

Getting to Zero

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We are getting closer and closer. Over the last 7 years, AWL Qld has been focussed on developing a comprehensive sustainable Community Change Model which is proving successful in significantly reducing the numbers of incoming abandoned animals and the numbers euthanized in Gold Coast City.

Our major goal is to achieve zero “euthanasia” for all stray and surrendered healthy and treatable cats and dogs (i.e. at least 90% of all stray and surrendered cats and dogs) in Gold Coast City (a city of 500 000 people and growing at an estimated rate of 13000 to 16000 each year)¹.

We are committed to whole community solutions. Having a shelter with a No Kill policy which only accepts animals when it has room, or is selective with the animals it will accept, or which keeps animals in pens for years with no prospect of rehoming, while other animals are being abandoned or euthanized in other pounds and shelters in the same city is not solving the problem. Having a Council pound which transfers animals out to other communities’ animal welfare organizations or to other institutions such as Universities to be euthanized for veterinary training is not solving the problem.

We are also committed to a sustainable model which will include the means to be able to continuously keep birth rates down to match the number of responsible homes available, to place and keep animals happily and safely in their homes, and to always be able to find homes for any animals that must be surrendered due to owner neglect, ill-health or misfortune. It is a model which has positive outcomes for animals and local communities and makes animal management easier for local governments.

This presentation will inform you of where we are at on the journey to zero and the model which can be implemented in other shires and cities all over Australia.

Where we are at in 2009

AWL Qld cares for approximately 10 000 stray and surrendered cats and dogs annually on the one site.

We work in partnership with Gold Coast City Council on the same site as the pound, and run the only shelter in Gold Coast City, caring for all the stray and surrendered animals– approx 7000 cats and dogs in 2008/9. We are therefore in an ideal position to identify the causes of companion animal overpopulation (i.e. more cats and dogs needing homes at any given time in any given community than there are responsible people offering homes in that community) and the effects of strategies it has put in place to prevent overpopulation and achieve zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and dogs in a whole city.

Figure 1 shows that, in 2008/9, the majority of incoming Gold Coast dogs were strays, the majority of whom were owned (75% reclaimed by their owners). 21% of dogs were surrendered by their owners. 41% of all incoming cats were handed in by their owners and 4% were born at the AWL Rehoming Centre. 55% of cats were strays of which 13% were reclaimed by their owners. See Figure 1. Even though the majority of stray cats are highly sociable and in good condition, indicating they are owned, most are unidentified.(The Queensland Government’s introduction of mandatory microchipping prior to sale or transfer for all cats and dogs from July 2001 is an important step in addressing capacity to return cats to their owners.)

Figure 1 Stray and Surrendered Animals -
Gold Coast only
Incoming 2008-2009

Source	Puppies	Dogs	Canines	
Stray	276	3282	3558	77.4%
Surrendered	157	827	984	21.4%
Born at AWL	54		54	1.2%
			<u>4596</u>	
	Kittens	Cats	Felines	
Stray	541	814	1355	55.5%
Surrendered	489	506	995	40.8%
Born at AWL	91		91	3.7%
			<u>2441</u>	
			Other Animals	
Stray			123	47.1%
Surrendered			138	52.9%
Born at AWL				0.0%
			<u>261</u>	
	<u>1608</u>	<u>5429</u>	<u>7037</u>	<u>7298</u>

The other 3000 cats and dogs which make up the total of 10 000 are unclaimed strays from 5 council pounds and surrenders from dog and cat owners in surrounding cities and shires in South East Qld. See Figure 2.

Figure 2 Stray and Surrendered Animals
- All Areas
Incoming 2008-2009

Source	Puppies	Dogs	Canines	
Stray	495	3735	4230	70.5%
Surrendered	364	1351	1715	28.6%
Born at AWL	54		54	0.9%
			<u>5999</u>	
	Kittens	Cats	Felines	
Stray	699	874	1573	39.0%
Surrendered	1394	979	2373	58.8%
Born at AWL	91		91	2.3%
			<u>4037</u>	
			Other Animals	
Stray			123	40.5%
Surrendered			181	59.5%

Born at AWL					0.0%
				304	
	3097	6939	10036	304	10340

Accepting animals from other communities has hindered achievement of zero euthanasia for Gold Coast City by adding more animals from other areas than the city would normally have to rehome. Without the extra 3000 animals from other communities, the remaining 1300 healthy and treatable animals of the 1500 Gold Coast cats and dogs which were euthanized in 2008/9 could have been saved.

Increasing Rehoming and Decreasing Euthanasia Rates Overall

Over the last seven years, AWL Qld has achieved a significant reduction in euthanasia rates. In 2001/2002, AWL Qld’s Gold Coast shelter was literally “littered” with kittens and their mothers, euthanasing up to 20 healthy or treatable kittens and cats and up to 10 working dogs and larger dogs every working day every summer breeding season. Out of almost 10 000 animals cared for, 1784 dogs (32%) of dogs and 2128 cats (57%) were euthanased in 2001 – almost 4000 cats and dogs (41%) in total. Only 59% of cats and dogs were being reclaimed or rehomed.

