

ABOUT THE PLAN

Why is a Cat Management Plan needed in SA?

South Australia has a cat overpopulation challenge that urgently needs a coordinated plan of action. RSPCA South Australia and AWL believe *every* cat deserves a responsible owner.

Sadly, an estimated 137,000 cats – and probably far more – live in urban areas as unowned or semi-owned strays across our state. This leads to poor welfare outcomes for animals, predation on native wildlife and negative impacts on human wellbeing.

Why are RSPCA South Australia and Animal Welfare League focusing on this issue?

We believe South Australia's cat overpopulation challenge is one of our state's most serious animal welfare issues. The current situation is unsustainable – together, we receive more than 10,000 cats into our South Australian shelters every year. Many of these are urban stray cats. Caring for these cats and kittens comes at an enormous cost to RSPCA South Australia and AWL – charities largely funded by donations.

Councils are looking for help in developing a strategy for cat management. As the state's leading animal welfare charities, we believe we are best positioned to assist.

What strategies does the Cat Management Plan for South Australia recommend?

RSPCA and AWL's South Australian plan seeks a consistent and comprehensive approach to cat management across our state. It proposes 26 key areas of change, including:

- Better promotion of responsible cat ownership.
- New measures to help curb unwanted breeding, increase cat identification and better control cat roaming.
- Strategies to increase cat rehoming, reduce surrenders and abandonment and lower the number of un-desexed stray cats in SA.
- Legislative changes to make cat management practices consistent across SA, along with proposals to increase funding for cat management.
- Research to ensure the plan's action points are effective.

Does the plan propose changes to feral cat management?

No. Feral cats are very different from urban stray cats. Ferals, unlike urban strays, have no reliance on humans directly or indirectly for food or shelter, but rather hunt and survive on their own. They are typically found in the wild at least two to three kilometres from the nearest human habitation or building.

How long will it take for the plan's measures to have a meaningful effect?

The reality is that South Australia's cat overpopulation challenge is a complex issue that will require a comprehensive set of actions by multiple stakeholders over many years. The Cat Management Plan for South Australia will only be effective if implemented in its entirety. The plan is not a "menu" from which individual items can be selected or rejected.

Is the Cat Management Plan based on any science or research?

The Cat Management Plan for South Australia draws from an extensive national scientific study conducted by RSPCA Australia, released in May 2018, entitled '[Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia](#)'. That national study made 21 recommendations as to how best to manage the complex and persistent challenge of domestic cats in the community.

Is a trap, neuter and release (TNR) program included as part of the plan?

The Cat Management Plan for South Australia proposes a 'trap, desex and adopt or return' (TDAR) trial as part of the broad range of initiatives proposed. This trial is likely to run in one location in South Australia, which is yet to be determined.

In TDAR programs, cats are trapped, health checked, desexed, vaccinated and then either rehomed or returned to their original location. Cats that are unsuitable for rehoming, unhealthy and unfit for release are euthanised.

TDAR programs have potential benefits beyond just reducing cat numbers, including the potential to improve cat health and reduce cat-related conflict with the local community due to the reduction in cat nuisance behaviours in desexed animals, such as aggression. However, no large scale trial of TDAR has been run in Australia to determine its effectiveness as a cat management strategy - hence why this trial is proposed.

Who was consulted in the development of the Cat Management Plan for South Australia?

National consultation was undertaken by RSPCA Australia in developing 'Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia', which was launched last year.

Further to this, the RSPCA South Australia and Animal Welfare League have engaged with relevant Ministers and State Government departments, the Local Government Association, local councils, the Australian Veterinarian Association, and a range of community and conservation organisations in the development of our Cat Management Plan for South Australia.

Addressing the complex issue of cat overpopulation in SA will require many actions by stakeholders over a number of years. We welcome assistance from all stakeholders with implementation of this plan going forward.

Why didn't you involve smaller SA Rescue Groups when developing the plan?

The plan for SA is the result of extensive consultation nationwide with a wide cross-section of stakeholders. National consultation was undertaken by RSPCA Australia in developing 'Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia', which was launched last year.

In SA, addressing the complex issue of cat overpopulation will require many actions by multiple stakeholders over a number of years. We welcome your group's assistance with implementation of this plan in the near future. Thank you for your interest in addressing this major animal welfare challenge, and please feel free to contact us if you require any further information.

When was the Cat Management Plan for South Australia released?

Together, RSPCA South Australia and Animal Welfare League released our Cat Management Plan for South Australia on Sunday, November 10.

How can I find out more about the Cat Management Plan for South Australia?

To download the full plan, please visit: www.rspcasa.org.au/cat-plan

ABOUT COMMUNITY CATS

What exactly is an “urban stray cat”?

Urban stray cats are unowned or semi-owned cats living in urban and peri-urban areas of South Australia. They may also be wandering or lost owned cats.

