

The Cat Crisis Coalition - who are we, what do we want and why

The CCC is a unique alliance of leading Victorian animal welfare groups united through our commitment to urgently address the current cat crisis by:

*Ensuring that legislation is enacted in Victoria to require that all cats over the age of 12 weeks are desexed unless registered to a licensed breeder and
That all cats and kittens offered for sale or acquired are desexed*

Our total membership comprises some 30,000 and across Victoria, 53,000 cats and kittens enter our shelters annually of which 35,000 will be euthanased. Those euthanased do not just comprise the old sick or wild cats, the average age at intake is 4 months and a large majority of these are kittens that would otherwise make good pets but are "surplus to demand". Each of these cats has documentation collected by the shelter at point of entry, these are not fictional animals.

The Cat Protection Society has been collecting and collating statistics relating to the cat problem for the last twenty years as well as conducting extensive literature searches on the subject in both Australia and overseas. These have been compiled into The Cat Project as an attempt to define the magnitude and nature of the cat problem and set a baseline with which to assess future changes. A summary document is provided here:

The Cat Project: Cats in the Australian Community

The CCC has worked closely with the Government via:

*Early Age Desexing of Puppies and Kittens" circulated to all vets in Victoria
Pet Acquisition Survey
Community Attitudes Towards Cats in Victorian Residents
Victorian Council Animal Control Benchmarking Exercise June 2004*

The statistics and information presented by the CCC therefore have solid scientific basis and validity and do not simply represent an anecdotal or emotive response to the problem of cat overpopulation

The CCC acknowledges that we deal with the negative side of pet ownership, but the simple fact remains that when you are dealing with an overpopulation problem as we are with cats (documented by the *DAMIC survey*, and the *Early Age Desexing brochure*) there are only two solutions:

1. Stop production - via desexing, there is no other viable alternative to stop cats reproducing
2. Euthanase the surplus - which is what we are currently doing and this is unacceptable in a civilised society and not supported by the community as a viable option

That we have the support of the Victorian community is documented in the *Community Attitudes towards cats in Victorian residents* which shows that 83.5% of residents support compulsory desexing cf 71.3% for compulsory microchipping

Reproductive Capacity of the Cat - the necessity to desex

Why do we have a cat overpopulation problem? Why is desexing so important a part of the solution? This relates directly to the amazing reproductive capability of the cat. Cats are designed to reproduce:

- 🐾 Female cats begin to cycle at 4 months of age (some kittens at 8 weeks of age have follicles on their ovaries indicating this may in fact occur earlier). Gestation is 63+/-2 days so they can produce their first litter by 6 months of age. This historically has been the age recommended for desexing so that the cat can actually be close to giving birth before the owner has considered having the cat desexed. This is supported by two surveys in the USA (Massachussets and San Diego) which showed that 58% of owners whose cat had become pregnant had not had her desexed because they thought she was too young. Literature searches show 15-18% of cats have had one litter before desexing, this is supported by the Community Attitudes Survey which has found the Victorian figure is 13%

- 👉 Cats are seasonally polyoestrus - this means that there is a distinctive period during the year when they cycle (commonly known as kitten season this is generally October - April in Victoria). Cycling is induced by increasing day length. Ambient temperature also plays a part in that the season is extended in warm years. The female will continue to come into season (usually every 4-9 days) until she is mated. During this time she is very vocal (leading to noise complaints), desperate to get outside to be mated, and male cats are attracted to the area increasing noise, fighting, and adding to the nuisance complaint.
- 👉 The female cat ovulates when she is mated so invariably becomes pregnant
- 👉 One female cat can produce a total of 41 offspring in 12 months. An estimation from a USA study cites that in 7 years, a female cat and her young can produce 420,000 cats. A literature search shows cats produce 4.25 kittens per litter, 2.1 times per year with a mortality of approx 30% (Dr Niels Pedersen, USA)
- 👉 The average lifespan of a domestic cat across the literature is 7 years, that for an undesexed cat is three years, that for a desexed cat is 15
- 👉 Putting these statistics together, if 1 cat in 50 remains entire, the population will regenerate in 12 months. (Huxley, urban cat survey in 1990)

Thus desexing is imperative to control the population, and this must be desexing at an early age.

