



**GETTING 2 ZERO**

## NATIONAL CAT ACTION PLAN

2013 Discussion Paper

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## Introduction

This Discussion Paper proposes a way forward to achieve national consistency in effective domestic cat management and welfare strategies in Australia. (Feral cat management will be addressed in a separate process).

At present, all states are at various stages of introducing breeder and identification legislation, with varying levels of consistency within and across states. Some local governments have introduced additional legislation and have proactive policies. Because cats move with owners and are also sold across borders and between municipalities, this variety of legislation and policy is not helpful in developing effective solutions to domestic cat issues in Australia.

This G2Z Discussion Paper therefore aims to generate feedback for the development of effective common approaches to domestic cat management and welfare across Australia, acknowledging some differences in approaches may be needed between urban and rural or remote communities. As states and local governments manage companion animal legislation and are at different stages, it is not anticipated that commonality can be achieved simultaneously. However the benefits of achieving agreement across stakeholders nationally on a common direction should help reduce inconsistencies over time. This paper therefore offers a proposed way forward as a starting point for response and constructive suggestions from all stakeholders.

The **objectives** of this National Cat Action Plan are:

1. To seek agreement on **the need for common legislation** which makes it easier for communities to understand and is better for the welfare and management of domestic cats.
2. To work towards **effective breeding legislation and policies** in line with **an ethical approach** that improves the well-being of domestic cats, other animals, and communities.

## The reason for the focus on cats

Dog breeding has already had significant consultation to address the issue of puppy farming and has been successful in raising awareness and promoting discussion and action in each state toward some common solutions. Cat breeding issues are significantly different from dog breeding issues. While large-scale cat farming is rarely deliberately undertaken for profit, the capacity of cats to reach sexual maturity from as early 16 weeks and have multiple litters each year, particularly as most of Australia has a temperate climate, means that Australia has a significantly larger number of abandoned kittens than puppies in most community's pound/shelter/rescue facilities. This then impacts on the proportion of cats that are able to be rehomed. In addition, free-roaming domestic cats, both owned and wandering, lost or abandoned, if undesexed, are breeding and contributing to the feral cat population.

## Definitions

1. **Domestic cat:** A cat who has had human contact within her lifetime and may be owned, semi-owned, unowned, stray, abandoned or be a community cat. Domestic cats are socialized to people and can be adopted into homes.
2. **Stray cat:** A stray cat is a domestic cat who has wandered from her home - she may be wandering temporarily, purposefully e.g. to explore, hunt, find a mate or food, or may be lost after being transported to a new environment by an owner who has relocated. A stray may have been abandoned in an existing environment by its owner who has moved. Stray cats may still be pets whose owners are not looking for them or can't find them, or they may have once been pets whose owners have abandoned them. In either case, they can usually be successfully placed in homes. Some municipalities around Australia consider a cat to be stray once it has left the confines of its owner's property.
3. **Community cat:** A community cat is a cat who has no specified owner but is fed by someone, or a number of people in the community. She has been socialized to people at some point in her life, but may have little human contact and dependence.
4. **Feral cat:** An untamed, undomesticated cat in its natural state, not socialised to humans and surviving without human intervention. Can have kittens that can be socialised at an early age and adopted into homes. They may be socialised to their colony members and bonded to each other though they do not have that same relationship with people.
5. **Owned cat:** A domestic cat that is identified with and cared for by a specific individual or family.
6. **Semi-owned cat:** A cat that is fed by a human on a regular basis but not identified to a specified person. Also called a Community Cat.
7. **Unowned cat:** A cat that now supports herself without human intervention. Also called a Community Cat.
8. **Abandoned cat:** A domestic cat that has been relinquished to a shelter or pound or whose owner has moved or withdrawn all support from it. These cats have been owned or semi-owned.

## What are the cat issues in Australia?

1. [Overbreeding](#)
2. [Seasonal impacts](#)
3. [Lack of early age desexing available](#)
4. [Lack of identification](#)
5. [Lack of containment of cats](#)
6. [Changing lifestyle and accommodation](#)
7. [Breeders](#)
8. [Pet shops](#)
9. [Owners](#)

## 1. Overbreeding

Due to seasonal breeding, the early breeding age from 4 months and continuous breeding cycles of cats, there are more cats needing homes than the number of homes offered, particularly during the warmer months and in Northern parts of Australia with an extended warmer season.<sup>1</sup>

According to the NSW Government Companion Animal Taskforce's report, in 2011, only 43% of the almost 500,000 microchipped cats on the Companion Animal Register were desexed<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Seasonal impacts

The huge numbers of cats entering pounds and shelters in the warmer months results in overcrowding in some pounds and shelters. Many cats and kittens become stressed and succumb to infectious diseases such as cat flu and ringworm. Due to lack of space, and sometimes the facility design, these animals are often not segregated effectively or provided with treatment. A lack of fostering programs in many facilities also means these animals have no opportunity to be placed in a less stressful, disease free environment. Euthanasia is therefore usually the management strategy even though these are only minor illnesses which can be cured.

While some animal welfare organisations have foster care programs, it is often difficult to keep up with the numbers of kittens and cats requiring fostering in the warmer months, which means facilities are still overcrowded and stressful, and euthanasia rates increase.

Cats who are timid, anxious or bored often respond by demonstrating a lack of sociability and behaviours such as hiding or striking at their carers. This makes them harder to care for and rehome, as they need time, patience, space and less stressful environments to show their normal personalities.

## 3. Lack of early age desexing availability

Some vet schools have only recently started teaching about the issue of abandoned animals in pounds and shelters and how vets can help prevent this through the benefits of early age desexing, particularly of cats. Many vet clinics still do not encourage the public to desex their kittens from 2-4 months to prevent accidental pregnancy, despite there being "no significant health concerns with early age desexing in kittens", and "significant health and behavioural benefits".<sup>3</sup> A survey of all vets in Gold Coast City in 2010 showed that only 13 of the 43 vet clinics in the city offered early age desexing to cat owners and breeders.<sup>4</sup>

## 4. Lack of identification

It has only been in recent years that most state and local animal management legislation has included a requirement to identify through microchipping and/or registration. The majority of

cats entering pounds and shelters have not been identified, and their owners have therefore not been contactable.

