

Meeting in the middle:

Managing stray cat populations in Australia

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What is a Stray Cat?

Street cat

Free-roaming cat

Semi-feral cat

Unowned cat

Alley cat

Lost cat

Street cat

Semi-owned cat

Barn cat

Colony cat

Community cat

Feral cat

- ~ 0.71 million strays in Australia
- ~ 50% of shelter intakes are 'stray'
- ~ 15% of stray population processed by charities



Sources of Stray Cats

1. Lost or abandoned pets
2. Accidental/unwanted breeding of pet cats
3. Breeding by unowned cats



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Legislation (& enforcement!) for increased responsible ownership

Sources of Stray Cats

1. Lost or abandoned pets

2. Accidental/unwanted breeding of pet cats

3. Breeding by unowned cats



?? ??

Australian Legislation for Stray Cats

- Grey zone, too difficult...
- Open to interpretation – Public/controllers determine whether cat is a ‘nuisance’, guess ownership status & assess temperament



e.g. Seizure of ‘free-roaming’ cats

Appears to be unowned

Present on, or damage to, private property

Excessive, constant noise

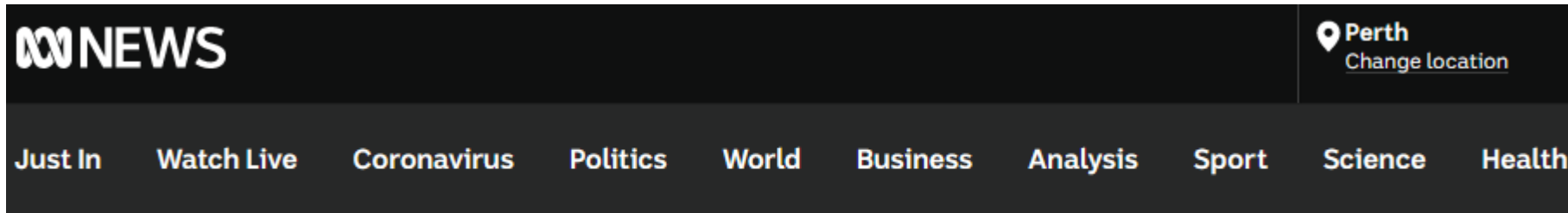
Public areas with food/Threatens public health

Primary production land/>1km from any residence

Conservation/Protected areas

Australian Legislation for Stray Cats

- Open to abuse



Alice Springs man fined for using metal traps to catch cats

[ABC Alice Springs](#) / By Mitchell Abram

Posted Fri 18 Dec 2020 at 11:11 am



Why should you care about Stray Cats?

Australian Cats	Pet Cats	Stray Cats	Feral Cats
Population Density	Low-High	Medium-High	Low
Average Age	Long lived 7 yrs	Short lived 2.5 yrs	Short lived 2.8 yrs
Subject to Elements	No	Somewhat	Yes
Food Source	Pet food, wildlife	Scavenging, pet food, wildlife	Wildlife, scavenging
% Population Breeding	<20%	98%	100%
Worming treatment	Majority	Colony – one off	None
Vaccinations	Majority	Colony – one off	None

Why should you care about Stray Cats?

- Stray cats are most vulnerable to poor health & welfare



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Published Australian Studies (1960-2016)