Since then through the Community Change Model, rehoming rates have been gradually increased and euthanasia rates have been substantially reduced in a gradual downward trend. Out of the total over 10 000 animals cared for, the proportion of all incoming dogs euthanased in 2008/9 has more than halved in the last 7 years from 32% to 14% and the euthanasia rates of all incoming cats has fallen by 40% from 57% to 35%. 78% of all incoming cats and dogs are now being reclaimed or rehomed. See Figure 3A & 3B. In contrast, many other pounds and animal welfare organizations around Australia are experiencing rising numbers of animals incoming and rising or static euthanasia rates that are approximately double these proportions.

Figure 3A

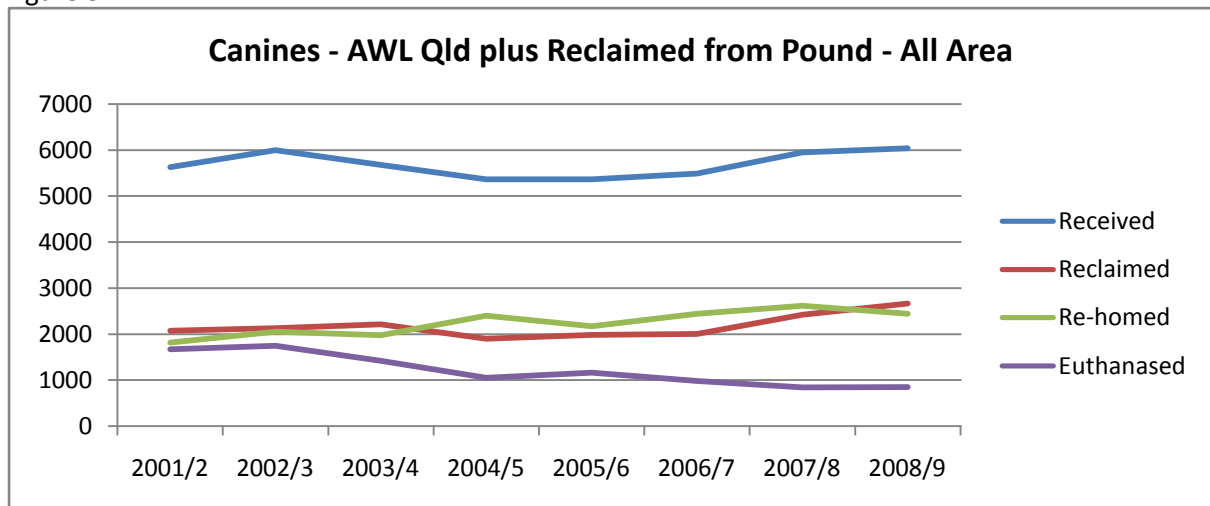
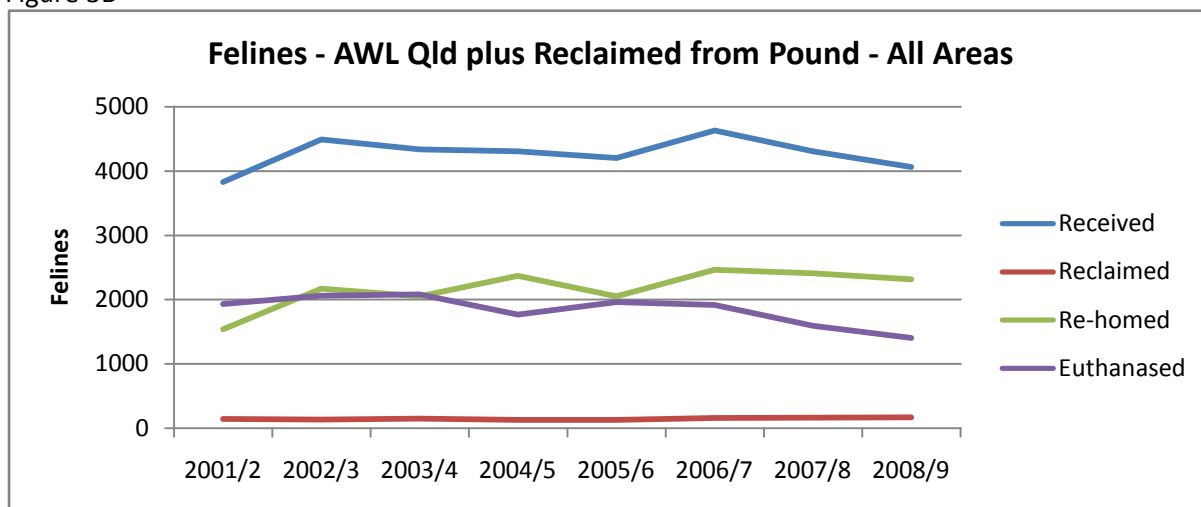


Figure 3B



Getting Closer to Zero in A Whole City

Separating out Gold Coast City animals for whole of city statistics, 80% of all stray and surrendered cats and dogs were reclaimed or rehomed in 2008/9. This includes 87% of all Gold Coast stray and surrendered dogs and 64% of all stray and surrendered cats. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Stray and Surrendered Animals - Gold Coast only
Outgoing 2008-2009