Many cat owners fail to visit a pound to look for their cat because they assume it will come home eventually. US research found that the median time for an owner to recover their cat was 5 days, and 66% of the 73 cats recovered, returned home on their own.<sup>5</sup>

Even when cats are identified, and the owners contacted, some owners are unwilling to pay the impound fee to reclaim their cat. Reasons for this could include the ease of replacement of cats due to the oversupply and lower levels of attachment.

Only 2% of cats entering pound facilities in NSW in 2010/11 were returned to their owners.<sup>6</sup>

## **5. Lack of containment of cats**

In most jurisdictions across Australia, there is no requirement for cats to be confined to their owners' property. This increases their breeding opportunities and also creates an environment where cats are frequently regarded as self-sufficient, which in turn may lead to lower levels of public concern for their welfare.

Cats are difficult to contain using traditional fencing. Methods of containing cats in suburban yards have progressed, but the continued high level of strays entering pounds and shelters<sup>7</sup> indicates many owners are still not installing effective cat containment measures, perhaps unaware, or unwilling/unable to pay the cost of modifying their fencing or building cat enclosures attached to their homes.

Because cats are able to survive independently in cities and rural areas, numbers can continue to grow<sup>8</sup>, with inadequate and often inhumane strategies to manage them.

## **6. Changing lifestyles and accommodation**

Regulations in apartments, strata title and rental accommodation often limit the capacity for people to keep cats (and dogs)<sup>9</sup>. This leads to owners having to surrender their pet cats to a shelter, pound or on occasion, to abandon them at the residence, if they have to move. In addition, increasing urbanisation, smaller families and families with two working parents may restrict the keeping of companion animals.

## **7. Breeders**

Some people are unaware of, or ignore, the impacts of breeding cats on the wider population of cats, people and other animals.

Some individuals choose to have a litter of kittens from the family pet because they believe a female cat should give birth to one litter before being desexed and/or that it's educational for children to experience the birth of kittens. Often a cat will commence breeding earlier than

expected by the owner and the cat will not be desexed until after the litter is born and weaned, by which time the cat may be pregnant again.

There appear to be few large scale commercial breeders of cats. Many breeders who are members of breed organisations work to eliminate illness for good feline health, socialise their kittens and desex them prior to rehoming to responsible owners. However not all breeders do this.

## 8. Pet Shops

Pet shop owners also vary in their social responsibility. Increasingly pet shops are choosing to not sell animals or to rehome abandoned cats and kittens, already desexed and microchipped, on behalf of animal welfare and rescue groups. However, very few who accept kittens from breeders, or accidental litters from the public, desex and microchip them before they sell them.

## 9. Owners

### i. Ease of acquisition

Many people have similar compassion for, and affinity with, cats as they do with dogs. This being the case, when confronted with stray cats, they will often feel bound to support them. While their goal is to help these cats, some may not have the resources or be organised sufficiently to prevent them from breeding or from wandering, thus contributing further to the oversupply.

Changes in life circumstances will mean that people will always need the support of some rehoming agency e.g. shelter or pet shop or rescue group. However the numbers of cats needing this service will be more manageable once over-breeding is prevented.

### ii. Lack of knowledge

Some owners are unaware of overpopulation issues and their legal obligations regarding pet ownership.

## Current numbers of unwanted cats

Little data has been collated in most states, so a national figure of stray and surrendered cats is difficult to determine. However NSW government gathers and publishes its pound data annually, and the RSPCA NSW and AWL NSW, the largest shelters in NSW, gather their data. From this combined data it is possible to extrapolate a national estimate based on numbers of stray and surrendered cats in relation to population size i.e. the number of cats per year entering pounds and shelters is at least 153 000 cats nationwide. In 2010/11, approximately 64% of cats in pounds and welfare facilities in NSW were euthanased. Nationally this extrapolates to approximately 100 000

cats euthanased.<sup>10</sup> 47% of cats arriving at NSW Council pounds were abandoned with a substantial increase (of almost 25%) in the number of abandoned cats between 2008/9 and 2010/11.<sup>11</sup>

There are no national figures on the numbers of abandoned cats in Australia who have become wild and continue to breed.

## Successful reductions in unwanted and euthanased cats and kittens

Combined efforts of stakeholders to reduce the numbers of stray and surrendered cats in whole cities have been successful. For example, in Gold Coast City, Animal Welfare League of Queensland has worked closely with Gold Coast City Council to systematically reduce the number of unwanted animals in a whole community using the Getting to Zero (G2Z) model<sup>12</sup>. Focussing on both reducing breeding of owned animals and increasing reclaiming and rehoming, the number of stray cats coming into the Gold Coast City Council pound has fallen steadily from almost 2000 in 2001 to 1200 in 2011/12 despite a growing human population. The number of surrendered cats for the whole city has also substantially reduced from 1750 in 2000 to approximately 500 in 2011/12. The number of incoming stray and surrendered kittens for the whole city has halved in the six years up to 2011/12. Gold Coast City (500 000 people) has halved its cat euthanasia rate over the last 10 years to 27% of 1730 incoming cats in 2011/12. This represents a reduction in cat euthanasia from almost 5 per 1000 human population in 2001/02 to less than 1 per 1000 in 2011/12.