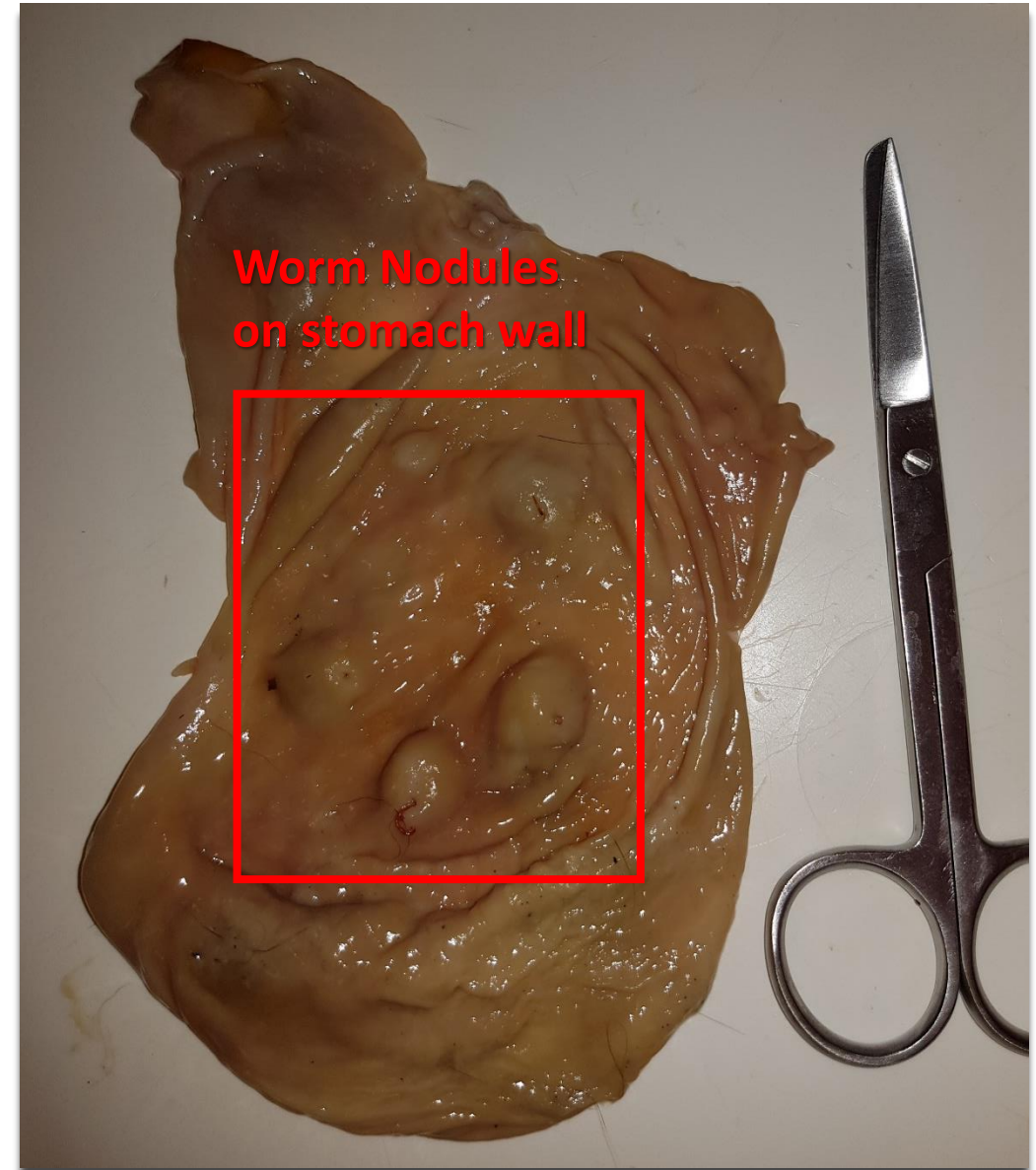
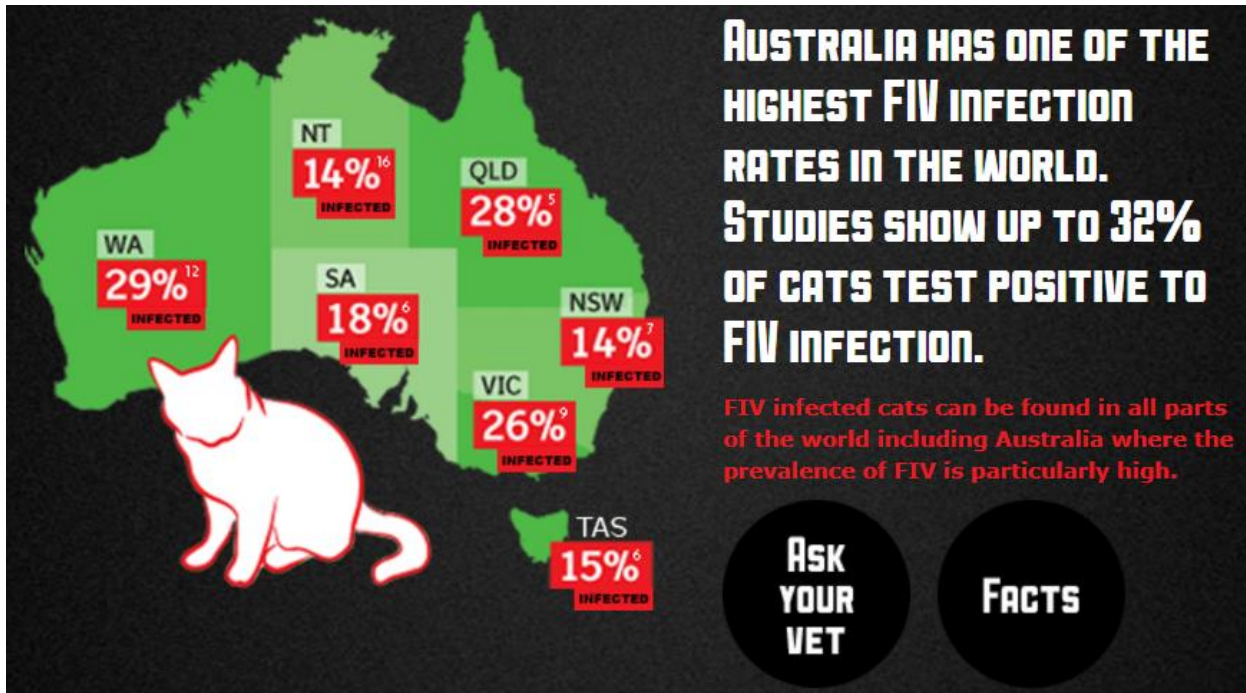
	Infectious Agent	Pet Cat	Stray Cat	Feral Cat
Viruses	Feline Immunodeficiency Virus	✓	✓	✓
	Feline Leukaemia Virus	✓		
	Feline Herpes Virus	✓		✓
	Feline Calicivirus			✓
	Feline Corona Virus	✓		
	Feline Immunodeficiency Virus	✓		
	Feline Leukaemia Virus	✓		
Cestodes	<i>Spirometra erinacei</i> *	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Taenia taeniaeformis</i> *	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Dipylidium caninum</i> *	✓	✓	✓
Nematodes	<i>Ancylostoma</i> spp. *	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Uncinaria stenocephala</i> *	✓		✓
	<i>Toxocara cati</i> *	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Toxascaris leonina</i> *	✓		✓

