



GETTING 2 ZERO

WHY DESEXING ALL CATS AND DOGS REHOMED FROM POUNDS & SHELTERS IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GOOD ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Animal Management's role is to reduce the number of unwanted cats and dogs over time, so as to minimise public nuisance, health risks and expenditure on public services. However Councils also have a responsibility to do this ethically, based on respect for animals' ability to value life and experience pleasure and pain.

A fundamental step to achieving these goals is the desexing of all cats and dogs before rehoming from a pound, shelter or rescue group. Rehoming without desexing leaves Councils continually "chasing their tails" – unable to escape the continual cycle of breeding, catching, holding and killing animals.

The BENEFITS

1. Prevents unwanted animals
2. Reduces Animal Management costs
3. Promotes socially responsible animal ownership
4. Increases support for Councils
5. Owners save time, money and worry
6. Educates about safety and benefits of early age desexing
7. Increases registration
8. Rehoming is more efficient
9. Pricing structure encourages adoption

1. Immediately prevents unwanted animals by reducing the number of animals that are capable of breeding in the community.

Animal Management are not in the dog breeding business and have no obligation to provide animals for breeding when there are already too many animals in the community for the number of homes offered.

A Council policy of desexing all cats and dogs prior to rehoming does not prevent a responsible person choosing to become a breeder. Dog and cat owners still have a choice to buy an undesexed dog or cat from any breeder in the community, and preferably from a government-inspected registered breeder,



who is more experienced and able to provide sufficient information for the new owner to make an informed decision.

A prospective breeder should be informed about the skills, costs and time needed to care for breeding animals and their litters, and the risks. Council pound employees are unlikely to have the expertise or time to provide this, nor is it their role to do so.

2. Long term savings in Council Animal Management costs

The more animals desexed, the fewer excess animals will be born, to be collected, housed and “euthanased” by Council. This is particularly so with cats, due to their prolific breeding rate.

Substantial rehoming of 1200 to 1500 desexed cats per year in Gold Coast City for the last 5 years, supported by complementary desexing promotion and co-operative desexing subsidy programs, has enabled Gold Coast City (pop. 550 000) to reduce the number of incoming kittens over the past 8 years, and achieve a rehoming rate of 75% of all impounded stray and surrendered cats in 2009/10, a rate which is the reverse in most cities.

If these cats were rehomed undesexed, each of these cats could have produced 8-16 kittens on average each year. Even if only 10% of 1500 cats produce litters (surveys show that up to 90% of owned cats are desexed by 6 – 12 months of age, though 15-18% of female cats have had at least one litter before they are desexed¹), this is a potential 1200 – 2400 kittens born in one year. **These numbers do not include the exponential growth if each of these kittens breed, which they can do from 4 months of age.** Since a well-cared for cat can live up to 20 years, and a female human’s breeding rate in one year is only 6 – 12% that of a cat, and female humans rarely choose to breed more than four years, compared with a cat’s potential breeding years of at least 10, the number of households that own a cat growing at an even slower rate, many of these cats inevitably become unwanted and end up having to be managed by Councils.

Since costs (including wages) to collect, hold for 4 days on average and “euthanase each abandoned cat” is \$200 on average (Gold Coast City 2012), this represents a potential saving of between \$240 000 and \$480 000 per year if impounded and surrendered cats are desexed prior to rehoming. In states where holding periods are 14 days the average cost to collect, hold and “euthanase” is doubled, resulting in a saving of up to \$1 million dollars per year if 1500 cats are desexed prior to rehoming.

3. Councils are sending a consistent message regarding socially responsible companion animal ownership.

Every person who adopts a desexed animal from the pound is being socially responsible, helping the community in many ways e.g.

- a. providing a home for an abandoned companion animal
- b. preventing killing which causes stress to animals and to Council staff
- c. reducing Council costs of collecting, holding and “euthanasing” possible unplanned litters. It is extremely difficult to keep an undesexed cat from breeding, with cats on heat continually, unless pregnant.
- d. reducing Council costs responding to nuisance issues. When animals are released undesexed, it requires extra management skills to prevent unwanted behaviours such as wandering, spraying and unplanned breeding. Wandering undesexed owned animals contribute to increased numbers of unowned or “feral” cats and dogs. A 2007 study indicated that 20% of owned cats are not contained to their property at all times.²



- e. Educating friends and work colleagues about the large numbers of abandoned animals needing homes, and therefore the importance of desexing owned animals and adoption. Individual personal desires for breeding a pet so the family can watch and learn about it need to be ethically weighed against the need to educate the family about the numbers of abandoned animals needing help, so that they may act to reduce the number of animals in existence that are killed.

