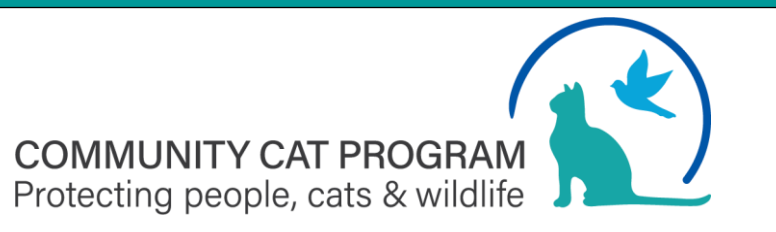


# Funding Proposal IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL Community Cat Program



June 2020



## FUNDING PROPOSAL | IPSWICH CITY COUNCIL

### COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM

**Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is seeking funding and support for a ground-breaking local Community Cat Program for the City of Ipswich.**

#### Executive Summary

- City of Ipswich's current **approach for managing stray cats** is **costly** (in excess of \$1 million each year) and relies on an out-dated approach that: (1) is **not effective** in reducing the overall number of strays in the community; and (2) **does not reflect community views** about the management of strays.
- Any healthy stray kittens/cats that are caught and cannot be adopted are currently euthanased (i.e. **'catch, adopt or kill'**). Only 24% of surveyed Ipswich residents support this method of management, while **94% of Ipswich residents support an alternative approach** - desexing and returning healthy cats to where they live. This alternative (known as a **'Community Cat Program'**) has been shown overseas to be significantly more effective in reducing cat-related complaints, reducing biosecurity risks and reducing the overall number of strays over time.
- The Australian Pet Welfare is leading a **collaborative, evidence-based project** to confirm the effectiveness of this approach in the Australian context. This program has the support of **20 national and international industry partners** (including University of Queensland, four other Australian universities, RSPCA Queensland, Greencross and MSD Animal Health) and has already secured the necessary permits from Biosecurity Queensland.
- While discussions are currently underway with other councils around Australia, **City of Ipswich is the preferred 'flagship site'** for this research. This will only be possible through close collaboration and support from the City of Ipswich.
- This proposal seeks the **support and investment** of the Ipswich City Council through:
  - Funding of \$30,000 each year (for the five years of the program), as a partial contribution towards research resourcing costs
  - Additional support through:
    - A City of Ipswich seconded part-time community liaison officer (or \$40,000 additional project funding per year); and
    - In-kind support for community communication, assistance with transport of cats and microchips.
- This project is expected to deliver **significant community and financial benefits** for the City of Ipswich, including:
  - ✓ Direct investment of more than \$1.7 million from partners in desexing, vaccines, parasite control, project management, research and reporting costs
  - ✓ Reduction in cat-related complaints (down 50% from current levels of 200 per year)
  - ✓ Reduction of recurring annual cat management costs (up to \$500,000 per year)
  - ✓ Significantly reduced cat impoundments and euthanasia (down 30-70% over 3 years)
  - ✓ Reduced bio-security risks from free-roaming undesexed cats
  - ✓ Saving of approximately \$1 million in infrastructure costs for the proposed new animal shelter (due to reduced need for space).

**This program will gain the City of Ipswich national and international recognition as a leader in effective urban cat management. It better aligns with community preferences and priorities for local cat management, and will significantly reduce the number of stray cats and the problems they currently cause.**

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# COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM

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### 1. Overview

- The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is offering the City of Ipswich the opportunity to lead Australia in effective management of urban cats through a targeted campaign of high-intensity desexing.
- As part of this Community Cat Program, urban stray cats will be captured, desexed, vaccinated, microchipped and treated for parasites. Socialised cats and kittens will be adopted whenever possible, while unsocialised but healthy cats are returned to their original location. This will be coupled with community messaging on practical implementation of responsible cat caring behaviours.
- The research will involve assessing the impact of this program on a range of measures of interest to both councils and the community (see Appendix 1 - Research aims).
- In addition to significant financial and community benefits across Ipswich (see section 9), the research findings will be published in international journals and promoted widely. This will include recognising the leadership and support of the City of Ipswich.

