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## Australia Asks “Who’s For Cats?”

Carole Webb

### Introduction

Cats present a unique challenge in the Australian community. In an increasingly busy, urbanized world, cats make ideal companions particularly for the elderly and disadvantaged, costing less to feed and not requiring owner supervised exercise as do dogs. Scientific studies have proven cat ownership reduces stress and lowers incidence of heart attack. The popularity of cats is evidenced by Australia’s high cat owning population (estimated 26% of households own 1.47 cats)<sup>7,12</sup> confirming their place here.

However, cats are not native to Australia and as highly effective, adaptable predators able to reproduce rapidly in our ideal climate, irresponsible or semi ownership transforms them into a major community problem - causing nuisance, threatening owned cats and wildlife, and suffering themselves from disease and malnutrition with thousands of unwanted cats euthanased in shelters annually.

This paper examines Victoria’s approach to this complex issue and highlights the newly launched “Who’s for Cat’s”(WFC) campaign which illustrates the translation of research into practical, effective education at the coalface and shows that with broad stakeholder cooperation, much can be achieved on a small budget. The campaign has been developed and supported by the Victorian State Government and 10 major animal welfare and industry groups. This widespread support indicates the magnitude of the cat problem – it is such that groups that are often adversarial have put aside their differences and concentrated on the views they have in common – the overriding concern - the welfare of the 500,000 unowned cats currently leading a life of neglect throughout Victoria and a need to address this.

### Cats in Australia



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It is widely acknowledged in Australia that there is a cat problem and it is a complex issue. Varying opinions exist about its magnitude and best methods of addressing it; statistical surveys have tended to concentrate on particular facets of the issue rather than the whole; cat management programs focus on a particular activity, usually the endpoint (e.g. banning cats from environmentally sensitive areas, feral cat eradication) rather than a holistic approach, and overall a comprehensive, coordinated and effective cat management plan has yet to be implemented and its effectiveness scientifically measured. It is not a cat problem per se - it is the way people mismanage their cats that causes problems and in concert with Australia's unique fauna which hasn't evolved with cats as natural predators provides a significant challenge.<sup>4</sup> Overall, there is broad agreement that responsible cat ownership(RCO) is the key to effective cat management

### **Formation of AWAC Working Group 6(WG 6)**

The nature of the cat problem is different to that of dogs, though historically they have been identically handled. This arose partly from a political compromise – in developing the Domestic Animals Act(DAA) to incorporate cats into legislation (thereby improving their welfare by giving them a legal status and a statewide pound system), animal welfare groups conceded to cats being treated as dogs. In 1996, Victoria introduced the DAA. On the surface it provided a sound basis for dealing with the cat problem requiring registration (revenue provision), identification (clearly linking cat and owner), a comprehensive education program run by the State Government and the ability for Local Government to address cat complaints. There was insufficient understanding and acknowledgment of the cat issue at this time to address it independently. The DAA by recognising cats as companion animals has increased community awareness re RCO, has increased identified cat numbers and reclaim rates and produced, although not fully utilized revenue and the framework for cat management programs. Significantly though, unwanted cat numbers in the community haven't decreased. The animal welfare organisations (NPO), who lobbied strongly for compulsory desexing in 1996, had signalled to the Government that if shelter intake didn't decrease following a



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reasonable implementation period, they would renew their campaign. In 2004 the Cat Crisis Coalition reactivated this initiative.

Since 1994, community expectations had changed considerably, increasingly demanding that cat issues and high euthanasia rates are addressed. Environmental concerns about impact of cats on wildlife continued to surface. In addition, whilst the problem remained unaddressed, cats acquired a poor image as killers and nuisances. Due to the surplus, cats are readily available and regarded as disposable - this undervaluing continued to exacerbate the lack of responsibility in some cat owners. In 2005, AWAC identified the cat problem as a welfare issue needing urgent attention and formed WG6 comprising a broad cross section of stakeholders to examine the issue and develop solutions.

## Background Research

The Bureau of Animal Welfare(BAW) had commissioned several research projects to characterize, quantify and understand the factors contributing to the cat problem to enable evidence based solutions.<sup>6,8,13,19</sup> McMurray<sup>8</sup> identified cat problems were different to dogs, a key difficulty being the overpopulation of feral and semi-owned cats. Whilst generally accepted that most dogs have “owners”, many cats do not, so reclaim rates are low. In addition the cat’s remarkable reproductive capacity accounted for large numbers of unwanted healthy kittens admitted to shelters, many euthanased as surplus to demand<sup>6</sup>

The shelters had also collected data and conducted extensive literature searches in Australia and overseas, compiling these into The Cat Project<sup>22</sup> attempting to define the magnitude and nature of the problem and set a baseline to assess future changes. It concluded that the cat problem is different to dogs and to address it effectively required examination of the biological and behavioural characteristics of the feline species and the development of specific solutions that properly reflect these<sup>22</sup>.