Alternatives to desexing are risky or impractical:

- 👉 Contraceptives carry the risk of uterine infection and diabetes, and will fail if not administered regularly
- 👉 Confinement is impractical and unrealistic for both females in season and entire males:

If a queen in season is contained in an outside enclosure, she will attract undesexed male cats and cause a great deal of noise with her calling

If she is confined inside she will literally climb curtains and demolish flyscreens to get outside
She will continue to call for males and if not mated will be susceptible to developing ovarian cysts, which require veterinary treatment

Confined entire males spray urine on their territory - a characteristic that usually results in the owner putting the cat outside, where he is free to seek undesexed female cats

- 👉 Desexing must be compulsory - other systems such as differential registration schemes, education programs, voluntary programs have been in place now since 1996 and we are still euthanasing 35,000 cats per year ie they have not worked.

It is this remarkable reproductive capacity which has led to the tragic problem of overpopulation. Australia has an ideal climate for which to breed in, unlike colder climates, there is no natural reduction of the population through winter months. We therefore need artificial control via desexing, and desexing rates need to approach 97% to stabilise the population.

Where do the unwanted cats come from - desexing rates are not high enough at present

It is claimed by our opponents that as most responsibly owned cats are desexed, what then would compulsory desexing achieve? Although we would argue that this places no imposition on owners (if they have done it already!!), it is important to clearly understand where cats entering shelters come from:

- 👉 There are four groups of cats:
 - 👉 Group 1 Owned Cats - these are responsibly owned cats, classically they are registered, desexed, identified and contained to the owners property. Desexing rates in this group are high:

It is claimed by the AVA that 94% of owned cats are desexed (hence 94% of the owners support desexing and no problem with compulsion should exist, we would simply be requiring owners to do what they would do anyway, so there would be no imposition). However other statistics dispute this figure:

DAMIC Benchmarking Survey - found 41% of estimated 616,000 owned cats were registered and that 81.89% were registered for the reduced fee, mostly claimed for desexing ie 82% desexing rate

Reark survey (see EAD brochure) found 88% cats were desexed but that under 12 months of age only 36% were desexed

Literature searches show 15-18% of cats have had one litter before desexing, this is supported by the Community Attitudes Survey which has found the Victorian figure is 13% (a very good reason to desex before acquisition)

When we look at the population statistics we find that this is sufficient to produce 2.5 times the number of cats required to replenish the population every year (see population model in EAD brochure - based on 90% desexing rate) and in fact desexing rates of close to 97% have to be achieved before the population stabilises

Cats - Victoria	Total	Percent	Current		100% desexing compliance	
			% Desexed	No Desexed	% Desexed	No Desexed
Pet Cats						
Registered	252,560	29.16%	85.00%	214676	100.00%	252560
Stray/semi-owned	363,440	41.97%	25.00%	90860	25.00%	90860
Feral	250,000	28.87%	1.00%	2500	1.00%	2500
Total	866,000		35.57%	308036	39.94%	345920

Cats - Victoria	Total	Percent	Current		100% desexing compliance		
			% Desexed	No Desexed	% Desexed	No Desexed	
Owned Cats							
Registered	252,560	41	29.16	82.00	207099	100.00	252,560
Not registered (semi-owned)	363,440	59	41.97	7.9	28,711	100.00	363,440
	616,000	100					
Unowned wild cats	Estimates only	250,000	28.87	1.00	2500	1.00	2500
Feral	Unknown			0	0	0	0
Total	866,000			27.51	238,310	71.42	618,500

👤 Group 2 Semi-Owned cats - these are cats that are friendly, have humans that feed them, but take no responsibility for them. Classically they are the cat left behind when the family moved, taken on by the new owners of the house, not desexed and then when the first litter is produced at 6 months of age, taken to the shelter because they do not want the responsibility of 5 of 1 cat. If not taken to the shelter, they become the free living cats that do become self sustaining wild colonies, but they would not be breeding if they had been desexed before being left behind. It is precisely for this reason that desexing before acquisition is essential. These are the cats that are "owned" but not registered. Of these 22% are desexed. These cats make perfectly good pets and represent a large percentage of the cats entering shelters. However, they were or are "owned" at some stage.

👤 Group 3 - Unowned Wild Cats. These are the cats that classically live around factories, McDonalds etc. They are not handleable and will not make good pets. Of these 0.01% are desexed. Whilst these colonies are self sustaining, they have originated from owned cats that were not desexed. Compulsory desexing will prevent replenishment of these colonies, the colonies can then be addressed by trapping programs.

👤 Group 4 - Feral Cats. Not seen in suburbia these are free living cats independent of human contact.

👤 In summary this gives us the Gap - the reason for the overpopulation:

88% of Owned Cats are Desexed

Only 36% of cats under 12 months of age are desexed

Only 22% of Group 2 cats are desexed

15-18% of female cats have had at least one litter before being desexed

👤 It is important to acknowledge this link between owned cats and the unowned colonies if the cat problem is to be addressed successfully. One of the strategies of preventing the unowned colonies becoming established is to ensure cats are desexed before acquisition. This prevents replenishment of the wild population by any irresponsible ownership of these cats. By requiring compulsory desexing and in particular, desexing before acquisition, we are preventing these unwanted litters from being born and creating problems in the community.