### 2. Project objectives for ICC

1. Reduce City of Ipswich annual costs associated with cat management
2. Reduce euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats impounded by the City of Ipswich from a current 14% to less than 5% over 3 years
3. Reduce cat-related complaints to the Ipswich Council by more than 50% from the current 200 per year
4. Reduce costs associated with cat facilities at the new shelter
5. Position the City of Ipswich as the leading council in Australia for urban cat management.

### 3. About the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF)

- The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is the peak research body and advocate for pet welfare in Australia. As a not-for-profit organisation, APWF specialises in evidence-based solutions for saving the lives of pets and people.
- APWF is led by Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand, who has worked extensively in shelter research over the last 14 years, including collaborative studies with the RSPCA and the Animal Welfare League. Over that time, RSPCA Qld's euthanasia rate for cats has decreased from 58% to 15%, and they are leading Australian RSPCAs in saving cats.
- Professor Rand has a long track record in delivering industry-relevant research outcomes and has authored over 115 journal articles, 118 abstracts, and 42 book chapters, and is editor of three books.

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#### 4. Current context (Animal management in the City of Ipswich)

- Management of cats by the Ipswich City Council (ICC) is currently costly.
  - The RSPCA contract to manage impounded dogs and cats costs approx. \$2.1 million per year (approx. \$500/dog or cat managed) with approximately half the estimated costs being due to cat impoundments.
  - Any healthy stray cats that cannot be adopted are euthanased.
  - Other costs to ICC are associated with managing cat-related complaints (approx. 200 per year) by Animal Management Officers (in excess of 200 hours/year), and providing trap cages (500 requests/year).
- The City of Ipswich impounded 1,896 cats in 2019 (9.5 cats/1000 residents). Total cat intake into RSPCA shelters from the City of Ipswich is approximately 3220 cats/ year (16 cats/1000 residents), which includes stray and owned cats brought directly to the shelter, in addition to impounded cats from the council. These rates are higher than the Australian average, due to a higher number of free roaming cats in Ipswich.
- Free-roaming cats, cat impoundments and cat-related complaints are commonly higher in socioeconomically disadvantaged suburbs where desexing is unaffordable and many of the properties are rented (making cat confinement difficult and unaffordable).
  - Cost of desexing, microchipping and vaccination for a female cat is typically in excess of \$300
  - Cost of a cat proof enclosure or other cat containment system is typically \$1,000-\$2,000
  - Some suburbs such as Rosewood have 250% higher cat impoundments than average for Australia. Median personal weekly income in Rosewood is \$514, and 25% of households live on less than \$650/week (average number of people in household = 2.5)
- Stray cats comprise 98% of the impoundments managed under the RSPCA contract and the majority (>80%) of cats entering RSPCA shelters from the City of Ipswich
- Kittens (< 4 months of age) comprise 43% of impounded cats and 41% of RSPCA admissions from the City of Ipswich.
- Return to owner rates are 10% for impounded cats, and 9% overall for all cats admitted to RSPCA shelters from the City of Ipswich. In Victoria, reclaim rates of 30-60% are being achieved by some councils.
- Euthanasia rates are 14% for impounded cats, and 18% overall for all cats admitted to RSPCA shelters from the City of Ipswich
- Free-roaming cats pose a biosecurity risk to the health of humans and pets. Undesexed free roaming cats also negatively impact Ipswich's social amenity and generate complaints to council by fighting at night and soiling property.
- The current method of cat management is also contributing to mental health damage of shelter staff tasked with killing healthy cats and kittens. Mental health disorders including post-traumatic stress disorders and increased suicide risk are documented in shelter and animal control staff tasked with killing healthy and treatable animals (Frommer 1999, Rohlf & Bennett 2005, Reeve 2005, Baran 2009, Scotney et al. 2015, Tiesman 2015).
- The current animal facilities are old and are flood prone. There is an expectation under the RSPCA contract that these will be replaced by new facilities at a more appropriate site. The estimated cost in 2016-17 was approximately \$5 million.