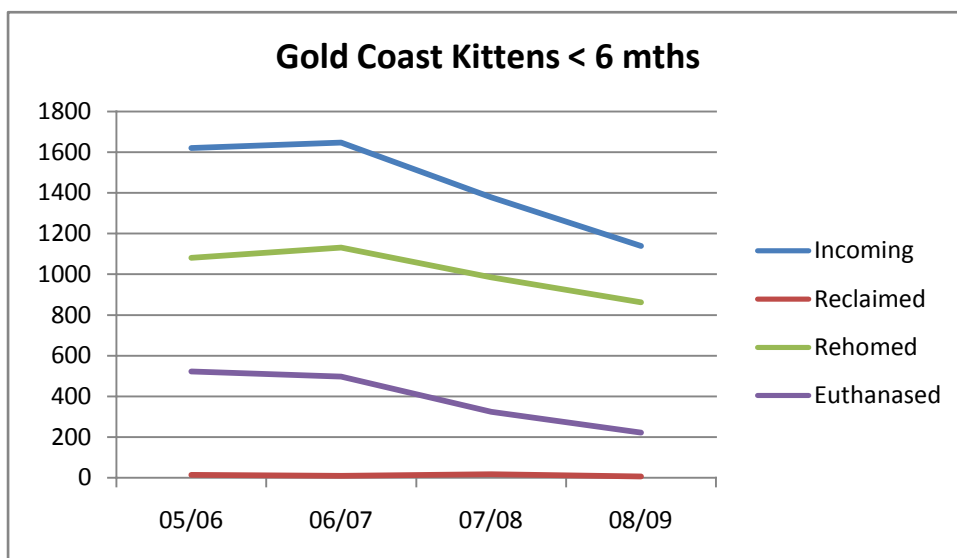
Outcomes	Puppies	Dogs	Canines	
Reclaimed	124	2540	2664	58.0%
Rehomed	332	1009	1341	29.2%
In Process*	1	8	9	0.2%
Died	4	0	4	0.1%
Escaped/Stolen	0	0	0	0.0%
Euthanased	26	552	578	12.6%
			4596	
	Kittens	Cats	Felines	
Reclaimed	19	160	179	7.3%
Rehomed	863	488	1351	55.3%
In Process*	14	19	33	1.4%
Died	14	2	16	0.7%
Escaped/Stolen	2	3	5	0.2%
Euthanased	209	648	857	35.1%
			2441	
			Other Animals	
Reclaimed			13	5.0%
Rehomed			243	93.1%
In Process*				0.0%
Died				0.0%

Escaped/Stolen					0.0%
Euthanased				5	1.9%
				261	
	1608	5429	7037	261	7298

* Includes Available, On Foster, In Quarantine, Pets In Crises

Computerised records from 2005/6, which allow kitten figures to be separated from total felines, show a continuing downward trend in the number of incoming stray and surrendered kittens on the Gold Coast since 2005/6 and a significant decline in numbers of kittens incoming and euthanased. See Figure 5. This downward trend suggests that our long term strategies of early age desexing prior to sale or transfer, providing ongoing low cost desexing, subsidised and free desexing, desexing campaigns and desexing education are achieving results.

Figure 5. Gold Coast Kittens – Incoming, reclaimed, rehomed, euthanased



New Criteria Helps Track Progress Toward Zero Euthanasia for a Whole City

After years of having a range of reasons for euthanasia that fell under categories of health issues, behavioral issues or too many, it became clear that these categories were being misread or misrepresented by some organizations to categorise most animals in pounds and shelters as not suitable for rehoming. The majority of animals in the health or behavioural categories had treatable conditions. Most were health or behavioural issues as a result of overpopulation - too many animals in close confinement in pounds and shelters, getting stressed or catching flu or kennel cough from other animals, or showing timidity or aggressive behavior due to anxiety or fear in such an unnatural and unfamiliar place. If a companion in our own home had flu or kennel cough, it would be regarded as normal practice to treat that animal. If a companion animal in our own home was nervous or shy or upset by other animals, we would give him/her time, space and encouragement to develop confidence and trust. Minor health or behaviour issues do not make an animal unsuitable for rehoming.

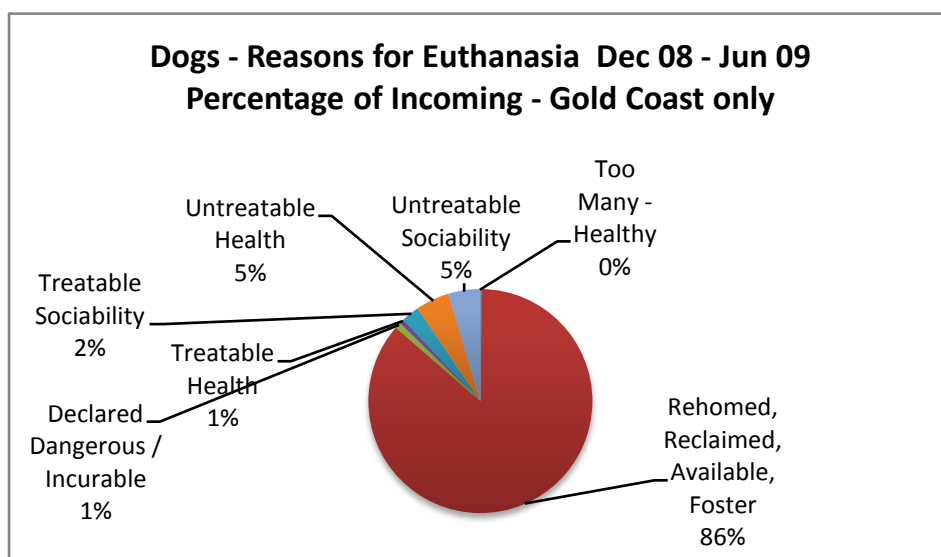
Since Dec 2008 the categories of “Healthy”, “Treatable”, and “Untreatable” similar to Nathan Winograd’s definitions², in both health and sociability, have been recorded for all euthanased animals, and are clarifying how close we are to saving all healthy **and** treatable animals.

