

for citizens in rural and remote regions to become aware of the discussion paper. This may particularly have affected Aboriginal Local Governments and Torres Strait Islanders Councils, as advertisements publicizing the discussion paper were not placed in media targeting these groups.

In addition to these limitations, it should be realised that there was no attempt to gauge the views of a representative sample of Queensland residents. Those who commented on the discussion paper were those with either a vested interest in the outcome or strong personal involvement in the issues raised. Some of the written submissions were concerned that the sample may be biased by groups that lobbied their members to support a given option, without supplying those members with the full discussion paper or encouraging them to read it.

This recruitment process would be expected to lead to a biased sample, with strong and not necessarily representative beliefs. Independent research would be required to ascertain the level of concern about companion animal overpopulation in the community, and also to canvas which of the options raised in the Discussion Paper are most widely preferred.

Limitations of consultation process

- **Stakeholder submissions were very comprehensive and well informed**
- **e-survey results were not representative of general population**
- **Insufficient time to prepare responses**
- **Some section of community excluded from consultation process**

SECTION 4. COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO COMPANION ANIMAL POPULATION CONTROL IN QUEENSLAND

In the discussion paper 'Managing unwanted cats and dogs', five implementation options were presented. These were:

- Maintain the current system
- Enhance the current system through non-compulsory measures
- Introduce state wide voluntary registration, identification and desexing with incentives
- Introduce state wide mandatory registration and identification, with voluntary desexing with incentives
- Introduce state wide mandatory registration, identification and desexing

A brief cost benefit analysis of the potential applicability of each of these management options to companion animal population control in the Queensland context is presented below, taking into account available scientific literature, experiences reported from other Australian states and territories and information provided by Queensland stakeholders. We particularly focus on the

strategies of education, identification, registration, desexing incentives, mandatory desexing and desexing prior to sale or transfer,

Option 1: Maintain the current system

The current system of animal management in Queensland has a strong emphasis on education. Councils are permitted to put local animal control systems, incorporating voluntary or compulsory identification, registration and desexing requirements, in place. The emphasis on education is consistent with scientific information indicating that education forms a critical component of interventions designed to change community attitudes and behaviours and is to be commended for this reason. Interviews with stakeholders from other Australian states and territories also confirmed the importance of education in managing companion animal populations, as did the written submissions from Queensland stakeholders and the interviews we conducted with these stakeholders. Many of the major stakeholders produced and distributed educational materials as part of their activities.

Arguing against maintaining the current system, however, are two things. First, because local councils are able to put local systems in place, and often do so on an ad hoc basis as specific issues arise, there is no consistency across the state. This is a significant problem for citizens who change residential addresses and also means that the population is generally confused about what constitutes responsible animal ownership. An added complication is the fact that animal issues are addressed in more than one Act. Major stakeholders in Queensland were adamant that this contributes significantly to general confusion on the part of residents, as well as making enforcement of local policies difficult. Animal Management Officers have no authority to intervene in animal welfare issues, preventing effective performance of their perceived role in the community.

Second, a wealth of data indicates that education by itself is not sufficient to reduce shelter and pound euthanasia rates. No other Australian states or territories except the Northern Territory rely solely on education to manage companion animal populations and there is a clear trend worldwide for legislative frameworks in this area to be strengthened and for a range of incentives and disincentives to be introduced to promote responsible ownership behaviours. There was also widespread agreement among Queensland stakeholders that the current management system is inadequate. An important issue raised by these stakeholders is the fact that education programs in Queensland are not coordinated centrally, with different messages being promoted by different stakeholder organisations. For these reasons it seems inadvisable for Queensland to maintain the current system, although effective education should be a core component of whatever alternative system is introduced.

Queensland should not maintain the current system, which is based on a series of ad hoc and poorly coordinated education programs, as well as inconsistent policies and procedures, which lead to general confusion. The current system is almost universally perceived to be inadequate and is not consistent with reforms being made in other Australian states or those recommended in available scientific literature.

Option 2: Enhance the current system through non-compulsory measures

In the discussion paper it was suggested that non-compulsory means of enhancing the current system might include using a central body to package and distribute educational materials,

thereby ensuring that consistent messages are communicated. This suggestion was endorsed by several Queensland stakeholders and is similar to the approach used in Victoria, where the Bureau of Animal Welfare produces a range of educational materials for distribution to councils and other venues. New South Wales is also in the process of developing a system of state-based educational programs.