Why should you care about Stray Cats?

Many are sick with viruses & bacteria

Majority host gastro parasites (e.g. 95% of 188 strays in Perth)

FIV cats actively rehomed by shelters - allowed to roam?



Why should you care about Stray Cats?

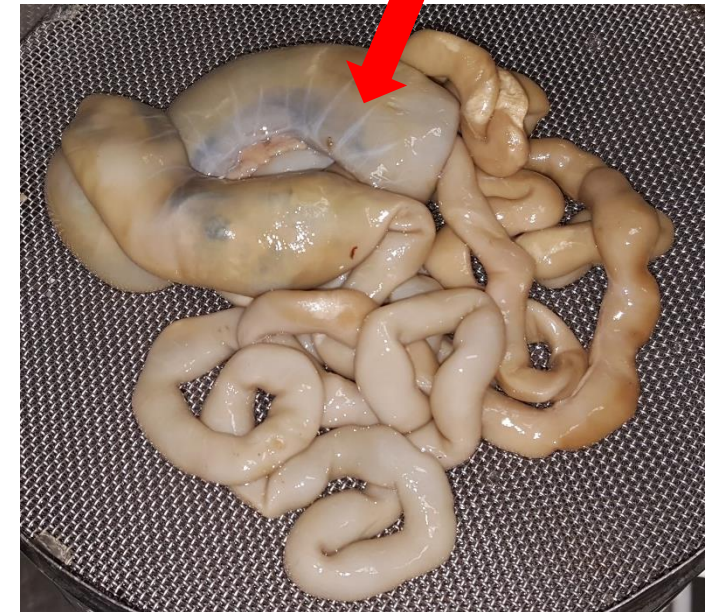
Look good but are not well

Survival is being boosted by feeders/caretakers, especially female cats

Constant reproduction – Breeding females aged 5 months to 7.5 years, av. 4 kittens

57% had eaten human refuse, including non-digestible items

*Plastic blockage
Intestine dying...*



Why should you care about Stray Cats?

