

AUSTRALIA'S IMPENDING ANIMAL WELFARE CRISIS

Seen one too many 'reduced adoption fee', 'free cat' or 'clear the shelter' promotions from animal rescue groups over the past year? Well there is a reason for it, and unless something is done soon Australia could have a nation-wide animal welfare crisis on its hands.

Cat overpopulation is not a myth, in fact it is a very real phenomenon happening right now across the country. Speak to any group involved in rehoming cats and kittens and they will tell you they are at-or-over capacity, and yet still receiving calls daily to take in another litter of kittens, or another stray cat.

It is a serious problem being perpetuated by unseasonably warm weather and people not desexing their cats.

"Traditionally, the kitten breeding season is accepted to be during Spring time and yet due to pervading warm weather newborn kittens are finding themselves at our doorstep every day," says Senior Behaviourist for Animal Welfare League NSW (AWL NSW), Rosalie Horton.

The warm weather, combined with people not desexing their cats (who can start reproducing from as young as 4 months of age), is pushing animal rescue groups to their limits, so much so that many kittens are simply being left to their own devices on streets or in backyards because there aren't the resources to help them.

"This problem is exacerbated by kittens coming into care without their mother's, so requiring around-the-clock bottle feeding which, if they weren't receiving, would lead to starvation and death in a very short amount of time," says Rosalie.

Statistically, the number of descendants of just one undesexed female cat can be up to 5,000 in only 7 years.

With such a statistic, and many cats roaming streets undesexed, Australia could be set to face a nation-wide animal welfare crisis.

"Cats and kittens who live on the street are susceptible to a number of dangers including being hit by cars, starvation, disease and health issues and animal cruelty," says Rosalie. "With more and more being forced to live in such a way, there is the very real possibility Australia is on the path to having an animal welfare crisis on its hands."

Perpetuating the problem, and making it harder to resolve, is the lack of governance around straying cats. While dogs receive certain regulations within the Companion Animal's Act to ...

... protect them, the same is not shared with their feline counterparts.

“Most council’s will collect stray dogs and legally any dog found straying outside of its owned premises without an owner can be seized and taken to an approved premises such as a pound,” says AWL NSW Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Mason.

“Cats however are allowed to roam, so unless they are found to be threatening injury or death on another animal or person, or they are in a prohibited place like a wildlife protection area, no authority will take responsibility for them, including council pounds who will turn away people bringing in stray cats.”

The lack of direction and legislation around stray cats is increasing the number remaining on the street with no accountable owner. When these cats are as well not desexed, the overpopulation crisis simply continues to get worse, with higher rates of euthanasia forced upon animal welfare groups and more incidents of malnourished and suffering cats in suburban areas.

“Finding a solution to this problem is not one-faceted, but a good, research-proven start is for cat owners to ensure their cats are desexed so if they do roam or become lost they aren’t contributing to the problem,” says Andrew.

Groups like Animal Welfare League NSW will continue to work with Government departments to improve outcomes for companion animals, and provide educational resources to the public on the importance of desexing. In the interim however, they need people to desex their cats and consider adopting a rescue cat or kitten to help make room for more animals in need.

Find out more about adoption and desexing at: www.awlnsw.com.au

For media enquiries please contact Jessica Craig at jessicacraig@awlnsw.com.au or on 0403 140 649. Spokesperson available on request.

About Animal Welfare League NSW

Animal Welfare League NSW (AWL NSW) believes that all companion animals deserve a safe and loving home. We have been operating in NSW for over 55 years.

AWL NSW provides a safe environment where surrendered, neglected and abandoned animals can feel comfortable and nurtured, and we do our very best to match each pet with a suitable home.

AWL NSW operates three animal welfare shelters, a veterinary hospital, a behaviour team, a foster care network and 13 volunteer branches around NSW. We have a team of Inspectors on the ground protecting animals, providing emergency rescue and enforcing the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

For more info go to www.awlnsw.com.au or call 02 8899 3333.