Semi-owned and unowned cats live either on their own or in groups (known as “colonies”). They rely indirectly on humans for food and shelter to survive. They may, for example, live on the grounds of a shopping center, community housing complex, university or private property. Semi-owned cats are directly fed and often provided other care by specific people, but those individuals do not perceive themselves as official “owners” of the cats, but rather as caregivers. Owned cats may be wandering due to lack of suitable cat safe fencing or confinement in the owner’s home.

Why can’t urban stray cats all be captured and offered for adoption?

At RSPCA and AWL, our resources are already stretched thin with the work we are doing to rehome thousands of cats each year across South Australia. Sadly, it’s beyond our capacity to socialise and find homes for most urban stray cats in our state – and realistically, it would be difficult to find enough homes for so many cats in the short term.

We believe our Cat Management Plan for South Australia offers ways to make meaningful progress on the issues of cat management. By focusing on reducing cat reproduction, hopefully one day we will be able to find responsible owners for all unowned and semiowned cats.

Why can’t urban stray cats just be euthanised?

Mass killing of healthy domestic cats in urban environments is not the solution. This strategy would be completely unacceptable to the broader community and to RSPCA and AWL as animal welfare organisations.

History has also repeatedly shown that euthanasing stray cats – the usual approach – fails to deliver any meaningful results. Cats who are removed are soon replaced by new cats and the problems continue unabated. Mass killing is a strategy that is socially unacceptable, almost impossible to implement in an urban environment, expensive and ongoing, and will not be effective.

Isn't trapping, desexing and leaving cats outdoors currently illegal in Australia?

Desexing urban strays and leaving them where they live may be considered 'abandonment' under South Australian law. However, before beginning the 'trap, desex and adopt or return' (TDAR) trial, we will obtain all the necessary exemptions and permits from relevant state and local governments. Our aim is to demonstrate that this approach to cat management works, so we can get changes in state legislation.

If this trial is successful, state governments may be persuaded to change existing legislation so that all Australian councils can use such programs to reduce urban stray cat numbers and associated concerns. This would represent the most important change in domestic cat management laws in Australia in our lifetime.

Won't cats left outdoors predate on local and native wildlife?

Reducing predation by reducing the urban stray cat population is one of the goals of the Cat Management Plan for South Australia. Fewer cats will mean less predation. This will be achieved by desexing stray and pet cats, encouraging cat owners to keep their pets confined indoors or in outdoor enclosures, preventing abandonment and otherwise promoting responsible cat stewardship.

How will this Cat Management Plan impact the unowned cats in my community?

If you have issues with cats in your community, please contact your local council to alert them to this issue. The Cat Management Plan calls for a consistent statewide approach in cat management that is led by local councils. While this will take time to effect change, the process needs to begin now.

The Cat Management Plan offers varied solutions for cats that are suspected to be unowned. Please contact your local council for support.

FOR CAT OWNERS

Can I get my cat desexed for free as part of this plan?

Unfortunately we at RSPCA and AWL are currently unable to offer free desexing – as charities, we simply do not have the resources needed to make this happen.

How does this Cat Management Plan impact me as a cat owner?

The Cat Management Plan for South Australia calls for improved and increased education about responsible cat ownership. Responsible cat ownership includes:

- Microchipping
- Desexing
- Vaccinating
- Regular parasite treatments
- Containing cats within your property
- Providing cats with regular enrichment
- Providing cats with a healthy balanced diet

ABOUT COUNCILS AND GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

Don't individual councils in SA already have laws about cat management?

Councils have the option to create individual by-laws about cats, but fewer than half the councils in SA have existing cat by-laws, and the majority of these are regional. The provisions in these laws are greatly inconsistent across councils. Not one council with cat by-laws has all the provisions RSPCA and AWL recommend in our Cat Management Plan for South Australia. That is why we strongly believe consistent, statewide laws are needed.

What legal provisions for cat management do you recommend?

RSPCA and AWL recommend the following legal provisions for cat management in South Australia:

- Confinement to property at all times (however, curfews are a positive initial, transitional step).
- Mandatory desexing for *all* cats by the age of 4-5 months (not just for those born after July 1 2018).

- Identification for roaming cats by way of a quick-release collar outlining their owner's details.
- Increase the limit on ownership of cats to 4 per household.
- Compulsory cat registration to assist councils with funds to enforce management.
- Detention periods of 7 days for identified (microchipped) cats and 3 days for unidentified cats who are seized when roaming, with flexibility for cats who are injured/suffering.

What types of cat management changes have been made interstate?

One of the most significant and effective changes made interstate has been to adopt a consistent statewide approach and for councils to take the lead on cat management. This has proven effective in reducing community confusion while providing a consistent approach to addressing cat overpopulation.

As part of a consistent statewide approach, other states have applied mandatory detention periods, introduced cat registration and low-cost microchipping to increase the likelihood of cats being reunited with their owners. Other initiatives have included low-cost de-sexing programs, containment strategies and the introduction of curfews.

While cat overpopulation issues are broadly the same across the nation, we are keen to work with councils to address their specific concerns in the development of the plan.

In whatever form the final SA plan takes, we believe it should also be supported by ongoing promotion of responsible cat ownership and strategies to decrease surrender and increase rehoming rates.