Breeding colony of fairy terns in Mandurah, WA

Single 'unowned' desexed male cat

Entered breeding sanctuary over 6 nights

Decapitated 6 breeding adults

40 chicks found missing, injured or dead

= Colony failure



“These (local extirpations) can be so rapid that they are easily overlooked.”

Who currently cares about Stray Cats?

'Stray management' is sporadic, usually privately funded & often covert.

Carried out by those most motivated to 'save' stray cats.

- Concerned citizens
- Animal charity groups
- Foster teams
- Hoarders (mental illness)
- Feeders/Caretakers
- Select veterinarians
- Cat activists/Lobbyists



The Australian Cat Action Plan

Animal Welfare League of Queensland

*'Getting to Zero' Euthanasias **

(* of healthy animals)



- Australian Cat Federation
- Australian National Cats
- Australian Institute of Animal Management
- Animals Australia
- Australian Wildlife Rehabilitation Council
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Sentient
- AWLA
- RSPCA Australia
- National Animal Rescue Groups of Australia.



**10x Cat Issues identified
& Strategies developed**

The Australian Cat Action Plan

Animal Welfare League of Queensland



No Australian ecologists consulted

Impact on wildlife attributed to human actions not cats

“This document will become the blueprint for all to use in negotiations with relevant governments & organisations to develop a cohesive national system to reduce the proliferation of abandoned & poorly managed domestic cats (i.e. owned, semi-owned, & unowned (with some direct or indirect dependence on humans) in cities/towns) in Australia.”

3. Breeding by unowned cats

= Trap-Neuter-Release of Strays

New 'Evidence' for TNR success
in Australia

Tan *et al.* (2017).

Swarbrick & Rand (2018).

Wolf *et al.* (2019).

Rand *et al.* (2018).

Huang *et al.* (2018).

Zito *et al.* (2018).

- Overturn illegality of TNR in Australia
- Subtle inclusions in paper discussions, rebranding TNR
- Select referencing of 'successful' TNR programs
- Written with lobbyists often USA



Legislation vs. The Australian Cat Action Plan

Pets

No outdoor access/Curfews



Strays

No euthanasia in urban areas = TNR



Ferals

Lethal control of all cats
in non-urban areas



Extend definition of feral cats to include strays

Pets

No outdoor access/Curfews



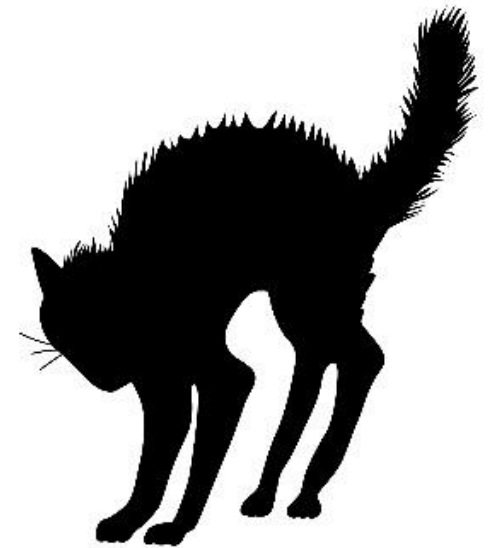
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Port of Newcastle's Stockton breakwall cat cull sparks fury after animals maimed

ABC Newcastle / By Giselle Wakatama, Bridget Murphy and Madeline Lewis

Posted Sun 20 Dec 2020 at 11:36am, updated Sun 20 Dec 2020 at 11:59am



TNR colony

Cull due to the increasing risks the cats were posing to the community & the environment.

Engaged a licenced & experienced external contractor to shoot cats.

"The outcome is distressing and does not meet our expectations nor align with the values of the organisation"

Future Cat Management

- Using 2 categories instead of 3 may make it easier to 'deal with' cats in some areas
- However, the public is watching & is vocal
- Bad press = loss of social license
- Confusing & Polarising – Save all vs. Kill all
- Undo all the excellent work on cats in Australia
- Unified approach to pet, stray & feral legislations
within/across states



References:

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- Google images @2023

Thank you!

