CATS are NOT Little Dogs
A Feline Purr-spective of the DAA

The introduction of the Domestic Animals Act in 1994 and subsequent implementation in 1996 was a defining moment for cat welfare and management in Victoria. This presentation will:

- Explore the situation for cats prior to the DAA
- Highlight why cats are not little dogs
- Examine the measures the DAA introduced for cats
- Change takes time
- Outline the present situation for cats and need for a feline specific look at the legislation
Purr-hiss-toric History – Before the DAA

- Cats had no legal status, only provisions for welfare were under the POCTA, ownership status difficult
- No resources for cat welfare, either financial or infrastructure
- No pound system existed for cats, no statutory holding times, very much at individual shelter’s discretion
- No mandatory standards for shelters – existing COP was voluntary and very basic
- Cats were generally second class citizens in shelters
- No ability to address problems caused by cats when mismanaged
Large numbers of cats entering shelters – high euthanasia rates - large component of intake were wild and young animals, queens with kittens indicating massive oversupply problem

No early age desexing – cats adopted were desexed at six months of age via a voucher system from shelters, large percentage (estimates at 25-40%) of these were not redeemed and common for kittens adopted from shelters to have at least one litter before being desexed.

No identification requirements – collars not reliable and owners often reluctant to place them on cats, could be removed easily – reclaim rates negligible, no regulation of microchip databases
Purr-hiss-toric History – Before the DAA

- Majority of cats were acquired passively – some 45-50% were “found”, approx 20% were adopted from shelters and a small percentage from breeders and pet shops
- Large number of unowned colonies around food sources eg restaurants generally with human feeder – not desexed, high disease rate, free living
Purr-hiss-toric History – Before the DAA

- As a feline practitioner:
  - Feline welfare not a mainstream career choice
  - Main cases seen were cat fights, motor car accidents and cat flu
  - Majority of problems seen were related to poor nutrition, and infectious and parasitic disease due to poor husbandry
  - Many unwanted kittens, injured strays left at veterinary practices
  - Majority of patients were domestics, not pedigrees – feline breeding in early stages cf dogs
  - Very few cats were permanently identified
Feline Specific Characteristics

- Superior intelligence
- Easy care pet ideal for modern living and for the elderly and disabled
- No dangerous cats, no barking cats, nuisance largely related to trespass
- Historically low value attached by community
- Remarkable reproductive capacity – seasonally polyoestrus, induced ovulators
- Not contained by fences
- Refuse to wear collars – need permanent identification
Feline Specific Characteristics

- Capable of living independently of humans - free living populations (colonies) exist which intermingle with owned populations meaning all populations must be considered in management plans or colonies are quickly replenished.
- Obligate carnivore with desert physiology superbly adapted for Australian climate – no natural climatic control on free living populations.
Holistic Cat Management Plan

- Legal Status
- Ownership defined with responsibilities for care
- Permanent Identification with reliable data base
- Desexing – early age preferable and at point of sale
- Subsidized/Discount Accessible Desexing Programs
- Revenue system – Registration (user pays) vs Levy (community pays)
- Infrastructure – pound system and resources with requirements for husbandry standards
- Adoption programs for rehoming
- Education – responsible cat ownership, improving image of cat and therefore value
Holistic Cat Management Plan

- Regulation and standards for breeding/sale of felines – pet shops, pedigree breeders – aim to produce healthy, genetically robust felines with excellent temperaments and well socialised.
- Humane management of the unowned population.
1996 – The Domestic Animals Act

- Legal Status – defined ownership and owner responsibilities
- Registration
- Requirement for identification but not microchip
- Differential registration fees to encourage identification and desexing
- Establishment of pound system and standards with mandatory codes of practice
- Resources from registration fees for cat management – Councils now responsible for stray cats
- Measures to address nuisance caused by cats
1996 – The Domestic Animals Act

- Ability for Local Government to introduce orders for cat containment for places and times – cat curfews
- State levy for responsible cat ownership education
Local government had no infrastructure for cats, poor infrastructure for dogs

Local government had no experience with cat management

Major shelters – to assist Councils and provide good facilities for impounded animals and experienced handling - entered the tender process

Not initially financially driven – generally a loss was made, though it provided some income for services provided pre-DAA for free

Competition between shelters eventually meant low prices continued and effectively shelters subsidizing Councils for service
DAA Amendments

- Addition of microchip registry requirements to regulate and provide uniform standards for data collection, storage and usage (2003 – 2005)
- Compulsory microchipping for first registration (2005-2007)
- DAB must microchip before sale (2011)
- Requirement for Councils to develop Domestic Animal Management Programs – one of the requirements for these plans was to examine and address overpopulation and high euthanasia rates. They are a mechanism to address cat issues at a local level (2005-2006)
DAA Amendments

