

# Cat admissions to RSPCA shelters in Queensland:

## A pilot study to describe the population of cats entering shelters and risk factors for euthanasia.





# 'Overview'

- PhD
- Pilot study
- Cat entry to shelters
- Risk of euthanasia
- Understand the problem!



# Why?



- Twice as many cats as dogs
- High cat euthanasia
- Moral and ethical implications
- Costs to the community



# Human 'cost'

- 50% people working with euthanasia develop symptoms of 'post traumatic stress' disorder\*



\*Rohlf, V & Bennett, P (2005) Perpetration-induced Traumatic Stress in persons who euthanise non-human animals in surgeries, animal shelters and laboratories. *Society & Animals*. 13(3): 201-219.





# Economic Cost

- \$82 million spent annually on the management of unwanted pets\*
- Local Queensland government spent \$30 million in one year\*
- This is a huge amount of resources



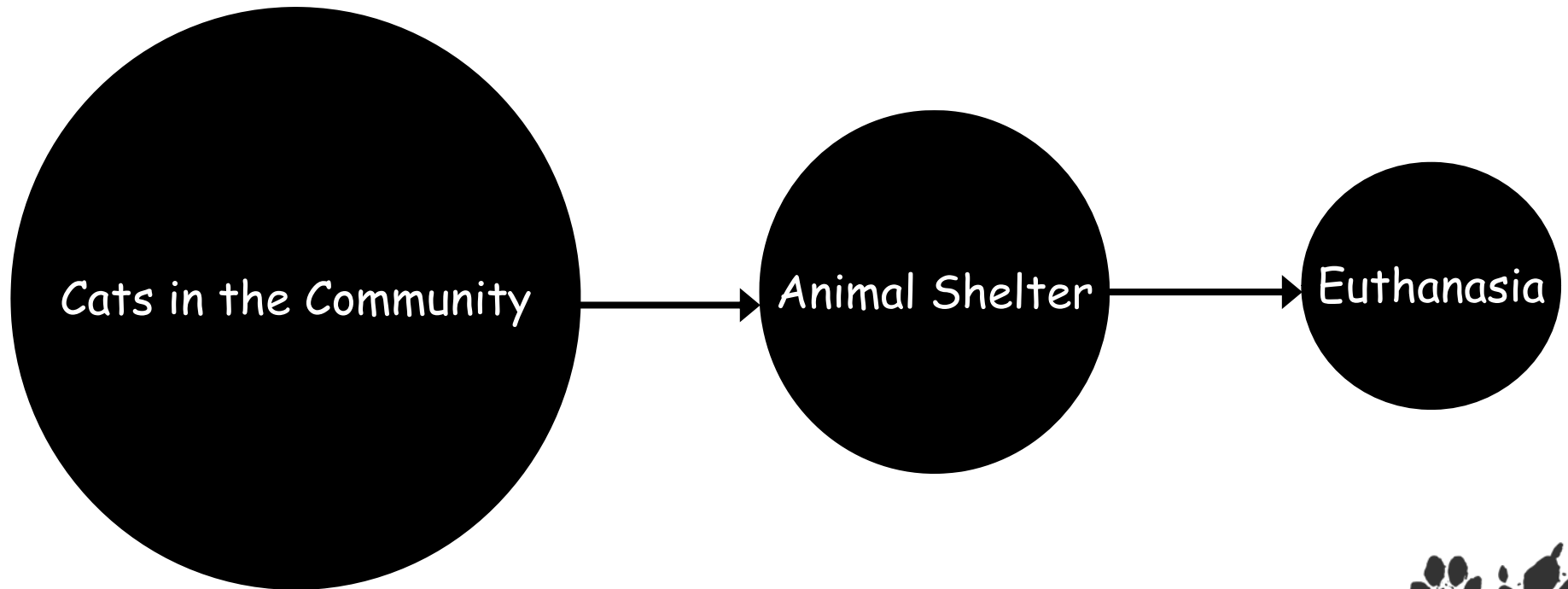
\*Australian Companion Animal Council. 2006. Contributions of the pet care industry to the Australian economy. BIS Shrapnel, Sydney.





# Study Aim

- To describe the characteristics of cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters and identify risk factors for euthanasia after entry.