In the Australian Capital Territory (350 000 people), RSPCA has reduced the euthanasia rate to 34% of 2400 incoming cats in 2011/12.<sup>13</sup>

Internationally, the Nevada Humane Society working closely with Washoe County Regional Animal Management Services first reduced the euthanasia rates for the County to 22% of incoming stray and surrendered cats in 2007. 78% found new homes, were reclaimed by their owners or in the case of feral cats, were adopted as barn cats or returned through Trap Neuter Return programs.<sup>14</sup> In 2010, of the 11 000 cats taken in, around 500 cats (4%) were euthanased.<sup>15</sup>

Three cities in Oklahoma i.e. Claremore, Lawton, and Tulsa have reduced euthanasia rates substantially through the introduction of breeder and seller legislation and availability of low cost desexing to reduce numbers of abandoned and "euthanased" animals.<sup>16</sup>

### [See Appendix 1 - Current legislation and review activity in Australia](#)

To provide a full picture of progress, State and local government representatives are encouraged to contact [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au), if you have any of the recommended legislation (listed in Appendix 1) in place, proposed or in development; and any figures which verify successful reductions in numbers of unwanted and euthanased cats and kittens.

## What can be done?

The G2Z philosophy is that all stakeholders can work together to achieve zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats, as well as dogs. Cooperative planning and implementation has occurred successfully, at a local city level, and at state level. We believe an enthusiastic cooperative community wide approach with the commitment of all stakeholders to social responsibility, and honest communication about professional concerns, can achieve a faster and more sustainable outcome than each group working independently on different strategies.

The following actions are based on consensus reached with stakeholders and successes of reducing abandoned and euthanased cats and kittens, in a number of jurisdictions.

It is hoped that stakeholders in every state will therefore read and provide feedback on the following actions relevant to them, including constructive suggestions, to help develop a cohesive framework for action as soon as possible by all communities Australia-wide. Appendix 2 provides a summary of the strategies for each stakeholder's consideration and feedback.

1. [State Government](#)
2. [Local Government](#)
3. [Animal welfare organisations and local government](#)
4. [Animal welfare shelters/rescue groups/desexing organisations](#)
5. [Breeders](#)
6. [Sellers of cats e.g. pet shops](#)
7. [Veterinarians](#)
8. [Veterinary schools and veterinary students](#)
9. [Cat owners](#)
10. [Volunteer community members](#)
11. [Journalists](#)
12. [Real Estate Professionals & Body Corporate bodies](#)
13. [Wildlife and Conservation Groups](#)

### 1. State Government

State Government facilitates negotiation with stakeholders to achieve common legislation state-wide on the following:

#### i. Breeder Permit System

Establish a legislated requirement for all breeders and sellers of cats to have a permit based on an independent inspection for compliance with a detailed Code of Practice to ensure all breeders have to meet common high standards and responsible breeders are not disadvantaged.

Key features of a BREEDER PERMIT SYSTEM:

- a. Anyone who breeds is required to have a government permit. This includes breeders of pure breeds and crossbreeds; commercial breeders for profit, hobby breeders for breed improvement and showing, and breeders of their family pet.
- b. **User pays.** Breeders pay for the Breeder Permit which covers the costs of inspection and keeping records. (This is similar to permits being required for builders, car drivers etc. to ensure permit holders are suitably qualified and have appropriate resources and skills to avoid harm to people and, in this case, animals.)
- c. **An independent accredited inspection.** Conducted by local or state government officers or government-authorized animal welfare inspectors, inspections of breeding establishments occur on application for a permit and every 1 -3 years on renewal, so officers can check if breeders meet and are continuing to meet Standards.
- d. **Inspections based on compulsory Standards.** These address not only feeding, shelter and containment, but also health care, socialisation and training to produce confident sociable cats and dogs, prevention of in-breeding and hereditary defects, planning to avoid unwanted litters and illness or exhaustion of breeding stock, care or rehoming of all breeding animals on retirement, careful matching of owners to the individual needs of each animal, advice and support to new owners, and lifelong rehoming if required.  
17, 18
- e. **Requirement to publish Breeder Permit Numbers.** This enables consumers to make ethical purchasing choices, based on welfare Standards when looking for a new pet. All breeders are required to publish a permit number to be included with any advertisement and provided to the purchaser. This number demonstrates that they have been inspected (every 1 -3 years) and meet best practice animal welfare and management standards.
- f. **A national register of independently accredited breeders** e.g. on the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy website **and promotion of this register** for consumer access to verify published Breeder Permit numbers.
- g. **Desexing of kittens before sale or transfer.** All kittens required to be desexed prior to sale or giving away at 10 weeks of age, (with exemptions if the animal is being sold to another permitted breeder or a veterinarian provides an exemption if the animal is unhealthy. E.g. Standard 38 [GCCC Breeder Code of Practice for the keeping and breeding of entire cats and dogs](#))<sup>19</sup>. In 2009/10 in Gold Coast City 32% of surrendered cats were a result of owners not getting around to desexing their cat.<sup>20</sup> Desexing prior to sale or transfer prevents this. The safety of desexing between 2 and 4 months of age is now well-established<sup>21</sup> in research and used by shelter and private practices around the world. Most Australian veterinary schools have lagged behind in training in this procedure, often for logistic reasons, which makes it important for each state to

encourage and support ways for veterinary school training in early age desexing to occur.

Anyone who has an “accidental” litter must either get a permit or their parent animals desexed (with provision of government subsidised desexing for those in need).

- h. Subsidised desexing programs e.g. the Last Litter Fund (free desexing of the mother cat when a litter of kittens is surrendered to a shelter or pound for desexing and rehoming).** This is necessary for financially disadvantaged animal owners who accidentally breed to avoid a fine for breeding without a permit. See Cooperative Desexing Programs benefits and models<sup>22</sup>. Animal welfare groups can provide administration of the subsidies and fundraising support to Councils to assist with this community funded program. Such programs can be justified as they benefit both cat owners and non-cat owners to prevent costs and nuisance issues of unwanted cats.