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#### 5. Community views

- Only 24% of residents surveyed in Ipswich are supportive of using euthanasia to manage stray cats which cannot be readily adopted; 94% are supportive of desexing and returning healthy cats to where they live. (This was based on a doorknocking survey in the area, conducted pre-COVID19 in early 2020; see Appendix 2 - Ipswich survey results)
- This aligns with similar Australian community sentiment research. An Australia-wide survey in 2015 with 1239 respondents<sup>1</sup> asked the question:  
*“Overseas, programs exist where stray suburban cats are captured, desexed (spayed/neutered), then returned to where they were captured. These programs have been shown to reduce the number of complaints about these cats and to reduce the numbers of stray cats and kittens put to sleep in shelters. Would you support a trial project like this in a specified area near you?”*  
82% of respondents said **YES**. This was despite 70% saying they believed cats had a negative effect on wildlife in their area (24% said this for dogs).
- A study from residents in the Brisbane City Council area, found that 78% of people preferred non-lethal management methods based on desexing and returning stray cats, and only 18% preferred the current method based on trapping and killing most trapped cats (Rand et al. 2019).

#### 6. International and Australian evidence and research

- Published reports from North America and Europe clearly demonstrate that desexing and adopting or returning urban stray cats to their original location markedly reduces cat-related complaints and euthanasia rates in shelters and pounds (Levy 2014 - see Figure Appendix 3, Spehar & Wolf, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). An adult cat desexing target of about 54% gives effective change. Returning adult cats also prevents a “vacuum” effect, where removed cats are rapidly replaced by cats from surrounding areas if the majority of adult cats are removed, instead of being returned.
- Further supporting the return of stray cats to their original location is that in most cases, they are being cared for by someone who does not perceive themselves as the owner (termed a semi-owner). Research shows that 3-9% of the adult Australian population feed daily, one or more cats they do not consider they own. (Rand 2019, Zito 2015)
- Over time, colonies managed by desexing, adopting or returning, decrease in size with a 30% reduction in numbers of cats reported from two Australian studies over 2 years and 50% over 5 years (Tan 2017, Swarbrick 2018). Euthanasia is reduced by approximately 80% over 2 to 3 years.
- A free desexing program targeted at cat owners and semi-owners (who agree to become owners) in the City of Banyule, Victoria, reduced cat impoundments from 6.3 cats to 1.7 cats/1000 residents over 7 years. Fewer cats were desexed than is proposed for the City of Ipswich, unowned cats could not be desexed because of Victorian legislation, and targeting to high intake areas only occurred in half of the 7 year program, hence a slower reduction occurred in cat impoundments than is anticipated with the City of Ipswich program.

#### 7. Project approach and milestones

- Project activities within the City of Ipswich will involve two key phases of activity over a period of five years:

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished data, Franklin



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1. Conducting a 'location pilot' in Rosewood, to refine methods and document the benefit to council and the community
  2. Roll out across the City of Ipswich to achieve broader benefits and impact.
- Throughout this period, insights would be shared regularly with ICC to help inform policy and funding decisions.
- Data will be collected in multiple fields of research over the duration of the project to evaluate and report on its impact. This will be undertaken by a diverse and expert multidisciplinary international team of researchers, including veterinarians, ecologists, economists, shelter experts, psychologists, infectious disease experts, animal behaviour, welfare and ethics, and biosecurity representatives (see Appendix 4 - Industry partners).
  - While Community Cat Programs have proven to be effective and cost-efficient overseas, matters are complicated in Australia by complex procedural requirements under existing legislation. Australian Pet Welfare Foundation has successfully navigated the challenging process of securing various required permits through The University of Queensland and Biosecurity Queensland - a first for Australia. No procedural or legal barriers are anticipated in association with the research.
  - APWF and Emeritus Professor Rand will assume overall project delivery responsibility and undertake the following to ensure the success of the project and its value for ICC:
    - a. Animal ethics approvals for the project and compliance with reporting conditions
    - b. Biosecurity Permit secured for handling restricted matter (Permit holder – The University of Qld) and compliance with conditions
    - c. Support from corporate partners to assist with cash and in-kind funding for the project, and ongoing reporting on project progress
    - d. Engagement with collaborating veterinary practices undertaking desexing, and provide them with standard operating procedures and training for handling unsocialised cats and restricted matter
    - e. Development of Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines and provision to council staff for trapping and return of cats
    - f. Material for community messaging about the program, and responsible cat caring behaviours
    - g. Oversight of the operations and research components of the program.
  - A series of collaborative working groups have already been established. Representatives of ICC would be welcome to join one or more of these groups.
  - A report summarising the progress of the project will be provided every six months, including numbers of cats desexed, data collected relating to the various aims of the project, data analysis and writing of reports for publication. (NB. all published scientific papers emanating from the project, and talks reporting data, will recognise the contribution of the City of Ipswich.)
  - Baseline data collection is already underway in Rosewood, with the placement of motion detecting cameras to determine free-roaming cat numbers. In the absence of any delays, and pending approval of this proposal, the following milestones are anticipated:

|               |                                                                                                                             |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| December 2020 | Preliminary results from community surveys (Rosewood)                                                                       |
| July 2021     | Year 1 impact results for numbers of cats impounded, reclaimed and euthanased, and cat-related complaints                   |
| January 2021  | Preliminary results of the "location pilot" and refining methodology<br>Recommendations re. broader roll out across Ipswich |

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#### Proposed contribution from ICC

To support City of Ipswich as the flagship project site, the following funding and support is requested:

- \$30,000 funding to Australian Pet Welfare Foundation per annum from July 1, 2020 for the five years of the program.
- Secondment of City of Ipswich half-time community liaison officer to assist in project delivery for the five years of the program. Alternately the City of Ipswich can opt to provide an additional \$40,000 of funding per annum.
- Use of trap cages for cats (APWF will provide 22 trap cages for the project)
- Assistance with transport of cats to the participating veterinary practices and return to residents
- Assistance with community information messaging about the program and responsible cat caring behaviours
- 2000 microchips (not inclusive of registration) valued at \$10,000

#### 8. Benefits for the City of Ipswich

The Community Cat Program will reduce stray cats and the problems they create (including the financial burden of ongoing management). It is expected that this will include the following community outcomes and financial benefits for the City of Ipswich:

- a. Investment of more than \$1.7 million over five years in the most disadvantaged areas of Ipswich. For example, Greencross will invest \$500,000 in desexing over 4 years and MSD Animal Health will contribute \$200,000 in vaccines and parasite control.
- b. Contribution from APWF of more than \$500,000 in project management and research staff costs. It will coordinate the operation and research components of the project. This includes overseeing collection, analysis and publication of data designed to evaluate the effect of targeted desexing of over 3000 cats in the City of Ipswich
- c. Decreased cat intake by 30%-70% over 3 years with 600-1300 fewer impoundments per year, and 1000-2000 fewer cat admissions from the City of Ipswich to RSPCA shelters
- d. Increased numbers of microchipped cats, and improved owner reclaim rate of impounded cats
- e. Potential savings in the order of \$250,000-500,000/year with next RSPCA contract.
- f. Potential savings of \$1 million on cat housing in the new shelter (reported estimated cost in 2016-17 was \$5 million).
- g. Additional benefits due to the reduced stray cat numbers and increased proportion of desexed cats:
  - Markedly reduced cat-related calls and cat trapping.
  - Less nuisance behaviours, such as roaming, spraying, fighting, noise and property damage.
  - Decreased risk of disease to residents and pets.
  - Decreased wildlife predation.
- h. Increased responsible cat-caring behaviours by residents.
- i. Better alignment of ICC approach with community values and views.

City of Ipswich could be the first council in Australia to get to less than 5% euthanasia of cats. The council would be recognised as a leader in urban cat management in

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international research publications emanating from the project, and in national and international research presentations.

#### 9. Alternative options

- If this funding proposal is not approved, the 'location pilot' at Rosewood will proceed; however, APWF will pursue opportunities with other councils to act as the flagship site for a city wide program.
- For ICC, in terms of alternative options for animal management, there are two available:
  1. Continuing the current approach; and
  2. High intensity culling.
- Continuing **Ipswich City Council's current approach** will not result in substantial improvements in cat impoundments or costs. Euthanasing impounded cats that are not adoptable removes approximately 5% of the urban stray cat stray population annually, but these cats are rapidly replaced because of the high reproductive rate of cats, resulting in the same number of kittens and cats the following year.
- Alternative management such as **high intensity culling** is theoretically effective in reducing cat populations, but is highly cost prohibitive and usually controversial.
  - To be effective, 30% to 50% of the population needs to be culled every 6 months for more than 10 years (Boone et al 2019)
  - In a city of 200,000 residents, approximately 6,000 cats would need to be killed in first year, which requires killing 15 times more than being currently killed in the City of Ipswich
  - The cost in the first year would be \$1.5 - \$3 million (\$250-500/cat)
  - Larger animal holding facilities would need to be built to house cats for the mandated holding period
  - There are no reports of high intensity culling in western countries being implemented, because it is not acceptable to the community, and is cost prohibitive.