The end result of overpopulation - the tragedy of the shelter

What then do the shelter statistics show us, the results of the remarkable reproductive capacity of the cat and irresponsible ownership:

👤 The numbers of cats entering shelters has not decreased over the past twenty years, in fact numbers have increased and the percentage being euthanased has not changed significantly. Overall, 53,000 cats enter Victorian shelters annually, of these 35,000 are euthanased.

👤 These euthanasia rates of approx 75% across the shelters are supported by the DAMIC Benchmarking Survey finding rates of 75.84% euthanasia for cats. The figures presented by the CCC are not anecdotal nor emotive

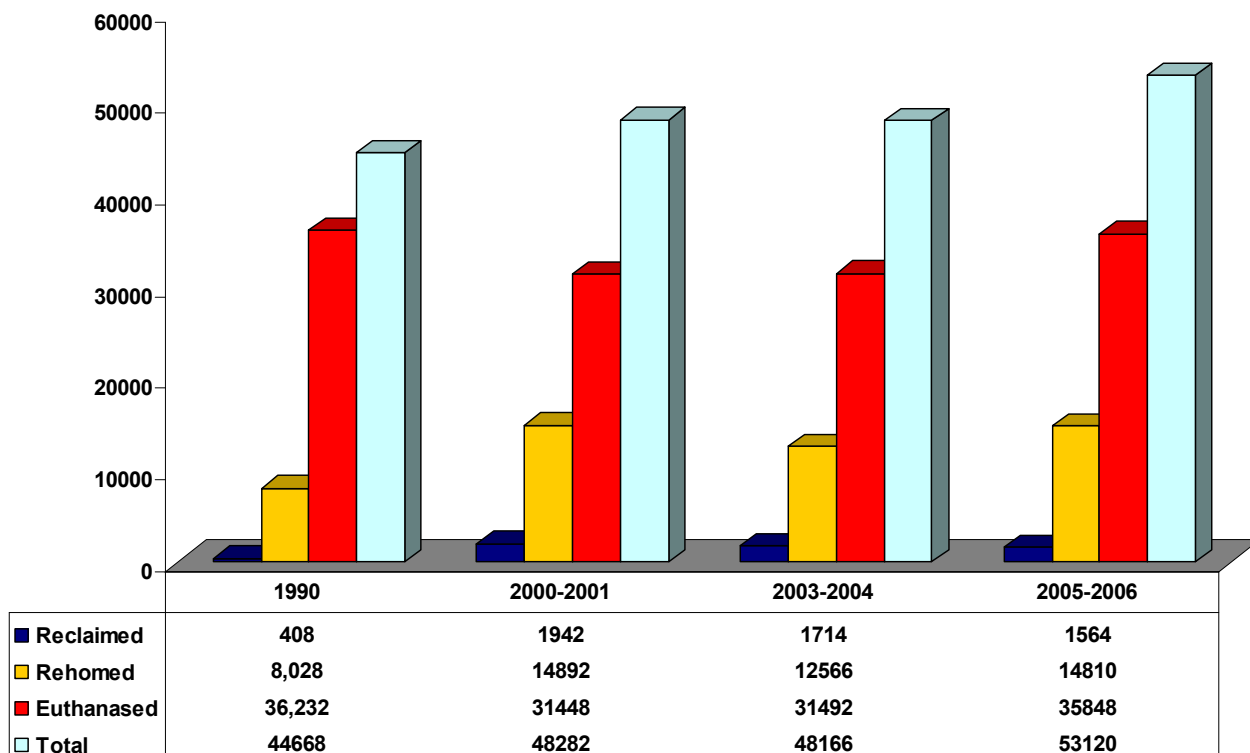
👤 The reclaim rate for cats is on average 3% - this is consistent with National figures and overseas figures, the reason for such low rates is that a large number of the intake are kittens that have no owners. This is in stark contrast to dogs where the average is a 41% reclaim rate, as most dogs are lost not unowned

👤 The acquisition of cats is currently passive in contrast to dogs which is active - see pet acquisition survey. The majority of cats are acquired passively as strays rather than being actively bought as dogs are. As a result, cats tend to be undervalued and poorly looked after. In many cases, the cat is simply fed, but not registered nor desexed, as the householder does not regard themselves as its owner. We would hope this will change by decreasing the oversupply so that cats are actively acquired and better looked after as a result. We do not believe this will restrict cats available to pedigrees and we would envisage the breeding of the domestic moggy to protect the gene pool. This does not give a competitive advantage to anybody, nor encourage kitten farms - we would see the same rules apply to all, that those cats registered/licensed for breeding have certain requirements attached to this so supply was met but not exceeded. To continue the present situation where a large pool of animals is allowed to exist so that a few are passively acquired, and the remainder are culled excess to demand or eke out a borderline existence in the wild, is unacceptable

👤 Desexing rates are not at the point where they are causing negative population growth - the shelters are still flooded with friendly kittens every summer. In fact the Community attitudes survey showed that 33% of the population owned cats which is higher than the national average of 25%. We will not run out of cats.