## ii. Seller Permits and Standards

Seller Permits and Standards to complement & support Breeder Permits and Standards, wherever animals are sold from pet shops or the internet, or by intermediaries e.g. wholesalers sourcing animals for pet shops. These legislated requirements should include:

- a. A user pays Seller Permit** to ensure inspection for compliance with high level Standards wherever animals are held for sale
- b. Display of the Seller Permit** (if not the breeder) and a breeder permit number with all cats and dogs sold through pet shops or via the internet within Australia, so customers can recognise animals have come from inspected breeding establishments which meet appropriate standards of care and responsible rehoming
- c. Records of the source of all animals** (breeder name and address), health care treatments and sale/disposal (this will be essential if animals are going to be traded interstate) to be accessible by inspectors and local government authorities
- d. Desexing all kittens prior to sale.** If the Breeder and Seller Permits have compulsory standards consistent across all states, breeders will no longer be able to sell undesexed kittens across borders to avoid and undermine the effectiveness of some city/ state legislation. Responsible breeders will no longer be disadvantaged.
- e. Publication of independently accredited pet shops** on a shared government site for consumer access e.g. the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy site.

## iii. All kittens (and puppies) required to be microchipped prior to sale

All kittens (and puppies) required to be microchipped prior to sale or transfer and breeders to record their details on the microchip database (breeder name, place of breeding and breeding parent microchip number with each puppy and kitten sold). This increases breeder

accountability by making all animals potentially traceable and therefore more obvious and accountable to the public.

#### **iv. All pounds, shelters and rescue groups required to desex all cats and kittens prior to rehoming**

All pounds, shelters and rescue groups required to desex all cats and kittens prior to rehoming. A **foster care program** to enable mother cats, underage kittens (and pups), to be cared for until they are able to be desexed can be achieved by Councils working cooperatively with animal welfare groups or willing individuals in their communities.

#### **v. Cat Registration**

All cat owners required to annually register their cat from 12 weeks of age with their local council. Significant discounts should apply for desexed cats.

Registration provides funds, statistics, location mechanism and return to owner service.

#### **vi. Pet Friendly Accommodation**

Work with Body Corporate and Real Estate bodies to develop nationally consistent supportive policies to enable responsible cat owners to keep pets in strata title and rental accommodation, and aged care facilities. Models already exist to ensure the interests of property owners are protected e.g. pet agreements, pet references. Currently Gold Coast whole of city shows 22% of surrenders of cat surrenders are a result of accommodation issues.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Benefits of all of the above legislation for State Governments**

Assists various departments achieve effective governance i.e.

- Department of Local Government – cost-effective management of animals through prevention
- Department of Primary Industries – proactive strategy to improve companion animal welfare
- Department of Environment – proactive strategy for preventing domestic cats contributing to the unowned ('feral') cat population

## **2. Local Government**

### **Preventing Abandonment of Cats**

Because animals are bought and sold across local government boundaries, it is preferable for local governments to work with State Governments on consistent legislation. However, where State Government legislation is delayed or difficult, the following legislation can be introduced into local government law, where it does not conflict with State legislation:

i. Breeder Permits<sup>24</sup>

ii. Seller Permits

iii. Desexing of kittens prior to sale or transfer

E.g. Standard 38 [GCCC Breeder Code of Practice for the keeping and breeding of entire cats and dogs](#))

iv. Microchipping of kittens and pups prior to sale or transfer (with breeders' details required)

Benefits to Local Government Animal Management Departments of supporting Breeder Permits at the State level:

- Addresses the problem of unwanted and abandoned litters at its source
- A more proactive use of resources – able to provide information to breeders to help them meet the standards instead of managing the animals after they have been acquired by people who cannot care for them
- Less stress on pound staff with fewer animals collected and killed in pounds
- Assistance from the community with identifying unpermitted breeders
- Power to close down operations that are not following the standards in the Code
- More resources - the cost is born by the breeder and can be recouped in the sale of the litter
- Once responsible breeding has become part of the community culture, animal management departments can focus on proactive services such as community education and desexing programs, instead of catching and killing abandoned cats and managing nuisance complaints.

For more details of these four legislative initiatives see [Section 1 State Government](#).

**Other essential local government strategies to prevent abandoned animals:**

v. **Cooperative Desexing Programs**

Cooperative Desexing Programs to support people on a low income and encourage all cat owners to act to prevent abandoned cats. The cost of collection of an abandoned cat, holding the animal for an average of four days and euthanasing her is on average **\$220, and \$260 for a litter** collected and housed together, then euthanased. The statutory holding period is up to 14 days in some areas, which can add another \$200 to the cost i.e. total cost of approximately **\$420 per animal or \$480 per litter**. In contrast, the cost to local government of a Co-operative Desexing Program can be as little as **\$40** per cat. The cost saving per cat is therefore approximately \$180 per cat, which is a conservative figure as, for each cat prevented from breeding, the savings grow exponentially with a potential 2-3 litters per year that do not have to be collected in the future.<sup>25</sup>

Key features of a **COOPERATIVE DESEXING AND MICROCHIPPING SUBSIDY PROGRAM**:

- a. Ongoing subsidies are based on need and made available to:
- holders of pension, concession or health care cards
  - people on low incomes with large numbers of cats
  - people facing financial difficulties who can't afford to have their cat desexed

Explaining to the community that Council funds need to be used to help desex as many animals as possible over a number of years to reduce euthanasia rates, usually means that people do not take advantage of the program unless they really need it.

Annual discounts should also be promoted at key times (e.g. before cat breeding season) for all cat owners, to encourage immediate action to prevent unwanted kittens, particularly in the first few years of the G2Z program in communities with large numbers of abandoned animals.

- b. 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. 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. Use the following guidelines summarised in Table 1. The following model has worked in Gold Coast City:

**Table 1: Guidelines for Sharing of Costs in a G2Z Co-operative Desexing Program 2012/13**

	OWNER	COUNCIL	ANIMAL WELFARE GROUP**	VET RECEIVES
Female Cat Spey*	\$40 - \$60	\$40 - \$60	\$40 - \$60	\$80 - \$180
Male Cat Castration	\$25 - \$30	\$40 - \$50	\$25 - \$30	\$65 - \$110

*\*If a female cat is pregnant or in season, an additional \$30 can be claimed by the vet clinic from the Council Subsidy Fund. (This means slightly fewer cats desexed (approx. 20% of cats may be pregnant or in season, with more in peak breeding season), or an extra 20-30% can be added to the budget).*

*\*\*In Gold Coast City AWLQ contribute by coordinating the program and desexing the animals at the discounted rate of \$80 (along with another 9 private vet clinics).*

Note: Since costs are usually rising, the proportions each party pays can be adjusted gradually over time to accommodate this, but should only increase minimally every two or three years, to remain at a realistic level that is affordable for owners on low incomes, and still cover the costs for vets.