# Methods



- 24 month study period.
- RSPCA electronic database, ShelterMate©.
- All cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters
- Data = year of intake, category of age at entry, gender, postcode of origin, method of admission to shelter, breed, and outcome.
- Univariable and multivariable risk regression analysis





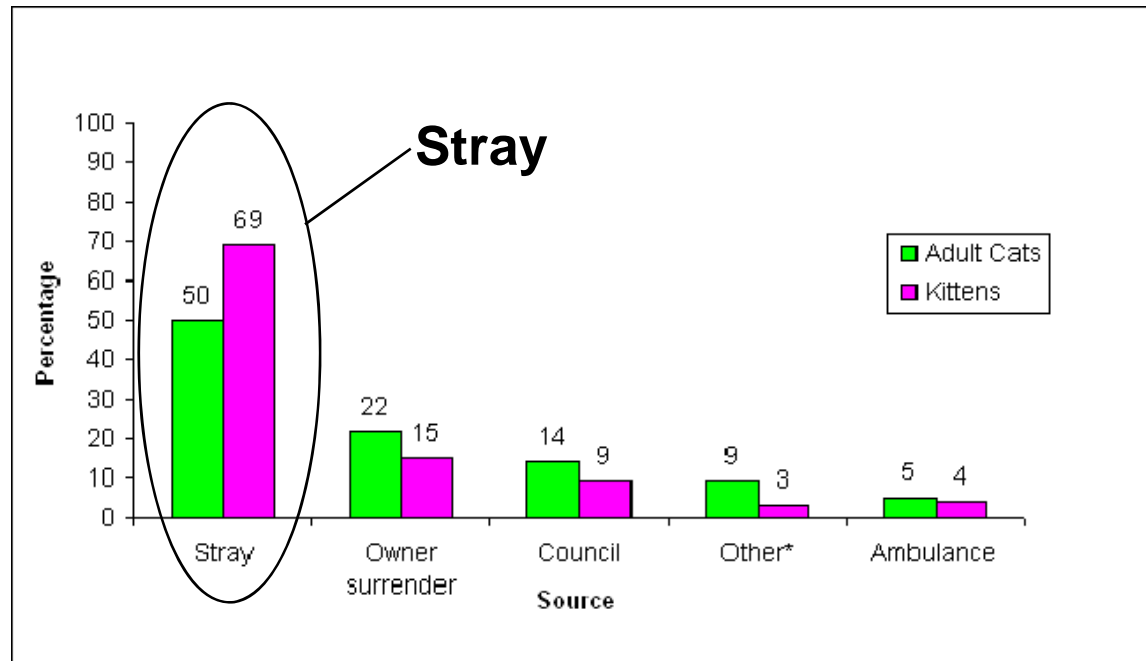
# Results

## General information:

- N = 26, 034 cats
- 66% adult cats, 34% kittens
- More than half (65%) of all cats were euthanised after admission.