WG6 also conducted an extensive literature review and analysed this data.



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## Characteristics of the Cat Problem

1. Cats are ideally suited to Australia's climate removing the climatic population controls found in the colder Northern Hemisphere. Effective, adaptable predators requiring little fresh water cats survive independently throughout Australia.
2. Cats are prolific breeders <sup>(A2)</sup>
3. Most "stray" cats are semi or unowned not lost, therefore reclaim rates are negligible as no responsible owner is looking for them. Australian and international figures consistently demonstrate that introducing cat legislation increases reclaim rates from virtually zero, to approx 3.2% compared with 41% for dogs<sup>(6,8,22)</sup>. However, they plateau here, reflecting true ownership rates and the differences between cats and dogs - for cats the problem is overpopulation, large shelter intakes reflecting thousands of unwanted kittens which have no "owner".
4. Cat Colonies are maintained by human feeders<sup>(19, 21)</sup>

Unlike dogs, there are many semi and unowned cats particularly in urban areas which are responsible for many of the nuisance cat complaints received by Councils, mostly relating to undesexed cat behaviour.<sup>22</sup> These cats are maintained by human feeders who feed them to prevent starvation but in so doing enable the cat to breed and perpetuate the problem. Control of the food source is a valuable management tool<sup>21</sup> The cycle is simple – a stray cat appears and is offered food – a normal nurturing instinct. The reliable food source improves the cat's condition and enables breeding, increasing numbers. The problem quickly spirals out of control (a colony of 40 cats can be established in 12 months) overwhelming the feeder's capacity and the cats are taken to the shelter or abandoned and the cycle begins again. The Cat Tracking Project(CTP)<sup>6</sup> identified two peak entry times for strays – a few days after being found (correct action), and another 6 months later when the cat had given birth to kittens. If



asked, the feeder will say “it is not my cat”, and takes no further responsibility so it isn’t desexed, microchipped, etc. They don’t go looking if it goes missing.

The act of feeding arose from a motive of kindness but in fact fed a bigger problem and increased the unowned cat population. Research showed 22% of the population fed a cat they didn’t own; these semi-owners tend to be women, the most common category, retired women over 65, followed by women 46-55 who are professionally employed or on home duties; they engage in a single behaviour that indicates cat ownership – feeding (93%) but don’t claim ownership.<sup>(19)</sup> They have genuine care, concern and feel sorry for these unowned cats. Although they believe cats are independent and able to fend for themselves they continue feeding. When asked what would happen if they stopped they assume someone else will. They won’t stop feeding because of sympathy for the cat and they don’t believe they are doing anything wrong. Further research indicated that asking them to stop wouldn’t be enough. There is a need for education about the consequences of their behaviour and its impact on the overall unowned population and a need to appeal to their love of cats to question if their actions are in the overall cats’ best interests. This group is difficult to reach and behavioural and attitudinal change is required

5. Cats aren’t contained by fences

6. Cats are acquired passively (person isn’t specifically looking for a pet but one appears and they accept ownership) cf dogs which are acquired actively (person specifically seeks out the pet).<sup>(13)</sup> The majority (59%) are acquired under 3 months of age. There is a general belief that people who actively acquire their pet and pay for it are more responsible owners. McMurray<sup>8</sup> found a greater proportion of dogs registered (64%) cf cats (41%), supporting this theory given that most dogs are actively acquired. As a result, cats are undervalued and poorly looked after as no real thought has gone into acquisition resulting in diminished acceptance of responsibility. Often it is just fed. By reducing the oversupply, cats would be actively acquired and better looked after.

