry date of one month.
- (viii) Keep records of vouchers issued and numbers of male and female cats desexed.
- (ix) Send reminders to participating vet clinics to return claim form and redeemed vouchers to NDN at the end of each month.
- (x) Check redeemed vouchers against issued vouchers and reimburse veterinarians from Council funds.
- (xi) If time permits, contact owners who have not redeemed their vouchers. If necessary, appointments are made on behalf of the cat owner, and reminder calls just prior to the appointment date. Occasionally assistance is provided to organise transport for people who cannot afford petrol or do not have a car to get their animal to the vet clinic.
- (xii) Organise further promotion via social media etc until all funding has been used.

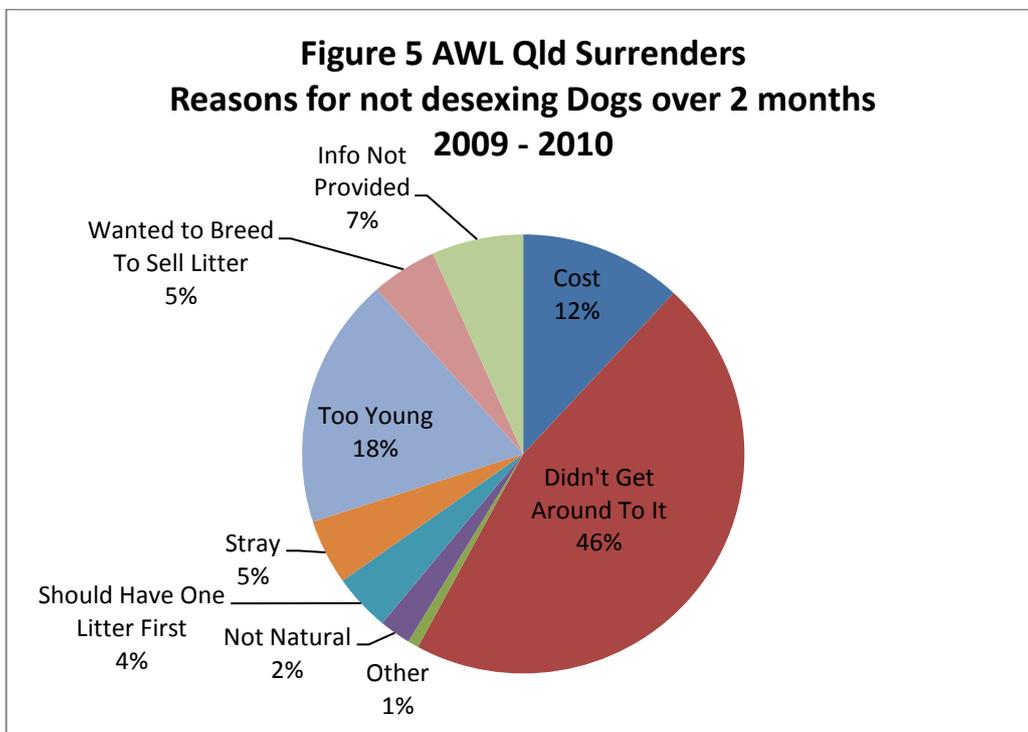
COMMUNITY DESEXING PROGRAMS AND OTHER STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING IMPOUNDED DOGS

Councils need to analyse their data to decide if desexing programs need to be applied to dogs as well as cats. There is usually a more pressing need, in most communities with limited funding, to apply desexing programs to cats more than dogs due to:

- longer and more prolific breeding rate of cats
- double or triple euthanasia rates of cats
- a greater proportion of kittens than puppies incoming as unwanted litters. There is usually a kitten “tsunami”, not an oversupply of puppies in pounds and shelters.

However, desexing contributes to easier management of dogs, being less likely to roam, fight and produce unwanted litters that may be neglected, untrained and wandering.

Owners indicate the main reasons for not desexing dogs are not getting around to it, their dog was too young or the cost (Figure 4). **Providing desexing subsidies to encourage desexing by those who don’t get around to it, before breeding age, and targeting low income earners, will help to reduce stray and surrender numbers.**