Some components of the Victorian program have been formally evaluated, with positive results. The effectiveness of a coordinated communication approach has also been informally evaluated, also with positive results. Interviews with Victorian stakeholders suggest that there is good uptake of educational materials produced by the State Government. However, it would be difficult to implement an effective, state wide educational campaign in a state where there are no state wide policies upon which to base the educational materials. Development of such policies would be a necessary first step, as would be the establishment of a funding model to support development, printing, distribution and delivery costs for an extended period of time. This is likely to require state wide legislation, precluding acceptance of this Option.

Also suggested in the discussion paper as a potential enhancement of the current system was the introduction of increased incentives for desexing of companion animals. This was identified by many stakeholders in Queensland and other states as a worthwhile undertaking. In addition, available information from the scientific literature is generally supportive of the effectiveness of incentives in encouraging responsible ownership behaviours. However, incentives are only effective if they specifically address the reasons why owners fail to engage in the required behaviours. For example, many stakeholders believe that offering reduced-price desexing is effective in encouraging this behaviour. Others point out that very few people who choose to leave animals undesexed, report doing so because of the cost of desexing. This was confirmed by scientific literature, which revealed a number of reasons for owners not wanting to desex their animals. While subsidies might be effective in low-income areas, therefore, they may be expensive but ineffective elsewhere. Identifying why some people fail to perform important pre-acquisition, maintenance and disposal behaviours is an important first step in developing a system of effective incentives. This requires research, conducted using methodologies drawn from the social sciences.

An additional challenge with Option B is that it fails to include any strategies which potentially address the issue of ownerless animals. Increased incentives for desexing and other responsible ownership practices will only have an impact on the number of animals killed in shelters if most of these animals are coming from the responsibly-owned population. It seems unwise to assume this is the case without basing the assumption on credible scientific research. Such research is urgently required to fill a critical gap in current knowledge.

A final means of enhancing the current system is the modification of Model Local Law No.4 (Keeping and Control of Animals), so that local councils have a more comprehensive guide concerning measures that they could adopt, should they choose to do so. While model laws provide useful information to councils on a range of important social issues, the seriousness of the issue under discussion suggests that a state wide approach may be more acceptable. Accordingly, no major stakeholders who responded to the discussion paper endorsed this option.

Enhancing the current system through non-compulsory measures is likely to be ineffective because it will not address the core issues underlying existing policy failures. A comprehensive and consistent state wide approach to animal control, based in legislation, was widely endorsed by stakeholders and is consistent with reform measures being adopted in other Australian states and in other developed countries.

Option 3: Introduction of state wide voluntary registration, identification and desexing with incentives

Some local authorities in Queensland already have either voluntary or compulsory registration and/or identification systems in place, although these generally include dogs only, with no requirements for cats to be registered or identified. This option focuses on extending voluntary schemes to areas where they are not currently available, so that animal owners can choose to register or identify their animals. Incentives could be used to encourage them to do so. Alternatively, a state based system could be developed, presumably permitting centralised registration and identification of animals on a voluntary basis.

To our knowledge desexing rates and shelter admission/rehoming rates between local government areas in Queensland that either do or do not have voluntary registration and identification systems in place have not been compared. It would be difficult to do this effectively because council-supported registration and identification schemes are more common in urban areas than in rural areas, confounding the results of such comparisons. The gap in knowledge, however, makes it difficult to ascertain whether such systems are effective in reducing shelter euthanasia rates.

While voluntary registration and identification systems potentially play an important role in assisting animal owners when animals become lost, they are widely perceived to be ineffective in reducing shelter and pound euthanasia rates. A critical problem is that uptake is generally restricted to responsible owners, prepared to take proactive measures to prevent loss of their animal, and these are the owners whose animals are least likely to contribute to shelter euthanasia rates even in the absence of the schemes. While incentives, such as subsidised desexing or vouchers, may encourage some less responsible owners to join the programs, the uptake is not likely to be sufficient to justify the costs of administration. Incentives must also be carefully planned. The incentive of reduced price desexing, for example, is unlikely to attract those owners least likely to responsibly desex their animal, which are exactly those owners most likely to benefit from the scheme. For responsible owners, few benefits are associated with council identification and registration schemes. Centralised identification schemes, based on implanted microchips, are becoming more popular and have greater benefits since they permit tracking of animals outside local administrative areas. Voluntary council registration and identification schemes offer few benefits to animal owners who already participate in these schemes.