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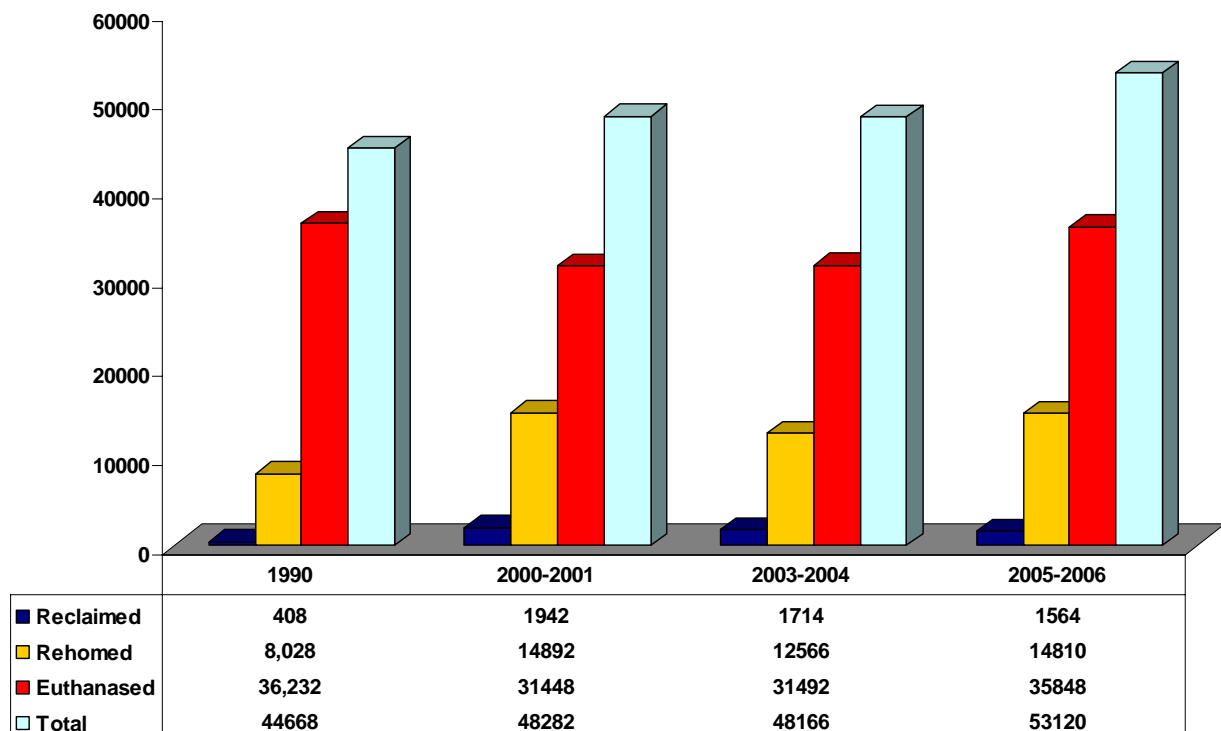
7. Unowned cats require trapping to remove them from an area
8. Cats are an emotional issue polarizing a community if issues aren't handled sensitively. To reach cat owners, management methods must be delivered in cat friendly terms
9. There is a continuum between owned and feral populations and cats move freely between these. Irresponsibly owned and surplus unwanted cats become/create increasing numbers of unowned cats which progressively become feral and disperse outwards from human settlement. These feral populations are self-sustaining, require specialized humane control and contribute significantly to the cat's poor public image as a killer and pest. Responsible management of the domestic population can prevent their replenishment. Different measures will be required along the continuum and all populations must be addressed to be effective.
10. Overall there are two components to the "cat problem" - supply exceeds demand ie overpopulation and surplus and irresponsibly owned cats cause problems

## **Impact of the Cat Problem**

1. Large numbers of unwanted cats euthanased in Victorian Shelters  
In 2005-6, Victorian shelters received 53,000 cats. Within the pound system, 74% of cats are euthanased, 15% rehoused and 11% reclaimed<sup>8</sup> Within the shelter system, 3.6% are reclaimed, 30.4% rehoused and 66% euthanased<sup>6,22</sup>. Nationally 120,000 cats are admitted to shelters annually with similar fates.<sup>(17)</sup> These figures have remained remarkably consistent through time, and across the nation suggesting that feline specific measures need to be investigated to address the issue. Although euthanasia is humane, ethically the wastage is unacceptable. There is increasing community concern over high euthanasia rates and expectations these be reduced.



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



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The CTP tracked 25, 810 cats through 3 shelters over 13 months confirming a current oversupply of cats in Victoria, and characterizing the nature of the cat overpopulation problem

2. Poor welfare of semi/unowned cats
3. Stress associated with impoundment
4. Emotional stress in shelter workers

Research exploring Perpetration Induced Traumatic Stress showed over 30% of shelter workers experienced moderate to significant traumatic stress as a result of euthanasia, particularly the large numbers euthanased as "surplus to demand"<sup>(16)</sup>