If all or most vet clinics in your municipality participate, each clinic will have to desex fewer animals at a subsidised rate and can set aside a slower day or evening for this extra work. If only one or two vet clinics participate, they will benefit from increased business, with less down time, compensating the reduction in profit from each service with the quantity of services offered, and strong support from the community.

Assistance is available from G2Z to work with relevant staff to develop a cooperative program in your municipality, and templates of the documentation and promotional materials are available free of charge.

Alternatively, a Community Vet Clinic can be developed. See G2Z website<sup>26</sup> for information.

#### **vi. Owner Support**

Local Governments introduce proactive policies to provide every opportunity for owners/carers to keep their pets safely e.g.

- a. Return animals home rather than impound them where contact can be made with an owner.
- b. Waive infringement fees for wandering cats in the first instance if the cause of the escape is being addressed e.g. appropriate fencing.
- c. Waive or reduce impound fees when owners desex and identify their cat (or dog).
- d. Provide desexing subsidies and reduced registration fees for responsible carers who adopt and desex stray or unowned cats. These residents are providing a community service by reducing Council costs of having to manage abandoned animals and nuisance issues.
- e. Provide trained volunteer and/or government supported Animal Help Lines for information on how to address common issues e.g. lack of rental accommodation or body corporate support, behavioural issues, safety and benefits of early age desexing for cats.
- f. Provide information on various cat containment methods<sup>27</sup> to help owners keep their cats on their properties.

#### **vii. Desexing prior to rehoming**

All animals from pounds, rehoming centres and rescue groups must be desexed prior to rehoming. Foster programs are therefore essential to provide care for cats and kittens needing time or rehabilitation before desexing. These can be organised cooperatively by recruiting local community groups' e.g. animal welfare, service or church groups.

#### **viii. Coalitions of local stakeholder representatives to work cooperatively on implementing G2Z solutions**

Include:

- Animal Welfare and Rescue Group Managers
- Local Government - Animal Management Coordinator, Education Officer, Pound Manager
- Board Members of Cat Breed Organisations
- Owners of Local Pet Shops and Pet Supply Shops

- Local Veterinary Clinic Managers
- Local university vet school ( if present)

**ix. Share statistics as a motivator to get your community involved in the solutions**

Councils and animal welfare shelters work together to provide the numbers of stray and surrendered animals, reclaimed, rehomed, and euthanased. This information can be used to encourage people to help by desexing their pets, keeping them safely confined and identified, donating for community clinics, shelter clinics, subsidised desexing programs, and rehoming facilities, volunteering at the rehoming centre, fostering and fundraising, and promoting animals e.g. using skilled pro bono volunteers such as PR experts, photographers, IT experts.

**x. Develop education programs for primary and secondary students**

Develop education programs for not just for primary students, but secondary students to involve them in the solutions<sup>28</sup> e.g. visiting the rehoming centre, training the animals, promoting their rehoming etc. Teacher trainees in relevant areas such as primary and secondary social science should visit the pound/refuge and learn how they can educate students on the essentials: Desex, Identify, Train, Keep Safe in their own yards (with cat safe fencing)<sup>29</sup>.

**xi. Community Education**

Community education through the general media, social media and Council communications can inform the general public about the need to Desex, Identify, Train and Keep Safe<sup>30</sup>, how to access desexing subsidies, help check that breeders have a permit, once required, and are microchipping and desexing kittens before sale.

**xii. Involve veterinary students in pound and shelter work**

For Councils in cities with veterinary schools, involve veterinary students in pound and shelter work to learn how they can help prevent overpopulation of cats by offering early age desexing and behavioural support. If possible, provide opportunities for veterinary students to be involved in desexing and early age desexing programs.

### **3. Animal Welfare Shelters & Local Government**

Animal welfare groups have a significant leadership role to play along with local governments in preventing abandoned cats and saving existing lives.

**i. Shelter Vet Clinic**

Wherever possible pounds and shelters should have a shelter vet clinic to check animals daily, treat animals with illness and injuries, and desex and microchip prior to placement of animals in rehoming pens. A small clinic can be set up with minimal expense. Employment

of a pound/shelter vet with a keen attitude to saving lives will mean a cheaper, quicker and more efficient and effective service. An on-site shelter clinic allows sick animals to be treated quickly and reduces transport costs. A veterinarian with a clinic near the pound/shelter who has the capacity to visit the animals regularly and provide daily care and treatment for all sick or injured pound/shelter animals is the next best option.

#### ii. Proactive Rehoming Policies

Proactive Rehoming Policies through a manager committed to G2Z, enthusiastic staff, volunteers and foster carers, positive marketing, convenient opening hours, and sufficient facilities.<sup>31</sup>

#### iii. Encourage local pet shops to rehome pound/shelter kittens

Encourage local pet shops to rehome desexed kittens and cats on behalf of the pound/shelter. Offer the store the opportunity to surrender unwanted kittens from the general public to the local shelter for desexing and microchipping and then rehome them on the shelter's behalf, or purchase from the shelter already desexed, microchipped etc., at an affordable rate, for on-selling to the public. This enables more access to pound/shelter animals in shopping centres.

#### iv. Vet School Shelter Visits

Invite local university vet school faculty to your shelter to explain the issues, and need for training of vet students in prevention strategies such as early age desexing. Coordinate opportunities for veterinary students to have experience at shelters/pounds and shelter and community clinics. See [Veterinary schools and veterinary students](#).