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#### Appendix 1. Research aims

The project aims to investigate outcomes of a Community Cat program targeted to suburbs of high cat impoundments in the City of Ipswich, and will include owned, semi-owned and unowned cats. A focus will, where possible, be to convert semi-owners of un-desexed cats to owners of desexed cats and to increase responsible cat caring behaviours.

Measures include:

1. intake and euthanasia rates of cats and kittens in council pounds and animal welfare organisation shelters
2. mental health and job satisfaction of pound/shelter staff and volunteer animal carers
3. proportion of semi-owned cats that become owned, changes in strength of the human-cat bond, and the impact on responsible cat caring attitudes and behaviours, including containment
4. cat-related complaints received by councils and changes in community attitudes to urban stray cats
5. costs and benefits, compared to traditional methods of cat management, for councils and shelters
6. prevalence of infectious diseases in owned, semi-owned and unowned cats
7. population size and density of free-roaming urban stray cats
8. wildlife predation and cat roaming behaviours

#### Appendix 2. Ipswich community survey results

Results to date of a 2020 survey of Ipswich residents (data were obtained by door knocking prior to COVID 19):

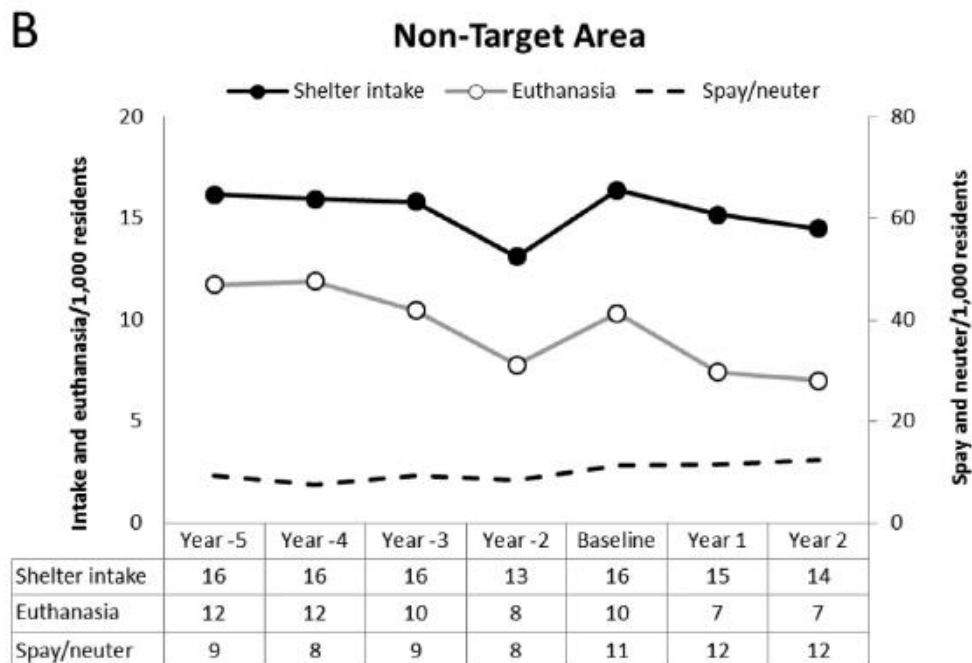
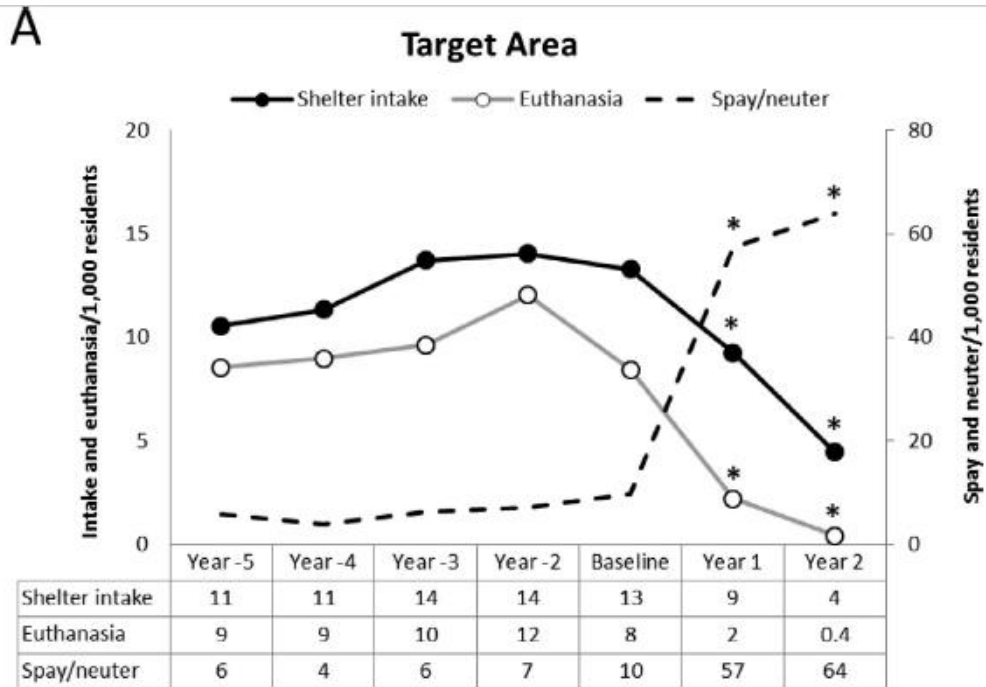
|                        | <b>If the following two methods of cat management were equally effective in decreasing unowned stray cat numbers over time and the problems they cause, how strongly would you support or approve of these two methods of control for healthy cats that cannot be readily adopted? Please rank them on a 5-point scale from strongly approve to strongly disapprove.</b> |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | <b>(a) Catching and humanely euthanasing unowned stray cats that cannot be readily adopted.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                        | Proportion of respondents (%)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Extremely supportive   | 24                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Somewhat supportive    | 0                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Neutral                | 6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Somewhat unsupportive  | 6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Extremely unsupportive | 65                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                        | <b>(b) Catching, desexing, vaccinating and returning the healthy stray cats to where they live.