- 🗨️ The decision to breed needs to be an active one, made responsibly by the owner of the cat. It should include the availability of homes for the kittens and not place burdens on shelters by lack of forethought.
- 🗨️ The emotional strain on shelters is enormous. A recent study done by Monash University shows that 30% of shelter works exhibit moderate degrees of PITS (Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress). This relates directly to the large numbers of animals euthanased as "surplus to demand" ie for no medical reason

Comparison of total number of cats received by Victorian Shelters from 1990 to 2006



The way to address this tragic influx of unwanted cats and kittens into Victorian shelters is to introduce compulsory desexing. We therefore support and thank Council for the proposal to introduce this Local Law as an enlightened and proactive approach to addressing the cat problem and eagerly await its implementation

The financial cost of not desexing

In looking at the financial implications of introducing compulsory desexing, our opponents have cited extraordinary cost imposition on all involved. In fact quite the reverse is true:

- 🗨️ The cost of undesexed animals to Council in terms of nuisance is high. It is cheaper to desex the cat than it is to address the complaint. Over five years, the CPS addressed 10,291 complaints. Of these 82% related to entire cat behaviour and of the cats causing these complaints 84% were not desexed. Hence requiring compulsory desexing will reduce the numbers of complaints thereby assisting Councils, not increasing the workload as suggested by our opponents. The costs of impounding a cat to council are estimated at:

Wild cat - \$28-63/cat
 Stray cat - \$27.50 - 85.50/cat

- 🐾 As the majority of cat owners are responsible (AVA cites 94%), compulsory desexing will not add any additional cost to owners as they are doing it already - the cost is simply transferred to at acquisition rather than after it. Ie the cost of desexing is incorporated into the price of the cat, rather than paying for it separately
- 🐾 Pet shops have cited that business will decrease as cost of the cat to the public will increase and clients will go elsewhere. The shelter experience showed quite the opposite. The fact that the kittens were desexed was attractive to many clients and actually a drawcard rather than a deterrent. The clients cited convenience that everything was done as the main reason.
- 🐾 The argument that compulsory desexing will deter people from rehoming cats and put increased pressure on shelters is emotive and unsubstantiated. At some stage, the responsible owner will need to pay for desexing - someone must bear the cost, to delay it at the first transference of ownership is simply to transfer the cost to someone else. Surveys, through our literature search have shown that the main reason cats have their first litter is that the owner either thinks the female is too young to get pregnant, or they did not "get around to it". Desexing before acquisition addresses both these. When compulsory registration was introduced via the Domestic Animals Act in 1996, those opposing its introduction predicted that the shelters would be flooded with cats - in fact for the first three months a 3% rise was recorded and then numbers returned to those previously.
- 🐾 The veterinarians would not be disadvantaged financially, as the animals will still need to be desexed - in fact business may increase as hopefully the desexing numbers will increase. In 1993, the City of Coburg as it was then, introduced a Local Law requiring compulsory desexing, which was welcomed by the community. Subsidized desexing schemes were run through the Cat Protection Society, and in the first six months of its implementation 623 very adult cats ie battered toms, queens that had had several litters were presented for desexing, that would otherwise have remained undesexed. Sadly the introduction of the Domestic Animals Act and Council amalgamation resulted in the Local Law being dropped, but the early results were very encouraging - and did not lead to Councillors being voted out of office!!!!
- 🐾 We would support subsidised desexing or discounted registration schemes - as the cost of addressing a nuisance complaint is greater than desexing the animal, it is probably a good investment in terms of animal management. Cat owners who have registered their cats have in large part obtained very little in return over the years since the DAA was introduced. There was always an understanding that the cat registration monies would be used to address the cat problem. We would see subsidized desexing schemes as a valuable tool to do this.