## 4. Animal Welfare Organisations/Rescue Groups/Desexing Organisations

### i. Preventing abandonment

- a. Initiate, design, negotiate and conduct Cooperative Subsidised Desexing Programs with local government and veterinarians<sup>32</sup>.
- b. Seek out large financial donations/bequests to establish a Community Veterinary Clinic to focus on desexing, early age desexing and treating suffering animals who may otherwise be euthanased. A fixed full service clinic is a sustainable model used in Australia.<sup>33</sup>
- c. Initiate, invite and coordinate Coalitions of stakeholders in conjunction with local government to progress understanding of the need for cooperation and implementation of solutions by all stakeholders. Work with Coalitions to develop new legislation and policies.

- d. Encourage compilation and publication of statistics for whole communities (pounds, shelters and rescue group data) as benchmarks for progress in reducing abandonment and euthanasia.
- e. Develop school programs which involve students from primary to tertiary level in the issue and practical solutions.
- f. Provide information to Councils about proactive strategies to prevent impounds. See [Owner support](#).
- g. Encourage State Governments to implement pet friendly accommodation initiatives which protect both property owners and pet owners.
- h. Provide displays and promotion of cat safe fencing options to prevent straying and impounding of cats.<sup>34</sup>

## ii. Saving Existing Lives

- a. Fostering of all unweaned kittens, timid and sick cats and kittens until they are able to be safely desexed and rehomed.
- b. Proactive rehoming policies including accessible hours on weekends and public holidays, positive marketing of animals.<sup>35</sup>
- c. Raising community awareness of the numbers being euthanased and the need for adoption from pounds and shelters, and desexing before 4 months of age, identification, training and keeping safe.

## 5. Breeders

Breeders have an important role to play in preventing abandoned and euthanased animals by:

- i. **Only breeding when they have assured responsible homes**
- ii. **Producing well-socialised and healthy animals**
- iii. **Careful education and support of new owners**
- iv. **Preparedness to take back and rehome any animals that the owner cannot care for**
- v. **Finding homes for animals at the end of their breeding period**
- vi. **Participating in community coalitions to develop proactive legislation and policies to reduce abandonment and euthanasia of cats**

**vii. Supporting breeder permit systems<sup>36</sup>. Responsible breeders benefit from a breeder permit system as it:**

- a.** Provides standards to guide breeders for socially responsible breeding
- b.** Identifies good breeders to consumers so they can support them

**viii. Selling only desexed kittens and cats**

Selling only desexed kittens and cats, unless being sold to another breeder with a permit, or if a veterinarian deems a kitten is unable to be desexed for long term health reasons. Breeders can incorporate the cost of desexing in the price of the cat.

**ix. Microchipping and registering**

Microchipping and registering the breeder details on a recognised microchipping database, prior to sale, and providing these details to anyone who purchases the animals.

**x. Advising owners about the importance of keeping cats safely in their own property**

See [Keeping Cats Safe booklet<sup>37</sup>](#).

## **6. Sellers of Cats e.g. pet shops**

Sellers of cats and kittens (other than breeders) e.g. pet shops also have an important role to play in preventing abandoned animals.

**i. Community coalitions**

Participating in community coalitions to develop proactive legislation and policies to reduce abandonment and euthanasia of cats

**ii. Supporting a seller or pet shop permit system**

Supporting a seller or pet shop permit system with inspections by independent local government or authorised animal welfare organisations. Responsible sellers benefit from such a legislated system by demonstrating to the public that they are meeting community standards i.e.

- a.** Sourcing animals only from breeders with a permit and who meet independent government standards
- b.** Ensuring all kittens are desexed prior to sale at 10 weeks and therefore not contributing to overpopulation. There are no significant health concerns with early age desexing in kittens, and significant health and behavioural benefits<sup>38,39</sup>.

- c. **Guaranteeing a home for life for each animal sold, by taking back and rehoming any animal they sell who has to be relinquished by the owner**
- d. **Providing appropriate care and socialisation of kittens (and pups)**
- iii. **Ensuring all kittens are microchipped prior to sale or transfer**
- iv. **Promoting pet friendly accommodation guides and cat safe fencing options**
- v. **Rehoming desexed cats and kittens on behalf of local pounds and shelters**

Pet shops benefit by being able to sell products to the new owners whilst gaining community appreciation.

## 7. Veterinarians

Veterinarians are in a unique position to assist with preventing unwanted animals and saving existing lives.

- i. **Become proficient in early age desexing<sup>40,41</sup> to:**
  - a. Offer this service to pounds and shelters in your local area to enable desexing prior to rehoming
  - b. Support breeder and seller permit systems which require desexing and microchipping of kittens prior to sale at 10 weeks.

From a business point of view, all kittens will be desexed, and desexed animals are likely to live a longer life, requiring more veterinary treatment and care, than if they were wandering undesexed and becoming unowned or euthanased in pounds. Over time there will be less pressure for subsidised desexing and free treatment, with reduced oversupply and thus fewer give-away kittens, unplanned owners and stray cats.

- ii. **Help establish a community coalition to promote G2Z with proactive rehoming and desexing policies**
- iii. **Be part of a cooperative subsidised desexing program<sup>42</sup> for cat owners in need**

Share costs with local government, animal welfare groups and owners. See [Local Government Section](#) above.
- iv. **Provide information and support to encourage keeping cats safe in owners' properties with cat safe fencing<sup>43</sup> and sufficient company and attention**
- v. **Offer pet-friendly accommodation guides and references to cat owners to enable them to find accommodation in rental and body corporate properties**

**vi. Develop community awareness**

Develop community awareness of the numbers of unwanted and euthanased animals in your community and provide information and support to enable all cat owners to desex, identify, train, and keep their animals safe.