5. Financial burden on shelters/councils

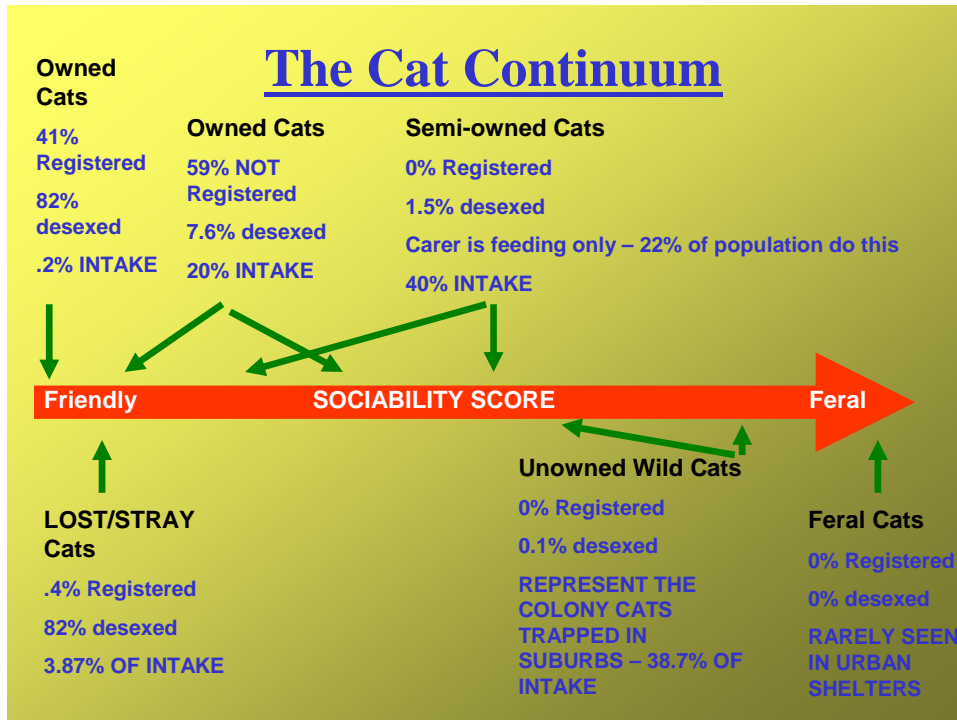
Negligible reclaim rates mean there is no ability to recover costs, pounds keep cats for the whole statutory holding period adding significant cost with larger percentages euthanased. Cost estimates illustrate it is cheaper to desex cats than address the problems they cause left undesexed. Currently shelters heavily subsidize cat management costs (estimated \$6 million/year)<sup>(8)</sup>. If numbers reduced, these resources could be directed to more positive cat welfare activities

### **Source of Cats entering Shelters**

The CTP provided a clear understanding <sup>(A1,A3)</sup>

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## Outcomes from WG6

WG6 met during 2005-7 providing regular reports to AWAC. Many strategies developed for dogs also applied to cats and were addressed by legislative amendments. A monitoring brief on the effectiveness of these was recommended eg compulsory microchipping for new registrations.

Broad agreement existed that to address the cat problem holistic plans were required, that these are costly and labour intensive and needed to incorporate different strategies for each group of cats. Broadly:

1. Registration (revenue provision)
2. Microchipping (link between cat and owner)

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3. Desexing (reduces production of unwanted kittens) – the main and significant disagreement was around legislative change to require compulsory desexing as opposed to using education, subsidised desexing and other incentives
4. RCO education particularly to change behaviour of the 22% feeding cats they don't own, and to promote active acquisition
5. Trapping of unowned cats to allow cats to be surrendered or "owned"
6. Improved DAA education for AMO/community

7. Urban design, affordable cat enclosures for humane cat containment

There was broad agreement that the nexus between owned and feral populations must be broken to allow these populations to be addressed effectively as they required different techniques. Setting aside the differences in opinion on compulsory desexing, WG6 reached agreement on three areas requiring further work:

1. Poor image/under valuing of cats – contributed to many of the issues.

Research found 22% of the population feed a cat they don't own. Whilst this is from kindness the cat isn't valued highly enough for the feeder to accept full ownership. Many of the unwanted kittens entering shelters came from this source. An attitudinal change was needed.

2. Passive acquisition of cats resulted in a large group of cats that are "not in the system" preventing accessibility to their carers. In Victoria 59% of owned cats aren't registered and a large percentage of these aren't desexed. Many of the unwanted kittens entering shelters came from this source. Registered cats are generally identified and desexed, less likely to be admitted to shelters and if admitted reclaimed faster – ie had better welfare outcomes.