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                        | Proportion of respondents (%)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Extremely supportive   | 82                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Somewhat supportive    | 12                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Neutral                | 0                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Somewhat unsupportive  | 0                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Extremely unsupportive | 6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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### Appendix 3. Impact of desexing program on shelter intake and euthanasia (Levy et al, 2014)

Impact on cat intake and euthanasia of desexing 2,366 cats over 2 years in target area, with adoption of social cats and kittens. 60 cats/1000 residents were desexed, which represented 54% of unowned cats. In the non-target area, 8 cats/1000 residents were desexed by community groups using a non-targeted approach.

Results: Intake was 3.5 times higher in non-target area (14 cats versus 4 cats/1000 residents). Euthanasia was 17.5 times higher in non-target area (7 cats/1000 residents versus 0.4 cats/1000 residents) Levy 2014. *The Vet J*



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#### Appendix 4. Industry partners

The research is supported by the following national and international industry partners:

- **5 major Australian universities** (Queensland, New South Wales, Sydney, Adelaide and La Trobe)
- **11 Australian welfare and rescue groups** (RSPCA Qld, RSPCA NSW, RSPCA SA, RSPCA Vic, AWL Australia, AWL Queensland, Maneko Neki, Cheltenham Cat Rescue, PetRescue, Sydney Dogs' and Cats' Home, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation)
- **2 veterinary care and pharmaceutical companies**, (Greencross, MSD Animal Health)
- **2 international partners**, Neighborhood Cats, Dr John Boone (Great Basin Bird Observatory, Nevada)

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