**vii. Offer support for desexing of stray and unowned animals**

**viii. Establish a community veterinary clinic or other desexing support system<sup>44</sup> with like-minded animal welfare oriented veterinarians with a strong commitment to desexing and treating all animals who are suffering**

**ix. Work in shelter clinics or community clinics which work intensively to prevent overpopulation of cats and minimise loss of life**

## **8. Veterinary schools and veterinary students**

In order for veterinarians to contribute to preventing unwanted animals, the following actions are needed in all veterinary schools:

**i. Practical training working with abandoned animals in a shelter or pound, preferably in a shelter clinic environment to be exposed to veterinarians experienced in early age desexing.**

**ii. Experience with early age desexing<sup>45,46</sup> is important to overcome the lack of training of existing practitioners.**

**iii. Include cat related issues in course content.**

Course content which includes the issues of cat overpopulation and its causes (see [What are the cat issues in Australia](#)), the numbers of animals being abandoned and proportions being euthanased in their local community, awareness of G2Z strategies that have been successful, and how veterinarians can contribute to the solutions including establishing or managing community vet clinics (see [Veterinarians](#)), specialising in shelter medicine, providing owner information and support for desexing, identification, and keeping cats safely with various options for cat safe fencing.

## **9. Cat owners**

Cat owners can participate in G2Z by:

**i. Desexing and microchipping their cats from 8-10 weeks**

There are no significant health concerns with early age desexing in kittens, and significant health and behavioural benefits<sup>47,48</sup>.

**ii. Keeping contact details up to date on the appropriate microchip database**

iii. **Keeping cats safely in the owners' property**

See [Keeping Cats Safe](#) booklet.

iv. **Taking responsibility for any stray cat**

Taking responsibility for any stray cat they may be feeding by getting the cat scanned to see if he/she is owned and, if not identified and returnable, taking ownership or finding a new home, and desexing and microchipping the cat to reduce the number of unowned cats breeding in the wild.

v. **Lobbying for state-wide Breeder Permit Systems to ensure that all breeders meet standards of care and careful rehoming, and to prevent unintended breeding. [See State Government section.](#)**

## 10. Volunteer Community Members

Volunteers in the community can make a huge impact on preventing unwanted animals and saving existing lives by:

1. **Be part of a cooperative subsidised desexing program**

Volunteering to organise or assist with cooperative desexing programs working with local governments in local coalitions to develop effective breeder permit systems and desexing and rehoming policies. (See [Local Government](#))

2. **Helping with school programs<sup>49,50,51</sup>**

3. **Using professional skills of marketing, photography, reception etc. to assist with rehoming of abandoned animals**

4. **Using professional skills of building, plumbing, painting, landscaping etc. to establish separate rehoming facilities at pounds**

5. **Donating and fundraising to establish shelter vet clinics and community vet clinics**

6. **Fostering animals too young or too sick until able to be desexed and rehomed**

7. **Volunteering to socialise animals waiting for new homes at pounds and shelters**

8. **Encouraging policies that provide support for community cats**

Encouraging policies that provide support for community cats in areas where they can live without impacting on native wildlife populations i.e. school and university campuses, factory and industrial sites, retail environments, hospital grounds.

## 11. Journalists

In their role of social responsibility, journalists can play an important part by:

- i. **Sharing information about the issues AND how the community can contribute to solutions**
- ii. **Reporting on initiatives of local government and animal welfare groups**

Keeping in touch with local government and animal welfare groups, to build community awareness of new legislation e.g. Breeder Permit Systems and policies for better input and compliance.

## 12. Real Estate Professionals & Body Corporate bodies

Real estate professionals and body corporates can play an important part by promoting cat friendly lease agreements, including policies for responsible owners to demonstrate the suitability of their cat (or dog) for a particular residence e.g. use of pet references, pet bonds, pet agreements.

## 13. Wildlife and conservation groups

Wildlife groups e.g. Wildcare and Wildlife Preservation Society have played an important role in the development of the recommendations in these documents.

The role of wildlife groups includes:

- i. **Being part of local and state Stakeholder Coalitions to encourage and give support to the recommended government legislation and policies to reduce the oversupply of cats and kittens, such as kitten desexing prior to sale, cat desexing before sale from all pounds and shelters**
- ii. **Helping with community education to promote desexing of cats**
- iii. **Promotion of appropriate cat safe fencing and containment strategies that limit wandering and predation.**

## Your Feedback

All interested stakeholders e.g. state and local government, animal welfare groups, shelters, rescue groups, cat breeders, pet industry, veterinarians, veterinary schools, cat owners, volunteer community members, journalists, real estate professionals and wildlife groups are invited to respond to this document.



We would like to know:

- Which of these strategies you support
- Any alternative successful strategies you have to offer
- How you think these strategies can best be achieved
- How you are already putting some of these strategies in place
- Any concerns you may have.

For enquiries or to arrange a meeting with a G2Z representative to discuss these strategies, either by attending one of your organisation's meetings or a personal or Skype meeting with a key representative of your organisation, please email [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au).

**Please submit your response to [info@g2z.org.au](mailto:info@g2z.org.au) by 15/12/13. Online response options will be available via the G2Z website from October 2013.**

**Your responses will be used to add to or modify the proposal and work with you to put the proposal into action.**

**The revised document will then be addressed at a national meeting of stakeholders to refine and produce a strongly supported way forward.**

## Appendix 1 - Current legislation and review activity

LEGISLATION	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
<b>Breeder Permit System</b>								
All breeders required to have a govt. permit	(Permit required to keep an entire cat)	*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F		* (GCCC,MBRC <sup>1</sup> )	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee			* Local Govts to introduce by 1.11.13
User pays	*	*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F		* (GCCC,MBRC)				*
Independent accredited inspection		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F		* (GCCC,MBRC)				
Inspections based on compulsory standards		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F Standards already in place, but no BP inspections		* (GCCC,MBRC)	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee		Breeding Standards in place, but no BP Inspections	
Requirement to publish Breeder Permit Numbers		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F		* (GCCC, MBRC)	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee			
Desexing of cats before sale or transfer	(Req. at 12 wks)			* (GCCC)	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee			(Req. at 6 mths)
State Government database of permitted breeders (linked nationally)								-
<b>Seller Permit System</b>								
All sellers to have a Permit		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F						
User pays		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F						
Permit to be displayed		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F						
Records kept of source, health care and buyer for all animals sold		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F						
Desexing cats before sale		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F			*Recommendation of SA Select Committee	*		(Req. at 6 mths)
State Government database of government permitted sellers (linked nationally)								-
<b>Microchip</b>								
Microchip prior to sale or transfer (with breeder information in microchip database for all kittens)	* (Does not	* (Does not yet require breeder details to be in database - Recommendation		*State-wide requirement	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee	*	*	* (Does not yet require