Regardless of age or origin, animals must be assessed not on the pound's or shelter's capacity to rehome but on the animal's own capacity to have quality of life. Kittens under 8 weeks are in the healthy category. Owners are encouraged to keep litters of kittens with their mothers until the kittens are 8 weeks of age and 1 kilo in weight, before they surrender them, to minimize time spent in the shelter before they are desexed and rehomed; or they are fostered into a caring home, where they are well fed and well-socialized with people and other cats, so that they can return to the shelter for desexing and successful rehoming from 8 weeks of age. Fostering of 1449 kittens by the Gold Coast community in 2008/9, as well as 220 cats who were mums with babies or with milk to dry, or cats with treatable illnesses, 196 puppies and 157 dogs, contributed to lowering euthanasia rates.

Healthy, Treatable, Untreatable Dogs

Using these new categories, data from Dec 08 to June 09 shows that AWL Qld, working in conjunction with Gold Coast City Council, has achieved zero euthanasia of healthy sociable dogs and almost achieved zero for treatable dogs - 3% of incoming dogs who were treatable were euthanased. 5% were regarded as unsafe around people or other dogs and at this point untreatable. 5% were regarded as having untreatable health issues. In time, as our knowledge, understanding of animal behaviour and experience grows we are hopeful that we will be able to do more for some of the dogs in the untreatable 10 % as well. 1% of euthanased dogs were those declared dangerous or restricted under the Gold Coast Local Law. This shows that 89% of stray and surrendered dogs were savable or rehoming in Gold Coast City (a city of over half a million people) in 2008/9. See Figure 6A.

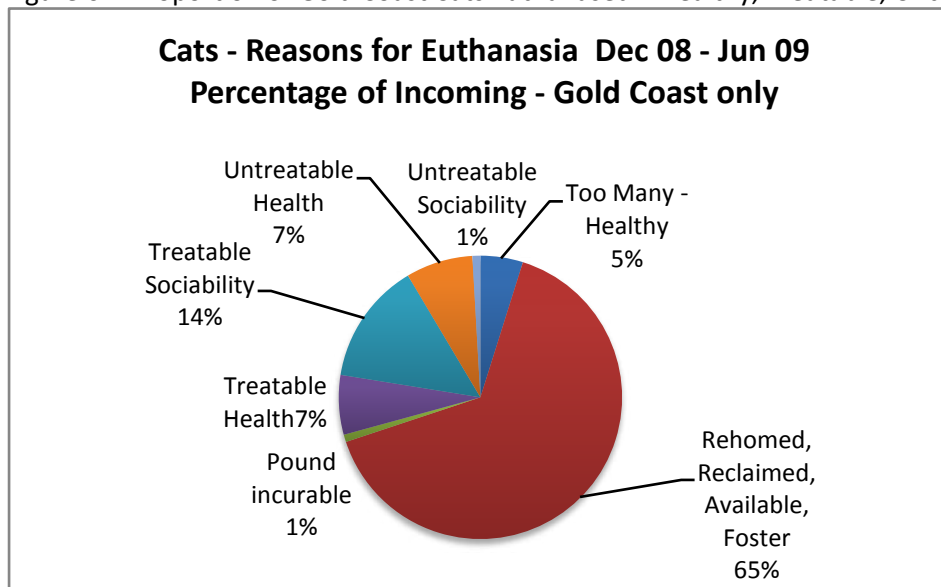
Figure 6A. Proportion of Gold Coast Dogs Euthanased – Healthy, Treatable, Untreatable



Healthy, Treatable Untreatable Cats

From Dec 08 – June 09, the peak breeding season, only 8% of incoming cats were considered untreatable for health or sociability. Most cats caught in traps were found to be handleable given time to reduce stress. Only 1% were regarded as never owned or “feral” and we still have more work to do on how best to help unowned cats. Thus 91% of incoming cats for a whole city were rehoming in 08/09. This reflects the 90% for both cats and dogs that Nathan Winograd has identified as the proportion “savable” in his analysis of achieving US cities.³ See Figure 6B.

Figure 6B. Proportion of Gold Coast Cats Euthanased – Healthy, Treatable, Untreatable



Kitten-wise, between Dec and June 2008/9 (i.e. the peak breeding season) we battled to find a home for every kitten, but did euthanase 8 healthy kittens, 20 kittens who were treatable but very timid, and 49 kittens that had treatable health issues, mainly flu.