A strategy based on state wide voluntary registration, identification and desexing with incentives is unlikely to produce a significant reduction in shelter and pound euthanasia rates since it mostly caters for responsible owners, least likely to contribute to these rates.

Option 4: Introduction of state wide mandatory registration and identification, and voluntary desexing with incentives

This option rests on the development of a state wide system *requiring* all companion animal owners to register and identify their animals, targeting both cats and dogs. The system would be mandated at state level and would replace current local systems of voluntary or compulsory registration/identification, being enforced either at the council level or at the state level. Supporting the mandatory system of registration and identification would be educational

initiatives and incentives for responsible behaviour, including desexing, as well as disincentives for noncompliant behaviour.

This system is similar to programs that are perceived to be effective in reducing shelter euthanasia rates in other contexts, although most of these programs were introduced too recently for comprehensive evaluation to have taken place. Importantly, it incorporates a strategy to identify ALL owned animals, with no need for a complicated system of exemptions to operate as part of this strategy. This is anticipated to address all three of the initiatives identified in our review of the scientific literature as being necessary to have a long term impact on shelter and pound euthanasia rates. First, it means that responsible owners can be identified and rewarded with incentives (such as no cost release of animals from shelters and pounds for a first offence or subsidised desexing) and that irresponsible owners (with unconfined and desexed animals, for example) can be identified and appropriate penalties applied. This should encourage higher levels of responsible ownership, including desexing, confinement and full adoption of semi-owned cats. Second, it means that ownerless animals can be readily identified, so that their management can be expedited. While this may not reduce shelter and pound euthanasia rates in the short term it may do so in the longer term by reducing the current load on shelters and pounds, required to hold all animals admitted for a prolonged period of time. Third, it should substantially increase reunions between owners and lost animals, having an immediate impact on shelter and pound euthanasia rates. Whether compulsory identification AND compulsory registration is required is uncertain, for reasons described previously. Few benefits associated with compulsory registration are unable to be obtained through other means (identification), and it tends to be costly and cumbersome to administer.

The main strength of this approach, widely endorsed by Queensland stakeholders and consistent with strategies already in place in other eastern States, is that the mandated behaviours are easy to perform, relatively easy to enforce, and clearly beneficial for owners and their animals since they make it more likely that lost animals will be returned to their owners. This ensures good compliance even among less responsible owners. There is no *requirement* for owners to desex their animals, although strong incentives for doing so will persuade most responsible owners to choose this option. As indicated previously, desexing rates are extremely high amongst registered cats and dogs in Victoria, where registration fees for dogs and cats are greatly reduced if the animal is desexed. Other incentives, not dependent on council registration, could easily be used to produce similar outcomes. There is also no requirement for owners to confine their animals (unless required by council bylaws for other reasons) although, again, disincentives (costs) for retrieving wandering animals who are admitted to a shelter or pound can be used to encourage this behaviour. For example, fees for release of an animal from a shelter or pound could be greater if the animal is undesexed, or they could be administered on a sliding scale, with first release being free and subsequent releases costing more and more. Perhaps a system of demerit points could be devised and linked with the microchip data base to track owner behaviour.

The main disadvantage of this approach is identified in the discussion paper as the potential monetary cost, both to individual animal owners and to those responsible for implementing and enforcing the legislative requirements. The costs to individual owners should be minimal, particularly if council registration is not required, and if subsidised desexing and microchipping services are available to those in need of them. Microchipping for life requires a one off payment that is currently approximately \$40 - \$70. If council registration is required for some reason, then councils should have the capacity to set registration fees according to the financial capabilities of their constituents. Costs to enforcement agencies can also be minimised through careful planning. Relying on a national microchipping company to provide identification services on a user-pays basis should reduce the need for local administrators. Various funding models have been used in other states and a modification of one of these may be appropriate. An alternative model, most applicable if council registration is not employed, is to levy all ratepayers to support

companion animal programs. The cost of these programs should be reduced if administration of a registration scheme is unnecessary, and if all animals can be quickly tracked to their owner for return following impoundment.