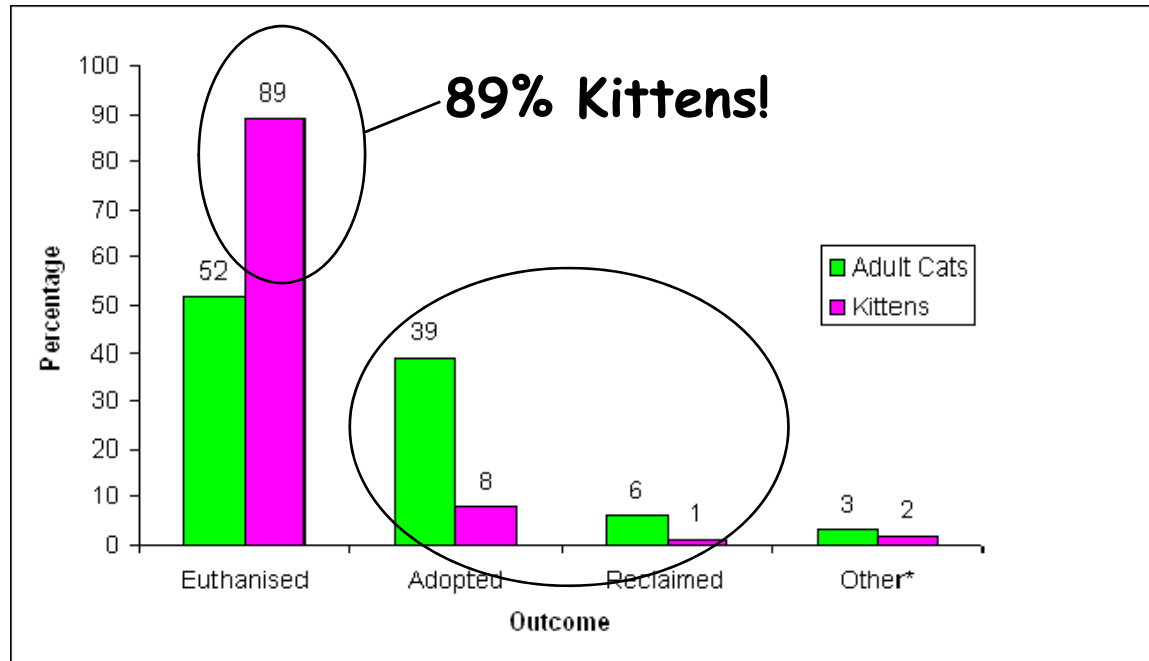
# Results - Admission



- The most common admission source was as a stray
- Amongst kittens entering shelters, most (69%) were admitted as a stray.



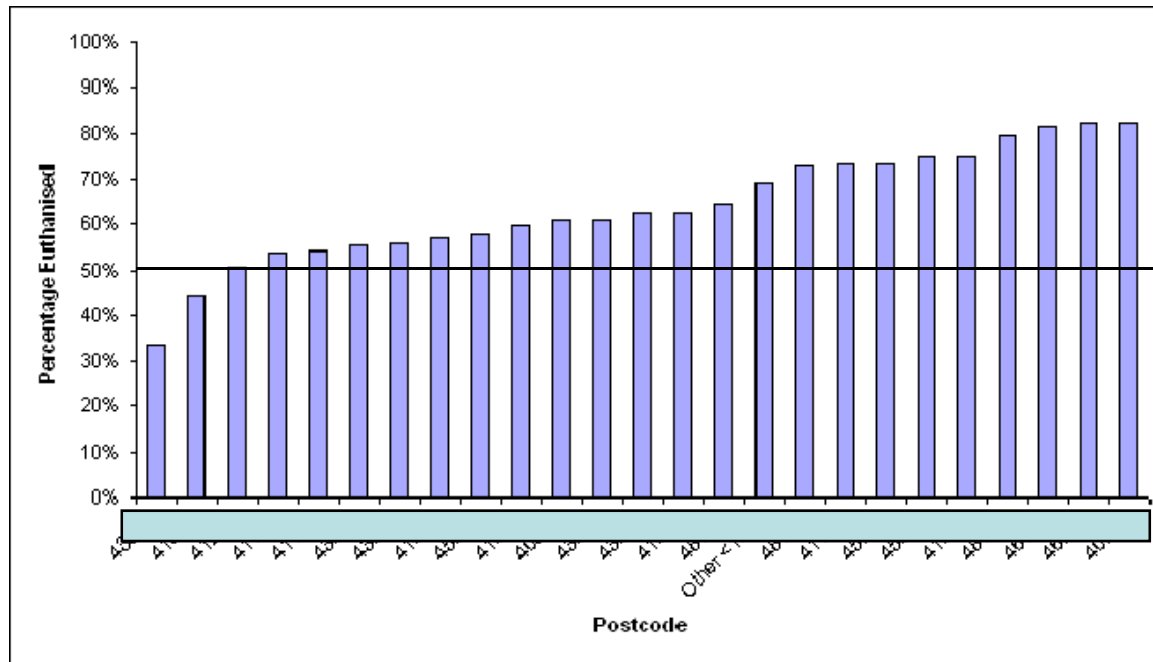
# Results: Risk of Euthanasia



- Kittens (<6 months) being at greatest risk. (Risk Ratio 1.73; 95% CI 1.71 – 1.75.  $P = <0.001$ ).
- Kittens were less likely to be adopted or reclaimed



# Results - Risk of Euthanasia



- After adjusting for all other variables, postcode was still associated with risk of euthanasia ( $P = <0.001$ ).
- Only 2 postcodes had a euthanasia rate less 50%



# What does this mean?



- Kittens are 1.7 times more likely to be euthanised than adult cats
- It is unclear from this study why
- Seasonal influx and age of kitten admissions in warmer months is suspected as a causal factor.





# What does this mean?

- If stray admissions are truly un-owned cats, then strategies to reduce cat admissions to shelters that target owned cats will have limited effect on this population.



# What does this mean?

- As postcode is a risk factor for cats being euthanised it is possible:
  - shelter practice
  - local legislation
  - Environment/ climate
  - human demographics
- Influence euthanasia risk





# Conclusions



- More research is required to investigate the 'stray' population of cats.
- Further studies investigating the precise age and date of kittens at entry are required
- Further research is required to establish why postcode is a risk factor for euthanasia.
- A single database can provide useful information!



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# Thank you



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