Despite running all the programs in Nathan Winograd’s No Kill Equation, including ongoing low cost high volume desexing, free desexing such as the Last Litter Fund for mother cats of unwanted kittens to break the cycle, desexing campaigns, desexing education, early age desexing of all kittens prior to rehoming, having 350 cats on foster in peak season, marketing and promotion to save every cat, transporting cats and kittens to pet shops for rehoming, providing veterinary treatment, and pet retention support to care for their animals, in the summer breeding season, particularly December to April, the market was still oversupplied. No amount of media pleading, emailing supporters or shuffling animals to find extra spaces was able to protect them.

As an example, on one Friday in January 2009, rehoming pens were full with 40 adult cats and 40 kittens, and another 30 were overflowing into extra temporary cages and outdoor enclosures, all animals desexed and microchipped, vaccinated and wormed, waiting for homes, and another 350 cats and kittens out on foster waiting to be filtered back in as kittens reached desexing age, and mother’s milk dried. Up to 20 new kittens and mums were coming in every day.

We invited the TV and newspaper crews in and told them the truth - 8 kittens had already been euthanized, and were going to have to euthanize more if we didn’t have a sudden influx of responsible people to adopt 70 kittens and 40 healthy sociable cats, already desexed and microchipped, immediately. In this instance, there was an overwhelming response from the media coverage, with every kitten and some of the cats being rehomed that weekend. However when similar numbers built up again in the following week or two, the TV and newspaper editors were not interested in the same story twice, or a third, fourth, fifth, or sixth time every couple of weeks over the next few months.

This overpopulation of kittens (more needing homes at any one time than there are responsible people that can be encouraged to adopt) had serious consequences for cats who would find homes

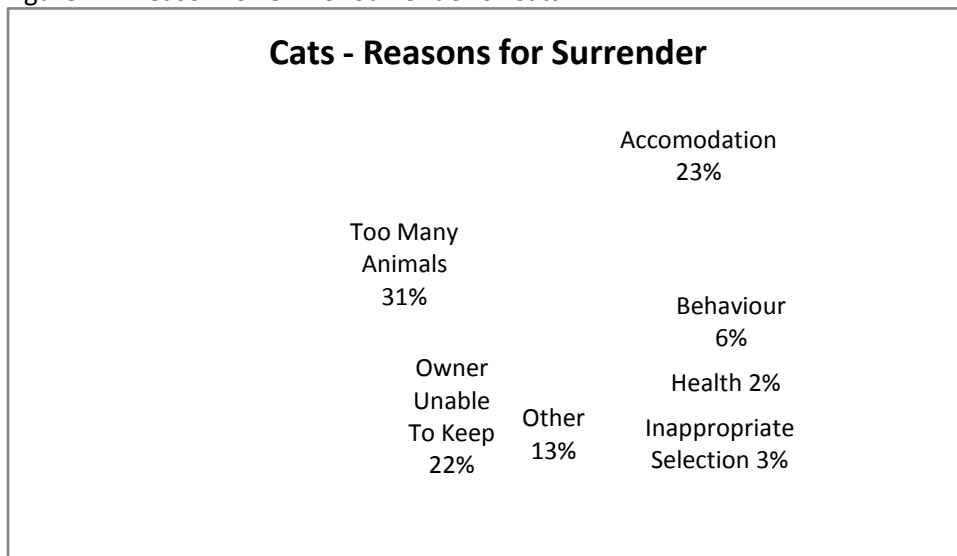
otherwise. Between Dec 2008 and June 2009, 5% of healthy sociable cats and 21% of incoming cats who were treatable (207 timid or defensive cats and 65 cats who had treatable health conditions, mainly flu) and still euthanized despite our desperate attempts to achieve zero.

However, new programs are constantly being introduced. Since May, 2009, despite continuation of kitten season, no healthy, sociable Gold Coast cat has been euthanized, due a new Save Every Life Program. This involves fostering out any healthy, sociable Gold Coast cat for whom there is no room in the shelter and promoting these cats with special stories through the media and website and at a discounted price. Often these cats can be brought back to the Rehoming Pens after a busy rehoming weekend. It has meant saving an extra 10 – 20 cats each month during the winter months. However, as the summer breeding season starts it will become increasingly challenging to maintain. We are determined to work hard at it and still need to increase our repertoire of strategies from others who have been more successful. We clearly still have work to do to save the 21% of treatable cats. First of all to reduce their stress, keep them healthy and help them to overcome their fear and anxiety in a shelter environment, our staff are currently working with psychologist Tamzin Barber from UQ and visiting other shelters such as Animal Aid Trust who have a lower incidence of cat flu.

Strays and Surrenders - Suitable for Rehoming

Unsuitable behaviour is often quoted as the main reason for surrender of animals to shelters and their euthanasia. This is not the case when one looks at a whole city’s data. The main reason for cat surrender is owners’ irresponsible unplanned breeding i.e. 31% of kittens and cats in 2008/9 were still surrendered for this reason, despite ongoing low cost desexing programs and desexing promotion. One quarter of cats were surrendered due to accommodation issues, another quarter due to owner issues. Only 6% of surrenders relate to the behavior of the cat. See Figure 7A.

Figure 7A. Reason for Owner Surrender of Cats



With surrendered dogs, behavior has not been the main issue either. Accommodation issues, and owners own circumstances or inappropriate selection result in the majority of surrenders. See Figure 7B

Figure 7B. Reason for Owner Surrender of Dogs



However strays are also usually well-socialised and also either reclaimed or suitable for rehoming, provided they are given equal opportunity in the selection process. See Figure 8A & 8B.