Early Age Desexing / Desexing before Acquisition - the cornerstone to solving the problem

In looking then to the solution, we require not only compulsory desexing, but desexing at an early age before acquisition, to prevent the one unwanted litter from being born - currently at least 13% of cats have had one litter before desexing. (Community Attitudes towards cats)

- 🐾 Juvenile desexing is therefore not a different issue to compulsory desexing. The need for juvenile desexing arose in the USA where 20-40% of desexing vouchers issued with kittens were never redeemed or redeemed after the cat had had one litter. Surveys showed both in USA and Australia, that only 60-80% of desexing vouchers were redeemed, and that the majority of owners did not desex their cat by the time it was pregnant because they thought it was too young, or they simply forgot. In analysing the figures, the shelters realised they were in fact contributing to the overpopulation problem. The need was then to desex the cats before leaving the shelter which necessitated the early age desexing. In searching the literature at this time, there were no studies that indicated that desexing could not be done before the traditional six month of age and so EAD was pioneered.
- 🐾 Similar problems with desexing voucher redemption existed in Victoria prior to 1991 when we began early age desexing. Whilst the evidence since (see EAD brochure) supports the safety and ease of the procedure, the need arose from the overpopulation problem and the need to prevent unwanted litters being born.

👉 EAD began in Victoria in 1991 and was quickly and effectively adopted by all shelters. To date, many thousands of EADs have been performed safely and with no long term deleterious side effects.

👉 The original concerns were:

1. Short Term - difficulty with surgery and anaesthesia. This proved not to be the case. A shelter survey re EAD in 2001 showed that 13 shelters reported better recovery, easier surgery and no difficulties in performing the procedure. Other studies have shown surgery and anaesthesia performed by experienced veterinarians, to be as safe as surgery and anaesthesia on adult patients.

2. Long Term

Stunted Growth - there was original concern that early age desexing would result in stunted growth. Studies have shown that cats desexed at 7 weeks of age are actually slightly taller than those done after 7 months ie they are not midgets

Obesity - there was original concern that kittens desexed at an early age would become fat - studies have shown no difference between cats desexed at 7 weeks or those done at 7 months. Overall, desexed cats have a lower caloric requirement than entire cats so have a tendency to overweight but there is no difference between those desexed at 7 weeks to those done at 7 months

Increase in feline lower urinary tract disease - the studies have shown no correlation between the age of desexing and the occurrence of this problem

Behavioural problems - The studies found no differences

👉 Thus early age desexing is safe, without deleterious side effects - please see EAD brochure for technical detail and DVD of how to do!!! It is not difficult nor unsafe, those who claim otherwise have not done any!!

👉 Early Age Desexing can be done easily and efficiently - breeders/pet shops/litters can go to the surgery for desexing, return the same day and the kittens be placed into a new home the following day, stitches can be removed by the new owner's vet (simple procedure!!). Litters can be kept together and done in "batches". No special facilities are required and monitoring is no more involved than for adults. At CPS - VAAT we desex kittens and place them up for adoption the following day. There is no increase in sickness/trauma/poor sociability etc as a result. In fact the general experience is that less psychological stress is experienced by kittens than adults - adults admitted for surgery to veterinary clinics often undergo a separation anxiety from their owner and some disorientation whilst at the clinic for their operation. Kittens in contrast have not yet formed such close attachments and generally show great curiosity and interest in their surroundings.

EAD is therefore an important tool in addressing the cat overpopulation problem as it can be done before acquisition, preventing the birth of unwanted litters.

Summary

👉 The reproductive capacity of the cat is tremendous, with an overpopulation problem only 2 solutions, hence the cornerstone to the solution is decreasing production by compulsory desexing

👉 The numbers of cats entering shelters has not decreased over the past twenty years, in fact numbers have increased and the percentage being euthanased has not changed significantly.

👉 Desexing rates are not at the point where they are causing negative population growth - the shelters are still flooded with friendly kittens every summer .. We will not run out of cats.

👉 Differential registration fees have now been in place since 1996. If differential registration fees were so successful why are we still euthanasing 35,000 cats per year?

- 👤 We agree with compulsory microchipping, but education programs on responsible pet ownership and appropriate pet selection are strategies that have been in existence now for many years, and whilst important, have not solved the problem.
- 👤 Compulsory desexing will tighten the supply, we will never get 100% - studies from the USA have shown its success in reducing the numbers of cats entering shelters.
- 👤 Changing passive to active acquisition by limiting over supply
- 👤 Better for all
 - cats and cat owners - live longer
 - Cat shelters - less emotional and financial strain use resources more positively
 - Community - less nuisance
 - Council - fewer complaints, less cost
 - Conservation
- 👤 Incentives essential eg subsidised desexing programs
- Reduced registration etc
- 👤 Have community support - 84%

Shelters have no vested interests