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### 3. The unowned wild cat problem

WG6 broadly agreed that promoting RCO and improving the cat's image were key solutions and to reach the target audience – the 59% of owners with unregistered cats, and the 22% that feed cats they do not own - a multimedia community awareness campaign was required, as these people are not in the system. The benefits:

- cats are better valued hence better cared for
- increase in registered cats – registration is positively to RCO
- decreased numbers of unwanted cats entering shelters in the long term, thus decreasing impounding stress
- impounded, identified owned cats can be quickly reclaimed minimizing stress
- decreased emotional and financial burdens on shelters allowing better resource utilization
- fewer unowned cats - as these are generally in poor condition with a high disease incidence overall suffering will be reduced.

A proposal was recommended to and endorsed by AWAC that

1. BAW develop and produce advertisements promoting RCO and the importance of taking responsibility for semi-owned cats through ownership or surrender to the council
2. The NPO secure CSA time to screen them and disseminate them through their extensive networks (a valuable and synergistic partnership to enable limited resources to have the greatest impact – TV although most effective is the most expensive media) All major stakeholders agreed and a small budget was allocated - \$200,000 to date

## The Campaign

### *Strategic Development*

Following AWAC endorsement:



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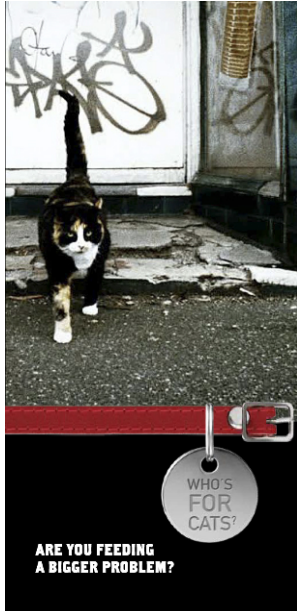
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1. Campaign coordinator was appointed (Neva Gladman BAW),
2. To ensure limited resources were effectively spent, WG6 agreed professional public relations/communications advice was essential to reach the target audience through the best medium. Advertising agency "The Surgery" was selected and available research provided.
3. The Surgery produced a directional paper, outlining their understanding of the issue and proposing initial directions/communication strategies. With fresh eyes, The Surgery had appreciated these were complex messages to convey and recommended they were delivered one at a time. Their findings:
  - a. To unravel the complexity, the first step was to break the continuum/nexus between owned and feral populations by addressing the large group of semi-owned cats - the key finding being 22% of people feed a cat they don't own believing they are doing the right thing by preventing starvation. This crystallized the Key Campaign Message – feeders must take ownership of the cat or call their Council, continuing to just feed them was feeding a bigger problem. Once ownership is accepted then responsible actions are desexing, microchipping, registration.
  - b. Research had defined the target audience as above and identified reasons for their behaviour
  - c. Behavioural (feeding to not feeding) and Attitudinal (I don't own it to responsible ownership or call the local council) change was required
  - d. One single powerful proposition needed
  - e. Emotive and hard hitting approach necessary to convey the problem's enormity and play on emotions

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f. Message needed to engage feeders, one on one to question their actions so the bigger picture was seen, and encourage them “not to feed a bigger problem”, but to take ownership or call their Council.

g. Message must be fully integrated across multichannel media to provide consistent exposure to effect long term behavioural and attitudinal change

h. Expected Impact

- |            |                                                         |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Short term | increased shelter intake                                |
|            | increased new veterinary cat clientele                  |
|            | increased cat registrations                             |
| Long term  | Reduced shelter intake                                  |
|            | Reduced production of surplus kittens                   |
|            | Fewer cats entering unowned colonies, reducing nuisance |
|            | Cat's image improved                                    |
|            | Increase in responsibly owned cats                      |

### Creative Concept

The creative concept “Who’s for Cats” was developed to maximise campaign impact by contrasting to the popular Pal “We’re for Dogs” advertisements

#### Stage One

Shows people feeding cats and asks “Who’s for Cats? Are you feeding a bigger problem? The images explain that the feeder is not for cats and why and asks them not to just feed but take ownership or call their council

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### Stage Two

Examples of everyday people taking positive action, making them heroes and affirming they are for cats and doing the right thing



### Development of Operational Materials

Concepts developed, production of materials began:



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1. The WFC brand (red collar with tag signifying ownership) was developed and registered as a trademark
2. CSA TV, radio and print ads were produced
3. Brochures and posters were produced - 70,000 distributed to date
4. The WFC website was developed as the central information resource providing detailed information on actions people can take –currently receiving 600 visits/month
5. Campaign phone number assigned
6. Media kits/releases were produced
7. WFC T shirts produced for front line shelter staff