An important issue with any mandatory system is gaining compliance. Available data suggests that dog owners tend to be compliant with registration requirements, perhaps because the presence of a dog is difficult to disguise, but also partly because the benefits for dog owners of registration are evident. Dogs are typically perceived to be valuable animals, worth finding when they go missing. Dog owners also benefit from a range of services offered by local authorities, such as off-lead parks, special dog events and animal management officers. Cat owners appear to be less compliant with registration/identification requirements for several reasons, prompting some stakeholders to call for registration and identification of dogs but not cats. One reason for non-compliance is that it is relatively easy to disguise the presence of a cat in a private dwelling. Another is that cats are generally valued less when compared to dogs, so many owners (particularly semi-owners) are less concerned about finding them if they go missing. A third reason is that cat owners obtain few benefits from registration. Many local councils in Queensland have no facilities for housing lost cats and it is difficult to identify other services that would benefit cat owners.

As described previously one council in Canada addressed this issue by offering a range of services to cat owners, including the provision of comfortable holding quarters for registered cats found wandering in the community and a drive home service. These strategies not only resulted in more cats being registered and identified, but also reduced shelter euthanasia rates. Since cats comprise a disproportionate number of animals euthanised in shelters and pounds (when pound facilities cater for cats), any animal management plan MUST include this species as well as dogs.

The MOST important strategy for controlling euthanasia rates in shelters is compulsory identification of all owned cats and dogs. This permits the application of incentives and disincentives to responsible and irresponsible owners, including incentives for desexing. It also expedites management of ownerless animals and facilitates reunion of lost animals with their owner. Council registration may not be required if existing National identification schemes are utilised to the fullest extent possible, This would reduce the administrative burden on councils and reduce the cost of implementing this program.

Option 5: Introduction of state wide mandatory registration, identification and desexing

The potential for state wide mandatory registration and identification to reduce shelter and pound euthanasia rates has already been discussed and will not be revisited. The focus of this Option is the addition of mandatory desexing, which is extremely controversial among stakeholders and experts from around the world. Our comprehensive review of available scientific literature (initially completed for the Victorian government) revealed a total lack of well-controlled, empirical studies examining the effects of mandatory desexing on shelter and pound euthanasia rates. There is no conclusive evidence to show that these policies work, but also no evidence to show that they fail. Reports from those who support the policies tend to be extremely positive, while those from people opposed to the policies are extremely negative. Some people report that the costs of implementing a mandatory desexing policy are prohibitive and not able to be justified by the small gains that are sometimes, but not always, made. Others reply that any costs are more than justified by the savings to shelters and pounds not required to euthanise so many animals. Neither side generally presents independent empirical evidence to support their claims. This makes it difficult to draw any objective conclusions.

Public opinion is also divided. As was evident from our quantitative analysis of public responses to the discussion paper, the majority of respondents were strongly in support of mandatory desexing. Whether similar results would be obtained from a random or representative sample of Queenslanders is unknown, especially since our qualitative analysis of written stakeholder submissions showed a different pattern. While shelter representatives tended to be strongly in favour of mandatory desexing, most other stakeholders were firmly against the introduction of this policy, perceiving it to be costly, impossible to administer efficiently and enforce effectively and, most importantly, unlikely to be effective in addressing shelter and pound euthanasia rates. Mandatory desexing prior to sale or transfer was particularly unpopular amongst veterinarians, pet shop representatives and dog breeders, primarily because of perceived risks associated with early age desexing and the potential impact of performing surgery during a critical developmental period, when animals are also most likely to be sold in pet shops. Without discounting the strong public opinion provided by the electronic submissions, we feel that additional weight should be given to the written submissions, typically provided by people very familiar with companion animal issues or dependent upon these animals for their livelihood, and many of whom put considerable effort into the documents they provided.

Of considerable concern are reports in the literature, although often unsubstantiated, that introduction of mandatory desexing in some places has led to a reduction in compliance with other legislative requirements, including registration/identification of animals. Since our analysis of all existing information suggests that the most important factor in reducing shelter and pound euthanasia rates is identification of all owned animals, this appears to be an unacceptable risk in the absence of compelling empirical evidence that mandatory desexing will produce any measurable benefits.

Mandatory desexing is not recommended by major stakeholders, apart from those representing shelters. There is no empirical evidence that it will work and it is perceived to be difficult and expensive to administer and enforce, particularly in rural and remote areas where access to a veterinarian may be limited. It also puts at risk compliance with other strategies that are expected to be more effective in reducing shelter and pound euthanasia rates.

SECTION 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a comprehensive review of all available evidence, and taking into account the unique context provided by the rich cultural diversity present within the state of Queensland, we recommend that the implementation of a staged approach to companion animal management be considered. In the first instance, additional consultation should occur with stakeholders in rural and remote regions of the state. We were unable to accomplish this within the very short time frame we were given to prepare this report and consider this to be a major limitation of this review. Compounding the omission, the same stakeholders were unintentionally excluded from the consultation process that took place prior to our involvement. If this additional consultation process fails to identify any significant issues we failed to consider, the following approach should be considered.

