

Claws out on no-kill scheme

Aisha Dow
Isaac Johanson

A catfight has erupted between animal lovers over a council's plans to scale back the killing of domestic animals that stray from home, with wildlife workers demanding all stray cats be euthanased.

Darebin council has pledged to launch a "social media blitz" to help reunite lost pets with their owners, including by posting pictures of impounded dogs and cats on Facebook.

But native animal carer Michele Phillips has no sympathy for felines that stray from the boundaries of their home. At the South Oakleigh Wildlife Shelter, it's her job to patch up the birds and possums that arrive with bleeding puncture wounds.

"Nine out of 10 native animals that we treat at the shelter are a cat attack," Ms Phillips said. "If people are responsible pet owners, we wouldn't have this problem, but we do have to take control."

Ms Phillips said all stray and feral cats should be euthanased.

On Tuesday night Darebin council approved a new plan with ambitions to slash the number of impounded cats euthanased from 85 per cent (762 cats) to 50 per cent. It's part of a long-term plan to make Darebin a "no-kill" council.

The reforms were prompted by last year's killing of resident Dean Nicholson's 15-year-old cat, Bubba, who was picked up by council rangers and euthanased the same day because she was allegedly diseased.



Kathleen Chapman, campaigner for Save Darebin Pets, supports Darebin council's plans for a no-kill policy for stray cats.
Photo: Jason South

The cat wasn't wearing a microchip or collar.

That incident led to the formation of the Save Darebin Pets group, who have successfully lobbied for reforms that will see neighbours notified when a cat trap is operating in the area.

Save Darebin Pets spokeswoman Kathleen Chapman argued trapping and killing cats was a "non-sustainable initiative".

That move, to warn neighbours who live within 50 metres of a cat trap, has drawn particular opposition from wildlife workers who say it encourages cat owners to be lazy.

If Darebin council fulfils its ambition it will join Stonnington

among a handful of councils who do not kill.

Stonnington euthanased just two dogs and four cats in the 2011-12 financial year and the animals that were killed were put down only because they couldn't be socialised.

Under current legislation in Victoria, a domestic animal has to be kept for a minimum of eight days before it is euthanased.

But each year thousands are killed before they can be rescued or rehomed.

In 2010 almost 11,000 dogs were euthanased across the state, according to the Pet Industry Association of Australia.



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