Other Proactive Strategies to Prevent Unwanted Adult Dogs

Preventing Stray Dogs

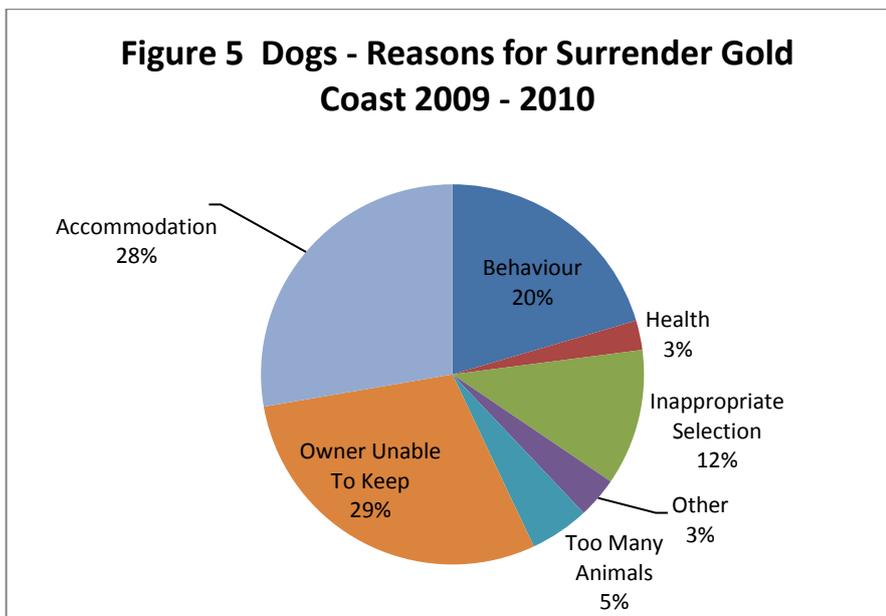
- a. Have a proactive friendly presence in areas with the most animal management issues to provide information and support to access desexing subsidies, training, enrichment and containment. Encourage and support residents to address issues before problems develop. See Todd Stosuy's presentation *Proactive Community Animal Control* <http://www.g2z.org.au/6th-national-g2z-summit-2015.html>
- b. Return straying animals home whenever possible, with support to fix the problem, instead of impounding
- c. Waive impounding fees initially, if owners address desexing, yard containment issues and enrichment
- d. Waive or reduce impound fees if owners take advantage of subsidised desexing for impounded dogs, prior to release
- e. Enable reclaim of impounded animals by offering payment plans, and include desexing for low income earners

Preventing Surrendered Dogs

Gather data on the main reasons for surrendered dogs in your city/shire. For example in City of Gold Coast, while the main reasons for surrendered cats is too many animals, requiring the strategy of desexing, the main reasons for surrendered dogs (**Figure 5**) are:

- a. accommodation issues
- b. owner unable to keep for reasons such as ill-health or death of owner, relationship breakup, domestic violence, not enough time, new baby.
- c. owner unable to manage or overcome behavioural issues
- d. inappropriate selection

The main reasons may be different in your city/shire.



While it is difficult to prevent owners' changes in circumstances, **addressing the other three main causes** will reduce intake by up to 60%:

1. Accommodation issues: Provide information to pet owners on support available and how to lodge a dispute with the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management, if the body corporate is unreasonable in their restrictions on pets e.g. <http://www.awlqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Pet-friendly-accom-flyer-update-8-4-16-JV.pdf>. Work toward State regulation of body corporate and rental properties to make it illegal to prohibit someone from keeping a cat or dog (as a family member), provided they comply with a Pet Agreement based on reasonable standards of animal care, and maintenance of the property.

2. Behaviour not meeting owners' expectations or experience level: Provide advice and support through friendly animal management patrols in problem areas, an Animal Helpline, referral to appropriate affordable training to address the most common behavioural issues e.g. escaping, excessive barking, not getting on with existing pet, not getting on with the children, chasing livestock, timid, not house-trained, too strong to handle.

3. Too many animals and inappropriate selection: Breeder and Pet Shop Permits ensure that all breeders and sellers of pets provide appropriate information and support for new owners and show responsibility for the lifetime rehoming of the animals they breed/sell. Responsible breeders who care about their animals do this already and will appreciate the recognition. Consumers will also appreciate being able to find responsible breeders in a government register.

CONCLUSION

An ongoing Council-funded NDN Cooperative Desexing Program is a proactive animal management strategy, essential to reducing the oversupply of cats and kittens in any community. It will: reduce costs for animal management, provide more positive and ethical outcomes for animals and owners, reduce nuisance issues for non-animal owners, and achieve a sustainable reduction in incoming impounded and euthanized animals over time.

For further information on how NDN can organise and manage your Council's Cooperative Desexing Program, contact: Joy Verrinder, Strategic Director, AWLQ, NDN and G2Z jverrinder@awlqld.com.au Ph 0417 788 063

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