## Implementation

While materials were produced, agreement, sign off and resource commitment was obtained from all stakeholders and a communication plan developed:

1. First round of CSA went to air in November 2007 – TV, radio and print
2. The Minister for Agriculture, Joe Helper MP officially launched WFC in December 2007 alongside a concentrated media/PR campaign. Extensive local print and radio coverage, several articles in state papers were obtained



Minister Helper & Celebrity Spokesperson Tracy Bartram at the launch

3. WFC material was widely disseminated via stakeholder networks, publications, websites, venues and events, eg expos, all Victorian veterinary clinics, pet shops and DAB
4. The TV CSA was uploaded to YouTube - 3000 visits to date
5. Recognition in advertising industry publications eg Australian Creative Magazine

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6. Incorporation of WFC into the Victorian Government's RPO Education Program which is built into the primary school curriculum – sessions include airing the TV CSA, discussing the statistics and sending WFC material home to the family
7. Local council briefings were held to encourage councils to adopt the campaign and incorporate it into their DAM Plans currently being formulated
8. Presentations to interested groups both State and National promoting WFC
9. Operational assistance given via:
  - a. Provision of 50 WFC traps to shelters to assist collection of the unwanted cats
  - b. Animal welfare agencies ran an incentive program (desexing, vaccination and microchipping for \$60) to encourage ownership uptake in May (83 cats) with another planned for September

## Evaluation

### *Current*

1. DPI Customer Service survey of callers to the campaign phone number

Is the WFC campaign effective in raising awareness?

Yes 60%          No 0%          Don't Know 40%

Would you change your behaviour?

Yes 64%          No 12%          Maybe 24%

2. Evidence of behavioural change – RSPCA Inspectorate reports 40% increase in calls re cats cf 5% decrease for dogs
3. Shelters receiving record cat intakes
4. Very positive stakeholder feedback with expressions of interest from other States to use WFC

### *Planned future measurement*

1. Second survey to determine the % of semi-owners - hopefully finding a decrease.
2. Comparison of cat impoundment/euthanasia statistics before / after the campaign.



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3. Measuring outputs eg publications produced, website hits, media interest
4. Surveying stakeholders for feedback.

### Future Direction

1. Continuing the above activities
2. Interstate uptake
3. Development of the next message will depend heavily on ongoing funding

### Conclusion

Thank you to the Victorian Government for supporting this initiative and providing the research tools to clearly identify the issues; to The Surgery's creative team who developed the educational vehicles to convey the messages and to all stakeholders involved in the deliberations, many challenging discussions and amazing synergy that led us here. This has enabled the felines of Australia to ask their community Who's for Cats?

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## Appendix One

### Definitions – the Cat Continuum

#### Category 1 – Domestic Responsibly Owned Cat

These cats are owned by an individual, household or business and their primary source of food and shelter is provided by the owner on the owner's property. In addition, the owner has accepted full responsibility for the cat's welfare and behaviour. These cats are identified, registered, desexed and confined at least at night.

Characteristics:

- comprise 41% of the owned cat population (in Victoria estimated at 616,000)<sup>8</sup>

- High percentage are desexed 82%<sup>8, 15</sup>

- may become lost and comprise some of the 3.87 % reclaimed through shelters  
0.2% of the overall shelter intake<sup>6</sup>

- Literature searches show 15-18% of cats have had one litter before desexing  
Victorian figure is 13%<sup>19,22</sup>

- 90% of owners desex their female cat and 89% desex their male cat, but under  
6 months of age only 33% are desexed<sup>15,19</sup>

#### Category 2 - Domestic Irresponsibly Owned Cat

These cats are owned by an individual, household or business (If relinquished to a shelter, the person claims ownership on surrender). Their primary source of food and shelter is provided by the owner usually on their property. Typically, these owners will take some responsibility for the cat in addition to feeding it, but generally, these cats

are

not permanently identified, though some wear collars, nor registered, and are seldom desexed. They are however handleable and make good pet cats .