Figure 8A. Gold Coast Stray and Surrendered Felines – Incoming, Reclaimed, Rehomed, Euthanased

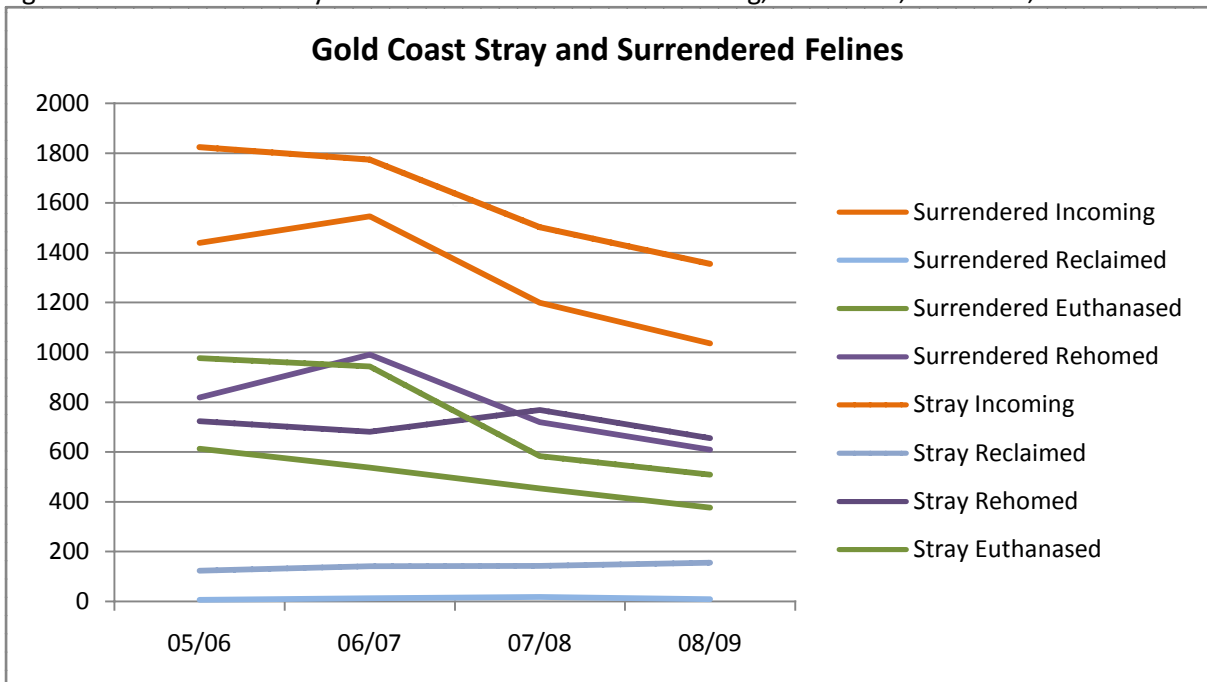
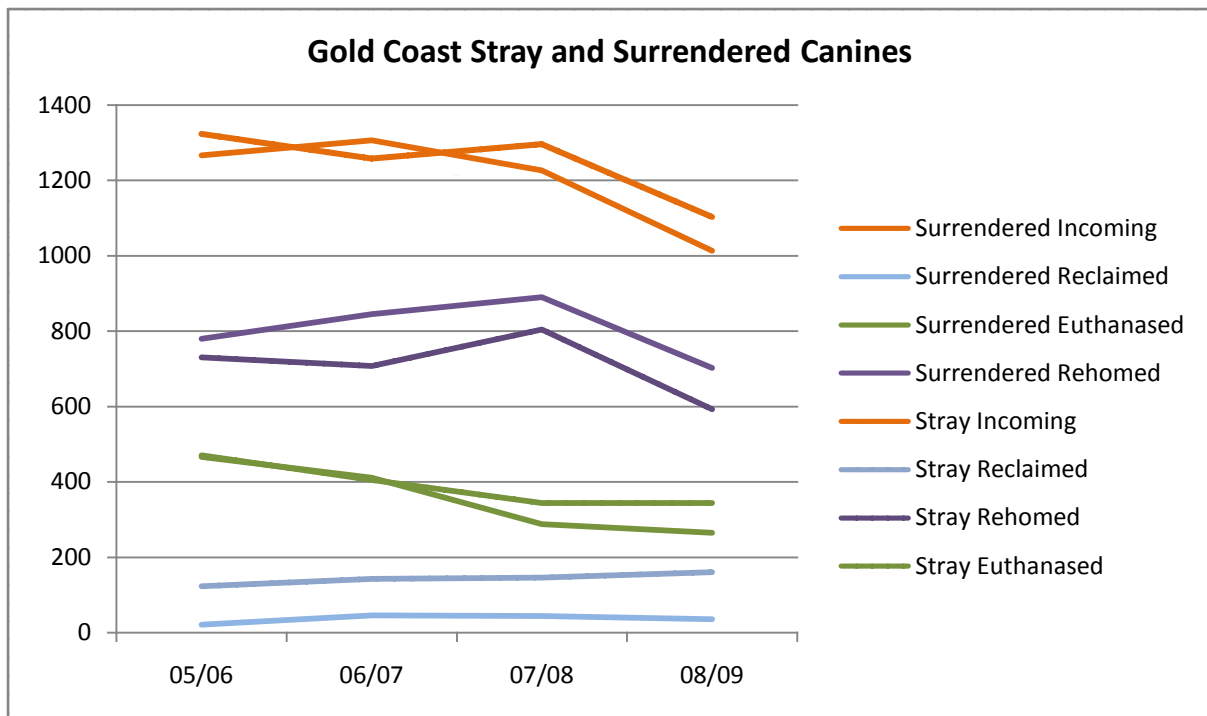


Figure 8B. Gold Coast Stray and Surrendered Canines – Incoming, Reclaimed, Rehomed, Euthanased



The animals in our pounds and shelters – stray and surrendered - are rehomable.