Stage 1

The aim in the first stage of the process is to develop a comprehensive and state wide legislative framework able to underpin initiatives to more effectively manage all companion animal issues in

Queensland. This legislation must be designed with sensitivity to cultural issues and regional variations across the state. Rather than being prescriptive with respect to detail, it should function as an enabling device, outlining minimum requirements but with local councils able to flexibly apply these as appropriate. The main features of the legislation should include:

- 1) Provision for a body or authority to manage companion animal affairs across the state, using either the Victorian or South Australian model. This body would ideally integrate animal control, welfare and management issues under one legislative framework, and would be responsible for overseeing research, training and education, regulation, compliance with policy and procedures, and policy development. Policy development should include creation of Codes of Practice for the control of Domestic Animal Businesses, including pet shops, shelters and pounds, commercial breeders, boarding kennels and catteries, training and day care centres. Procedures should include specifying reporting requirements for all domestic animal businesses. A central body would increase efficiency and ensure that legislative requirements can be enforced more effectively.
- 2) A requirement that all Councils create and regularly review local domestic animal management policies and place emphasis on ways to reduce the numbers of unwanted cats and dogs in their community (Victoria is instigating Domestic Animal Management Plans to do this). This should include provision of suitable housing for animal owners.
- 3) Setting up of a structured and systematic approach to promote voluntary desexing and compulsory identification, incorporating both microchips and collar/tag. This includes specification of acceptable microchip types and database integrity and performance standards, as well as access protocols for authorised personnel. To ensure data integrity, compliancy with privacy regulations, and prevent implementation problems experienced in other states it is recommended that all permissible microchips and microchip registries comply with Australian standards. Legislation may need a lead time in order for implanters to be trained to ensure that the chips can be read and that all documentation is completed correctly. Funds will also need to be made available to ensure that councils, pounds and shelters are equipped with appropriate scanning equipment. If provision is made for animals to be microchipped upon transfer from their breeder and the microchip registry records the identity of the breeder, then valuable data will accrue identifying the source of unwanted companion animals. This will enable strategies to reduce their numbers to be strategically targeted. In addition, the capacity to track movements of animals will facilitate implementation of biosecurity measures, should the need ever arise to do this. Provision should be made to fund low-cost/no-cost microchipping and desexing for disadvantaged members of the community. In some cases this may require access to mobile desexing/veterinary facilities such as those run by the RSPCA (Qld).
- 4) Stipulation of a funding model able to adequately resource companion animal programs within the state, including education, local government animal management services, research and compliance.

Stage 2

The aim in the second stage of the process is to raise community awareness of companion animal issues, increase voluntary compliance with responsible ownership practices and build basic knowledge of shelter and pound populations. This will include:

- 1) Development and implementation of a state wide 'responsible animal management' education program, targeting both schools and adults
- 2) Facilitation of local, community-based responsible animal management days, offering low-cost microchipping, access to educational and promotional activities, particularly those promoting desexing, opportunities to interact with, and increase awareness of,

different animals and breeds, and access to vouchers for desexing at local veterinary clinics

- 3) Sponsorship of basic research into
 - i.) different animal populations in Queensland, including how these interact and how they contribute to shelter and pound admission and euthanasia rates in different regions;
 - ii.) factors contributing to relinquishment of animals to shelters and pounds and perceived barriers to responsible ownership practices;
 - iii.) effective management of ownerless populations of companion animals, and
 - iv.) best practice for shelters and pounds, including promotion of successful adoptions
- 4) The provision of information, resources and appropriate training to shelters, pounds and councils to enable them to collect statistics in an agreed and standardised format. The ability to collate valid and quality data will enable the effectiveness of future strategies, such as educational campaigns or a changed incentive structure, to be measured. This will ensure that optimal policies and strategies are developed for Queenslanders and their companion animals.