- comprise 59% of the owned cat population, 7.6% are desexed<sup>6,8</sup>

- may become lost and comprise some of the 3.87% reclaimed through shelters  
represent 20% of shelter intake<sup>6</sup>

#### Category 3 - Semi -Owned Cat



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These cats are semi-owned by an individual, household or business. Their primary source of food and shelter is provided by the semi-owner usually on their property. Typically, the semi-owner will take no responsibility for the cat even though they are feeding it – 22% of the population do this<sup>19</sup>. These cats are not identified nor registered, rarely desexed and the semi-owner takes no responsibility for the cats welfare nor behaviour. These are less friendly cats, but would make good pet cats with care. comprise 40% of shelter intake, 0% are registered, 0% are microchipped 1.5% are desexed

#### **Category 4 - Unowned Wild Cat**

These cats are those that are found in and around cities, towns and rural properties. They generally depend on some resources provided by humans (cat-feeders, rubbish) but are not owned. Typically they are in poor condition, diseased, are unable to be handled and live in colonies. Although these colonies are self sustaining, these cats originally came from the owned population. Removal of humans would change their ecology. These will not make good pets.

comprise 38.7% of intake

0% are registered and 0.1% are desexed

#### **Category 5 - Feral Cat**

These cats are independent of humans, living and reproducing in the wild obtaining their food by hunting and scavenging. None of their needs are intentionally being met by humans, therefore removal of humans would not directly change their ecology. rarely seen in suburban shelters, colonies are self sustaining and can be replenished from the surplus or irresponsibly owned cats from the other categories.

Individuals may move from one category to another. It is very important to acknowledge that all cats are biologically the same ie the domestic and feral cat are the same species. The difference between the two is only in the degree of domestication or socialisation, there being a very fine line between a cat being a companion animal and a feral creature. The critical socialisation period for kittens

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appears to be 4 - 8 weeks of age, some authors cite 2-7 weeks, but it is essential they receive human contact early in life. Domestication of feral/wild kittens is possible if they are removed from their environment and socialised with humans during this time. Similarly if kittens of a domestic cat are not handled and socialised at a similar age they become wild and unhandleable. Food is a major driving factor and even feral cats will readily co-exist with humans during drought and food shortage. They may and certainly do interbreed. It is therefore important from a management perspective to identify the category of cat one is dealing with as management actions may differ according to the different category of cat involved. Where domestic cats (Category 1, and 2) are the primary cause, management is likely to concentrate on owners and consist of education and legislation to promote responsible ownership in particular desexing. In this case both incentives such as subsidised desexing programs and legislation to enforce this if owners refuse to comply are essential. For feral cats the requirement will be to reduce numbers or inhibit predation using a variety of techniques. The management of Category 3 cats will focus on educating the feeder/semi-owner to take responsibility or surrender to a shelter. The management of Category 4 cats usually requires a combination of both technical and social approaches – to remove the colonies and to prevent replenishment from Category 2 and 3 cats. This is why it is important to develop holistic cat management plans. If this is not done, eg if unowned cats are trapped and removed without managing the other categories, the problem is quickly replenished from the irresponsibly owned cats.

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## Appendix Two

### Reproductive Capacity of the Cat

- ❖ The feline literature cites female cats as beginning to cycle from 4 months of age. Gestation is 63 +/- 2 days so that they can be giving birth to their first litter by 6 months of age. Currently the commonly recommended age that cats be desexed is 6 months so that quite unknowingly the cat can become pregnant before the owner has considered having it 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%.
- ❖ Cats are seasonally polyoestrus - this means that there is usually a distinctive period during the year when they cycle (commonly known as kitten season). Cycling is induced by increasing day length. Ambient temperature also plays a part in that the season is extended in warm years. Cats were originally desert animals surviving best in warm dry climates. In 14 hours of light per day they will breed continuously through the year – in fact an Australian study has shown that even in natural photoperiod, they can breed all year long, though more kittens are born in spring.
- ❖ The female cat cycles every 14-16 days (oestrus or heat lasts an average 6-7 days and interoestrus lasts an average 8-9 days) and continues to cycle until she is mated. (this differs from dogs which cycle generally twice a year). During this time she is very vocal (noise complaints) and desperate to get outside to be mated. Due to the vocalization, male cats are attracted to the area increasing noise, fighting, urine spraying etc. and adding to the nuisance complaint. Cats begin to cycle again as early as 3 weeks post partum with the average being 6 weeks.
- ❖ 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 (this author's calculation and experience) Other calculations have cited one cat producing 2- 3 litters per year of between 2 - 9 kittens (mean litter size is 4.4). An estimation from a USA study cites that in 7 years, a female cat and her young can produce 420,000