More to Do

We still have more to do to reduce the breeding of cats. Combined with low cost desexing and desexing education and special support programs, Responsible Breeding Legislation will set the community standard so that all breeders, whether accidental or planned, should know of, and take responsibility for, prevention of overpopulation. Gold Coast City Council and stakeholders are currently working on such a pilot breeder permit system with breeders, AVA, pet industry etc we will be introducing breeder permits and a Codes of Practice that includes a requirement for breeders to publish their breeder permit number for transparency. It also will require breeders to desex cats prior to sale or transfer, unless a veterinarian deems that the cat has some condition which would put him/her at serious risk if desexed, or the animal is being transferred to another person with a breeder permit. Thus people who breed without a permit can be required to get a permit or be assisted to desex their pets through both government and AWL help.

We still have more to do to encourage town planners to design suburbs with cat safe and dog safe fencing and address the restrictions by body corporate and real estate owners and agents on responsible people having animals in their homes.

We still have more to do to have foster carers and responsible rescuers of cats supported in local laws for their community service and compassion.

We still have more to do to support people struggling to understand and better manage their animals.

We still have more to do to understand cats and how best to help them cope until they find a permanent safe and comforting place to live.

We still have more to do to train veterinary practitioners and vet students in Early Age Desexing of kittens to help prevent overpopulation in their communities.

We still have more to do to introduce the Community Change Model in other communities.

But the rewards of getting closer to zero are worth it!

AWL Qld Community Change Model

This model can be adopted by pounds, shelters or a partnership between the two.

3 Principles

1st Principle: Each community is responsible for its own abandoned animals. A community must be made aware that this is a community issue, be told the number of abandoned animals coming into its pounds and shelters and rescue organizations from the community, the numbers that are euthanased and how they can prevent this happening. This includes all stakeholders i.e. the general public, breeders, pet shops, vets, university vet schools, vet students, animal owners, dog trainers, state and local governments, teachers, students.

2nd Principle: Zero euthanasia of at least 90% of all incoming animals in a given community (i.e. all healthy and treatable cats and dogs) is achievable. The managers and staff need to believe it and want to achieve it. It is important to focus on continually adding and improving strategies to get closer to zero euthanasia every year.

3rd Principle: All animals' lives matter to them. This means understanding and support for all cats and dogs, not just those which humans determine are the popular, sociable, or easy to manage ones or that serve our current needs. This includes the stray and unowned animals, the cross-breeds, the boisterous untrained adolescent dogs, the timid cats, the sick, the young and fragile, the old and fragile, and those lacking in the "cute" factor. It also includes not blaming other species for our own mismanagement e.g. blaming cats for dwindling native wildlife, but finding better ways to care for all animals.

3 Groups

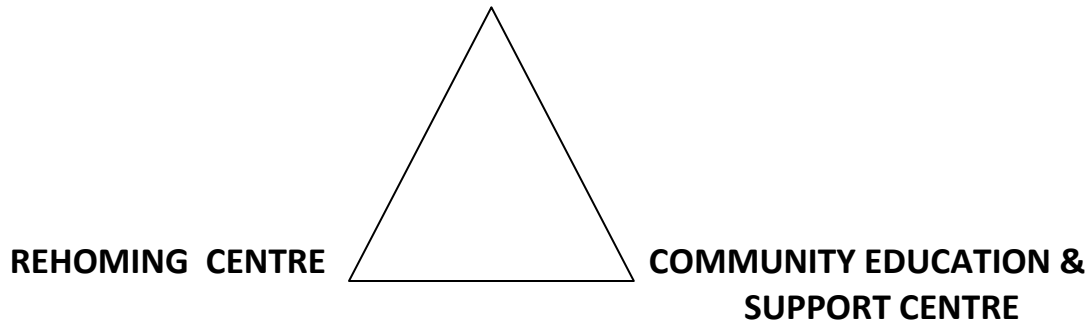
1. Owned animals
2. Stray and surrendered animals
3. Community Stakeholders

3 Facilities

For sustainability of reduction in birth rates, increasing adoptions and changing behaviour the following three structures are needed in an easily accessible location in each community, preferably on the same site or near each other:

AWL Qld Community Change Model 2009

COMMUNITY VET CLINIC AND SHELTER CLINIC (Combined or separate)



1. COMMUNITY VET CLINIC & SHELTER CLINIC

A. Purpose: Reducing birth rates, increasing identification, providing treatment for all owned animals in need to prevent euthanasia.