Stage 3

The aim in the third stage of the process is to implement strategies to reduce shelter and pound euthanasia rates. These will include

- 8) Compulsory registration of domestic animal businesses (including pet shops, breeders, boarding kennels and catteries, groomers, dog walkers etc)
- 9) Compulsory identification (microchipping and collar/tag) of all cats and dogs over twelve weeks of age
- 10) Compulsory registration and confinement to owner's property (unless under effective control) of undesexed animals (if compulsory registration is selected as an incentive for desexing)
- 11) Compulsory tattooing of all desexed animals by the veterinarian who performs the procedure
- 12) Compulsory desexing of all animals rehomed by shelters and pounds and all animals impounded more than twice in any twelve month period
- 13) Pilot studies of alternative strategies for domestic animal control, such as compulsory desexing and compulsory desexing prior to transfer (particularly for cats), in geographically constrained locations where collection of comprehensive outcome data can occur
- 14) Pilot studies of strategies for controlling ownerless populations, particularly chemical desexing if this becomes available
- 15) Any other initiatives identified by the research conducted in Stage 2

Stage 4

The aim in the fourth stage of the process is to review and improve animal management practices in Queensland following implementation of the revised strategies. This will include:

- 5) Evaluation of education programs (community surveys of compliance with key messages)
- 6) Compilation of shelter and pound statistics following introduction of compulsory identification, for comparison with baseline data collected during Stage 2
- 7) Review of compliance of Domestic Animal Businesses with Codes of Practice and regulations
- 8) Provision of feedback to stakeholders and government to fulfil accountability requirements and inform policy development

Conclusions

Euthanasia rates in Queensland shelters and pounds are perceived by many stakeholders to be unacceptably high. In this report we analysed and evaluated potential solutions to this problem, including those containing the elements of education, identification, registration, compulsory desexing, desexing prior to sale or transfer and confinement. We established the scientific merits of each option, its practicality, feasibility and anticipated effectiveness, as well as the expected costs and benefits for companion animals, animal owners, animal welfare organisations, local governments, domestic animal businesses and the state government. In considering the issue of early age desexing we specifically incorporated findings from a review undertaken by the Centre of Companion Animal Health at the University of Queensland.

In undertaking our review of available scientific literature we identified critical knowledge gaps and discussed ways in which these might be resolved, and we identified a number of strategies to address the issue of unwanted cats and dogs in Queensland. We reviewed relevant legislation from across Australia and interviewed key stakeholders in Queensland and several other Australian states and territories. We also analysed over 5000 public submissions that were provided in response to the discussion paper 'Managing unwanted cats and dogs'. In this final section we considered all the data that we were able to access and identified a preferred option for managing dogs and cats in Queensland.

As will be evident by now, the issue of effective companion animal control is complex and often obscured by strong emotions, with most developed countries currently undergoing a period of legislative reform. In some ways Queensland is well placed to become a world leader in this area; able to capitalise on lessons learned in other regions and employ innovative technological solutions (microchips and early age desexing) that have only recently become available. In other ways it faces unique challenges, due to the large size of the state, the geographic, climatic and cultural diversity within it, and the lack of experience and infrastructure required for effective policy development and implementation in this area.

Experiences elsewhere have shown that companion animal control is most effective when it is supported by a strong, simple and coherent legislative framework that encourages responsible ownership behaviours, regulates domestic animal businesses (including shelters and pounds), clearly distinguishes owned from ownerless animals and supports effective animal management at the local government level and applied research. Developing this legislation is therefore a critical first step in reducing shelter and pound euthanasia rates.

Once this framework is in place, more specific policies can be developed and implemented. The focus should initially be on education (both state wide and targeted), up-skilling and the provision of support, as private citizens, businesses and local governments adjust to altered expectations. This should be coupled with research to more clearly describe existing practices and problems. As the community adjusts and the most significant issues are clarified through independent research, more stringent requirements can be imposed.

The most important of these is compulsory identification of all owned animals. This is expected to be reasonably easy to implement as the costs are reasonable and the benefits for animal owners clear. Very few, if any, exemptions will require processing. In addition, much of the required infrastructure is already in place nationally, although training and equipment supply within Queensland will be required.

Compulsory identification will facilitate all three broad strategies for companion animal control: encouraging responsible ownership practices, removing ownerless animals from the community and improving reunion and rehoming rates for animals admitted to shelters and pounds. Encouraging high rates of reproductive control through voluntary desexing, including early age desexing of cats, and compulsory confinement of undesexed animals is also imperative, but the imposition of compulsory desexing should be considered a last resort, to be implemented only if incentive schemes fail and only if careful research establishes an effectiveness means of implementing and enforcing this strategy. Developing novel methods for dealing with ownerless animals should be treated as a matter for urgent attention.

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