- cats. Most births are in the warmer weather from spring to late summer. Unowned cat population reproduction is more strongly influenced by environmental conditions with litters raised in sheltered sites such as dense vegetation, under buildings etc.
- ✦ If 1 cat in 50 remains entire, the population will regenerate in 12 months. A survey of urban cats showed that 2.5% of the population remaining entire would be sufficient to regenerate the colony<sup>(5)</sup> A study of pet cats in a Kansas community<sup>(10)</sup> estimated that desexing 76-88% of the females would result in zero population growth depending on the percentage of the remaining intact animals which reproduced - However from Australian studies this appears to be a low desexing percentage as Australia's climatic conditions are more favorable to survival i.e. mortality rates are lower. Sweden for example reports that there is not a stray cat problem as they die of cold during winter. A USA study showed that on average cats had 4.25 kittens, 2.1 times per year with a mortality of approx 30% (usually close to birth).<sup>14</sup>
  - ✦ Undesexed female cats roam widely looking for males and call incessantly to attract the male usually at night, as cats are crepuscular (active at dusk and dawn). CPS statistics show, from 10,291 complaints from 7 Councils over a 5 year period, that 82% of the complaints relate to undesexed cat behaviour, and 84% of the cats causing the nuisance were not desexed. DAMIC Bench-marking Survey supported this in that the majority of cat complaints related to trespass (3.81% of the registered cat population - 6.11 complaints per 1000 households)<sup>8</sup>
  - ✦ Undesexed male cats roam widely looking for females, fight for territory and mates (usually at night) and spray urine to mark territory, causing the majority of complaints to Local Councils.
  - ✦ Female cats that are confined and not mated have a high incidence of ovarian cyst development which requires medical/surgical treatment - this is because unless they are mated ovulation does not occur.
  - ✦ The average lifespan of a domestic cat from surveys is 7 years - that for an undesexed cat is three years as compared to fifteen years for a desexed cat. Dr Roger Nassar (Las Vegas Study from Kansas State University in 1981) reported

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average life span of owned cats was 7.02 years. Ellen Berkeley (Maverick Cats 1982) reported average life span of feral cats is 2 -3 years and that only 33% of feral kittens are alive at age 1 year

- ❖ CPS statistics show that on average 52% of cats received are female and 48% are male. The Reark study<sup>(15)</sup> showed that 55.8% are female and 44.2% are male and the 1995 McHarg study that 57% of cats are female, 43% are male <sup>(7)</sup>
- ❖ A USA study found that in owned cats whilst the ratio of females to males is initially 50/50, by the time the cats are ten years old, the ratio is 70/30. In contrast in unowned cats, as they approach the average life span of three years, the ratio is 35/65 probably because there is a very high mortality among the queens during pregnancy and delivery.

Using conservative estimates from the above, which is 4.2 kittens per litter and 2.1 litters per year and factor in mortality of kittens (at 30%), and use current desexing percentages then we are producing 2.4 times the number of kittens needed to replenish the population lost through natural attrition. The surplus kittens are those received and euthanased by shelters with only one in four finding a new home ie it is this remarkable reproductive capacity which has led to the tragic problem of overpopulation.

The reason that shelters are still inundated with kittens despite a declining owned cat population can be explained by the following:

- ❖ 82-94% of the Registered Owned Cat Population is Desexed depending on study referred to, however only 41% of the owned population is registered
- ❖ Only 7.6% of unregistered owned cats are desexed
- ❖ Only 33% of cats under 6 months of age are desexed, and only 70% at 6 months of age
- ❖ Only 1.5% of Semi-owned cats are desexed
- ❖ 13% of female cats have had at least one litter before being desexed .

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## Appendix Three

### Results of the Cat Tracking Project

Tracked 25,810 cats through 3 shelters over 13 months

- 🐾 Confirmed an oversupply of cats in Victoria
- 🐾 Shelter intake of cats fluctuates seasonally with two peak intakes of kittens in December and March.
- 🐾 78.51% were stray admissions, 21% surrenders by their owners
- 🐾 No 1 reason (36.4%) for surrender - "Too many cats"
- 🐾 58% of all admissions were kittens, 23.4% without the mother – 40% of euthanased kittens were sociable, 18% were too young
- 🐾 Overall 2.81% were desexed, only 7.6% of surrenders were desexed and only 1.2% were registered
- 🐾 47.8% of queens with litters were juvenile, only 9.7% were feral.
- 🐾 72.8% received optimum body score
- 🐾 38.7% were trapped colony cats
- 🐾 Cat flu was recorded in 31.2% overall and in 77% of colony cats
- 🐾 Overall, 64% were euthanased, 32% rehoused and 4% reclaimed
- 🐾 Study provided strong evidence that there is a group of cat owners in the community who, although they claim ownership of their cat when relinquishing it to a shelter, do not register nor desex the animal
- 🐾 Study showed that the person bringing in kittens is a possible access point to the fertile queen to enable desexing to prevent further kittens being born.