- a. Owned/managed by animal welfare groups with a strong commitment to saving all healthy and treatable animals in the particular community
- b. High volume low cost desexing and microchipping and other veterinary services for the general public so that no animal has to born with no home to go to, and no animal has to lose his/her life because of owner's financial disadvantage or mismanagement.
- c. Access to desexing services for ease of compliance with legislation e.g. breeder permits, registration for subsidized registration
- d. Ongoing subsidies/free services to end the cycle of unwanted litters e.g. Last Litter Fund, Pound Fund, Desex Fund, National Desexing Network
- e. Desexing campaigns and regular promotion
- f. Wholesale desexing prices prior to sale or transfer for pet shops, breeders and rescue groups, and collection of animals in Pet Taxi

B. Purpose: Reducing birth rates, increasing identification, providing treatment for all stray and abandoned animals to prevent euthanasia

- g. Full shelter veterinary services for all pound/shelter animals –
 - i. desexing and microchipping, health checking, worming etc and treatment of sick and injured pound/shelter animals prior to being placed in Rehoming Pens
 - ii. Free veterinary support for foster carers of pound/shelter animals
 - iii. Health guarantee work for rehomed pound/shelter animals
- h. Train vet students in early age desexing
- i. Provide education in Basic Vet Care through on-site education programs
- j. Veterinary Support for Trap Neuter Release programs in appropriate environments

2. REHOMING CENTRE

Purpose: Saving all healthy and treatable stray and surrendered animals in each community (i.e. at least 90% of the whole community's animals)

A. Care of Pound/Shelter Animals

- a. Efficient movement through the system to be rehomed as quickly as possible
- b. Substantial fostering program i.e. for all kittens under 8 weeks, sick, injured, timid, no space
- c. Large network of volunteers
- d. Reduce stress (Enrichment, socialization, appropriate physical environment for each species)
- e. Increase rehomingability of each animal – train, socialise
- f. Treatment and rehabilitation for each cat and dog to prevent euthanasia

B. Finding Responsible Homes

- a. Focus on increasing reclaim rates each year
- b. Focus on increasing rehoming rates each year
- c. Accessibility to a large proportion of the community whose abandoned animals it accepts
- d. Positive communication about rescue animals
- e. Open when public are available to come – weekends, public holidays, after school
- f. Bright inviting environment
- g. Pre-adoption interviews (and inspections of properties where concerns with owner capability) to help find the most suitable animal for each owner
- h. Off-site adoptions through pet shops/mobile rehoming vans
- i. Involve the community in the zero euthanasia goal
- j. Involve community networks to help rehome animals e.g. schools, community groups, breed clubs
- k. Data gathering to assess how close to zero euthanasia using Healthy Treatable and Untreatable categories. Only irretrievably suffering animals or vicious dogs with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation should be included in the untreatable category.

3. COMMUNITY EDUCATION & SUPPORT CENTRE

Purpose: Supporting owners/carers in the community to prevent animals from entering pound/shelter/unowned

A. Owner education and support

- a. Animal Management Officers returning animals home rather than impounding, providing advice/support to owners to prevent straying, and efficient systems for matching lost and found animals.
- b. Pre-surrender interviews to educate and offer alternatives to surrender e.g. training courses, advice
- c. Supportive local laws for foster carers and people who provide safe and caring homes for additional rescue animals without nuisance to the neighbours
- d. Comprehensive information and support for new owners
- e. Post adoption support - phone calls, and problem-specific information and training

- f. Pet friendly accommodation development and support
- g. Cat safe fencing education
- h. Early age desexing education
- i. On-site education programs to involve upper primary and secondary students in the lives of the shelter animals, and how to prevent overpopulation through commitment to responsible animal care i.e. DESEX IDENTIFY TRAIN KEEP SAFE

B. Stakeholder Education and Support

- j. Form a Stakeholder Coalition – Local Govt, State Govt, Breed Organisations, AVA, PIAA, Wildlife Groups, and Shelter & Rescue Groups to develop understanding and cooperative involvement in the solutions
- k. Develop Responsible Breeding Legislation to help reduce oversupply and improve the well-being of breeding animals and their litters – breeder permits, permit numbers required to be published, desexing and microchipping of kittens prior to sale or transfer, unless to another person with a breeder permit. Pet shops, pounds, refuges and rescue group to sell only desexed animals.
- l. Education of whole community – from prep to university students and the general public - on how they can help get to zero
- m. Develop responsible carer networks for unowned cat colonies
 - a. Identify colonies of unowned cats
 - b. Reduce breeding and maintain health in appropriate areas

Working Together

Through sustaining this Community Change Model, AWL Qld has seen a steady reduction in the overpopulation and we are getting close to zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and dogs for a city of half a million people. There are other communities who are also achieving great results. By sharing our successes and strengths we can achieve success in every community around Australia. AWL Qld with the help of the Elsie Cameron Foundation offers support to any pound, shelter or rescue group in any community who wants to work together on this goal.

¹ PIFU, ABS Regional Population Growth, Australia 2006-7
http://www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/t_standard.aspx?PID=255

² Winograd, Nathan J. (2009) Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America. 2nd Edition. USA: Almaden, p.xi

³ Winograd, Nathan J. (2009) Redemption: The Myth of Pet Overpopulation and the No Kill Revolution in America. 2nd Edition. USA: Almaden, p.xi