<sup>1</sup> GCCC – Gold Coast City Council

MBRC – Moreton Bay Regional Council

LEGISLATION	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
and puppies)	yet require breeder details to be in database)	of NSW CA T/F)		(Does not yet require breeder details to be in database)				breeder details to be in database
M/C Numbers to be displayed when animal advertised		*Recommendation of NSW CA T/F			*Recommendation of SA Select Committee		*	
<b>Pound, shelter and rescue system</b>								
Desexing all cats (and dogs) prior to sale				(Some Councils)	*Recommendation of SA Select Committee		*	(at 6 mths only)
Adoption programs (complemented by fostering programs)							*(optional)	
<b>Landlords/Body Corporates/Aged care and retirement developers</b>								
Non-discriminatory pet legislation for aged care, retirement, body corporate and rental properties	* (For strata-title only)							
SUPPORTIVE GOVERNMENT POLICIES	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
<b>Subsidised desexing</b>								
Government desexing subsidy funding				*4 State Govt Desexing Pilot Projects in 2010/11 *GCCC Desexing Subsidy				*

## Appendix 2 - Summary of stakeholders & strategies for national cat action plan

STRATEGY	STATE GOVT	LOCAL GOVT	POUNDS	ANIMAL WELFARE GROUPS/ SHELTERS/ RESCUE GROUPS	CAT BREEDERS	SELLERS I.E. PET SHOPS, INTERNET	VETERINARIANS	UNIVERSITY VET SCHOOLS	CAT OWNERS	VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY MEMBERS	JOURNALISTS
<b>Preventing Abandoned Animals</b>											
Cooperative Desexing Programs		*		*			*		*	*	
Community Vet Clinic		*		*			*			*	
Coalitions	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	
Statistics		*		*							
School Programs		*		*						*	
Vet School Involvement		*	*	*				*			
Breeder Permit System	*	*		*	*	*	*				
Seller Permit System	*	*		*		*	*				
Desexing prior to sale or transfer	*		*	*	*	*	*	*			
Microchipping to include breeder details	*	*			*		*	*			
Owner support to prevent breeding, wandering and impounding		*	*	*			*	*	*		
Pet-friendly accommodation	*	*		*		*					
Cat safe fencing options		*	*	*	*	*	*	*			
<b>Saving Existing Animals</b>											
Shelter Vet Clinic		*	*	*						*	
Proactive Fostering/ Rehoming Policies		*	*	*		*				*	
Community Awareness		*		*			*				*

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- <sup>2</sup> NSW Companion Animals Taskforce. *Discussion Paper*. <http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Companion%20Animals%20Taskforce%20Discussion%20Paper%20May%202012.pdf>. May 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Verrinder J. Report on the availability of early age desexing in Gold Coast City in 2010. 2011; <http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/What%20proportion%20of%20vet%20clinics%20offer%20early%20age%20desexing%20-%20Research%20in%20one%20large%20city.pdf>.
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- <sup>6</sup> Ibid 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>9</sup> Australian Companion Animal Council. *The Power of Pets*. [http://www.acac.org.au/pdf/PowerOfPets\\_2009\\_19.pdf](http://www.acac.org.au/pdf/PowerOfPets_2009_19.pdf). ACAC, St Leonards NSW, 2009.
- <sup>10</sup> Verrinder J. *Estimated numbers of dogs and cats abandoned and killed in Australia 2009/10*. <http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/Calculation%20of%20National%20Figures%2009%2010%20incl.%20Healthy%20Treatable.pdf>. Getting to Zero, 2011.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid 2.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/about.html>
- <sup>13</sup> [http://www.rspca.org.au/sites/default/files/website/The-facts/Statistics/RSPCA Australia National Statistics 2011-2012.pdf](http://www.rspca.org.au/sites/default/files/website/The-facts/Statistics/RSPCA%20Australia%20National%20Statistics%202011-2012.pdf)
- <sup>14</sup> <http://www.nevadahumanesociety.org/pdf/HowWeDidIt11-08.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> <http://public.tableausoftware.com/views/SingleYear/CommunityStatistics>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://okspaynetwork.org/ordinances.php>
- <sup>17</sup> [http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/182911/Code-of-Practice-for-the-Operation-of-Breeding-and-Rearing-Businesses-Revision-1-Consultation-Draft-July-2013.pdf](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/182911/Code-of-Practice-for-the-Operation-of-Breeding-and-Rearing-Businesses-Revision-1-Consultation-Draft-July-2013.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> <http://www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/documents/bf/breeder-code-practice%281%29.pdf>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.awlqld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Statistics200910.pdf>

Figure 10.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/References%20on%20Early%20Age%20Desexing%20of%20Cats%20and%20Dogs%20August%202012.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/co-operative-desexing-programs.html>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 20. Figure 6A

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 22.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/models-for-desexing-programs.html>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.awlqld.com.au/education/school-programs/companion-animal-course/>  
<http://rspcavic.org/services/education/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.awlqld.com.au/education/school-programs/teaching-resources/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.awlqld.com.au/new-owners/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/the-checklist.html>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 22.

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/ASPCA-spay\\_program\\_models.pdf](http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/ASPCA-spay_program_models.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.g2z.org.au/pdf/G2Z%20Brochure%200912.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid 22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 28.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 30.