- Heritable Disease Code developed
- Code of Practice for Shelters and Pounds review
  - Removal of 28 day rule
  - Inclusion of health management plans
  - Improvement in fostering provisions
- Inclusion of Rescue groups and Section 84Y agreements (2011)
- Code of Practice for Breeding and Rearing Establishments review
  - Separated dog and cat husbandry requirements
- Animal Welfare Fund (2011)
Community Programs

- State Government Responsible Pet Ownership program
- Early Age desexing education for veterinarians
- Who’s for cats campaign
  - To encourage taking on ownership of semi-owned cats and discourage just feeding
- Cat Crisis Coalition
  - Shelters united and lobbying for compulsory desexing of all cats not required for breeding by 12 weeks of age and before sale/adoption
- Moggies.com – adoption website to raise the profile of shelter cats
RSPCA Preventative Programs

- I Love Cats Fee waiver scheme
- Mobile Animal Care unit – mobile desexing program eg recent program with Banyule City Council – improves accessibility of discounted desexing
- Young at Heart program – subsidy for adoption of senior cats
- Lake Tyres initiative
- Desexing Discount on reclaim of entire cats and surrender of litters of kittens – to encourage desexing
RSPCA Preventative Programs

Regional Cat Desexing Schemes targeting Health Care Card Holders eg Ballarat

- 1819 cats desexed, 2170 cats microchipped

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Admission Numbers</th>
<th>Reclaim Percentage</th>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>1529</td>
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Present Situation – 20 years on

Twenty years on significant improvements have occurred for feline welfare:

- Cat ownership clarified, responsibilities of ownership defined and process of introducing and implementing the DAA has significantly increased cat owner awareness and compliance.
- Cat pound infrastructure has been established with regulation and standards and husbandry significantly improved within the system. Shelter medicine has evolved into a discipline.
- Community attaches more value to cats – legislation increases awareness.
- Improved ID and containment.
Feline Admissions and Outcomes

RSPCA Victoria

![Graph showing feline admissions and outcomes with categories for Total, Reclaimed, Rehomed, and Euthanased over a period from 1999-2000 to 2012-2013.]
As a feline practitioner:

- Several feline only practices now established
- Main cases seen now are old age related disease, obesity problems, genetic problems and emerging diseases such as FIP
- Few unwanted kittens left at veterinary practices
- Pedigrees constituting larger percentage of patients - feline breeding developing rapidly
- Diseases relating to poor nutrition and husbandry far less common
- Majority of cats are now permanently identified
- Containment of cats accepted norm by owners
Cats are not little dogs
Future – Feline Specific Legislation

- Have embedded the basic requirements and framework for management within the DAA treating cats as honorary dogs – next step is to look at feline specific improvements:
  - Increase numbers of cats allowed without a permit from 2 to 4 (desexed) – cats less trouble than dogs, they do not bark, attack people and make ideal pets for current lifestyles.
  - Cat friendly housing – eg internal courtyards
  - Cats require desexing for population control – separate from dogs as few problems with cats with EAD, pedigree breeders generally support (protects gene pool and understand the cat problem)
Future – Feline Specific Legislation

- Use of allocated resources to feline specific programs eg subsidised/discount accessible desexing programs – it is far more humane and effective to prevent birth of unwanted kittens than address the problems caused - $1 spent on desexing saves $11 in cat management

- Councils to use DAMP to address cat issues within their community

- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus Protocols - discussion

- Pedigree – genetic disease, conformational soundness, diseases of intensive husbandry

- Addressing humanely the semi-owned cat population:
  - Education – 41% of cat owners feed a cat they don’t own
Future – Feline Specific Legislation

- Desexing – Who’s for cats program provided discounted desexing and encouraged feeders to take ownership – needs second stage aimed at assisting semi-owned cat feeders
- Research – humane control methods
Change takes time

- Cats some 30 years behind dogs in terms of legislation and some 300 years behind in terms of pedigree breeding
- Microchipping - 1989 – 2011
- Early age desexing – from 1991
- Removal of 28 day rule – 1990 – 2011
- Compulsory desexing – can act locally via DAMP
- Numbers declining, population changing, reclams slowly increasing, as intake numbers reduce resources can be allocated to rehabilitation and rehoming
- Community perception and expectation is changing – expectation that cats are rehomed but we still have an unowned cat population
Strength in Unity

- Animal welfare organisations have united through time to lobby for:
  - Domestic Animals Act
  - Compulsory Desexing of cats
  - Puppy farm abolition
- Labels not helpful – we all have the same intent
- Animal welfare in Australia facing significant difficulty – AAWS abolished, BAW’s future uncertain
- Need to unite to put animal welfare back on the agenda
With lots of purrs
Thank you
Questions?