4. Increased support for Councils

Australians generally have a high regard for the company and affection dogs and cats provide and are increasingly dissatisfied if abandoned healthy and treatable animals are killed. They support Councils who put preventative strategies in place, such as desexing prior to rehoming.

5. Owners benefit by:

- a. not having to organise desexing (Gold Coast City data 2009/10 show that 32% of cat owners and 46% of dog owners who surrender undesexed cats and dogs of desexing age, just didn't get around to it).
- b. avoiding a higher price for desexing after they purchase their cat or dog. 12-14% of people who surrender cats and dogs indicate cost is the reason for not desexing. (Gold Coast City data 2009/10). Any delay or indecision can result in an unplanned first litter.
- c. having animals that are easier to manage, less likely to be aggressive and want to roam.

6. Educates the public about the safety and benefits of early age desexing

Early age desexing has been shown to be just as safe as desexing at 6 months, and is an easier and quicker operation which impacts less upon the animal.^{3,4}

There is no evidence of any short or long term impacts on kittens being desexed from 8 weeks of age and 1 kg in weight. Because cats can be continually pregnant from 4 months, it is important that they are desexed prior to rehoming, so that owners are not caught unawares and unable to break the continual breeding cycle. There also are no negative and many positives for male dogs desexed early. While research has shown a possible 7% increase in urinary incontinence in female dogs desexed prior to 3 months, this is counteracted by a 7% decreased risk of mammary cancer if desexed prior to their first oestrus.

If any animals are sick, or too weak or small for desexing, they can be fostered until they are healthy and of sufficient weight for surgery i.e. 800gms - 1 kg for kittens and 2 kg for pups is often the base weight used. Female pups can be fostered til 12 weeks if desired to overcome the possible increased risk of urinary incontinence, prior to desexing and rehoming.

More veterinary schools are starting to provide education and training in the safety and benefits of early age desexing. A lack of education about unwanted cats and dogs and no training in early age desexing in veterinary schools in previous years has meant that many veterinarians in private practice are unsure of the safety and benefits. Many vets only become aware of how easy and safe early age desexing is when they have the opportunity to work for pounds or shelters. Once vets are used to it, they acknowledge early age desexing is much faster and less complicated surgery.

7. Increases registration by making it more affordable

Desexing cats and dogs prior to rehoming makes registration more affordable, since most Councils have differential incentive rates.



8. Rehoming is more efficient when all animals are desexed

Desexing cats and dogs, including kittens and pups, prior to placement in the rehoming section of the pound allows pounds to run more efficiently.

- a. Because animals cannot get pregnant, multiple housing arrangements are less complex to manage which allows more animals to be held for rehoming.
- b. Extensive follow-up to ensure desexing vouchers are redeemed is no longer needed.
- c. Registration refunds are not needed for later desexing.

9. Pricing structure can encourage adoption of desexed cats and dogs

It is not Council's role to make a profit from selling dogs and cats. Animal Management is not running a pet shop. It is providing a community service. Rehoming desexed animals is a strategy for effective management to achieve a reduction in unwanted animals and to save costs over time, and therefore is a legitimate and necessary expense, if all costs cannot be recovered initially. Animals for rehoming should be promoted at affordable and flexible prices based on animal and community needs.

Setting prices for animals at flexible and affordable rates for each community will:

- a. **achieve a faster turnover of animals and shorter holding times.** This reduces Councils costs to care for the animals, and reduces stress on the animals, preventing illness and frustrated behaviours.
- b. **entice people to adopt a desexed dog or cat from a shelter,** rather than an undesexed one from the internet or elsewhere, making it quicker to reduce the number of incoming unwanted animals.
- c. different prices based on breed type and demand for particular dogs and cats will **encourage more equitable adoption of all breed types and ages.** This can be justified to the community by explaining that charging higher price for a pure breed or popular breed, or a particularly appealing dog or cat, provides funding to support other animals that may take longer to be rehomed. Reducing prices for dogs and cats that are waiting longer to be adopted can help draw the attention of the public to these particular animals for quicker rehoming. It does not indicate that one animal is more valuable than another, but that one may, due to cultural and lifestyle preferences, be more popular at a given time.

In short, it is poor policy to continue to provide undesexed animals to the community which are more likely to roam, fight, and breed, resulting in greater nuisance issues to be addressed by Council, higher numbers impounded and destroyed, and growth in unowned or "feral" animal populations.

For more information please contact info@g2z.org.au

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