

Mitcham restrains cat numbers

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MITCHAM Council has formally endorsed a controversial cat-control bylaw which restricts the number of cats per household.

In addition to the two-cat restriction, Mitcham cat owners will be required to register and microchip the animals. Cat owners are permitted to own more than two cats if they can convince the council they are not impacting negatively on the community and they are properly cared for.

The council proposed the bylaw at its previous meeting in February. It endorsed the bylaw at last night's council meeting, in a 9-4 vote.

Councillors - some of whom are cat owners - clashed over the issue.

Mitcham Animal Management Committee chair and councillor Diana Gibbs Ludbrook said she had received strong feedback that residents supported the bylaw.

"People are excited to think there's some leadership in the community," Ms Gibbs Ludbrook said. "Eighty-one per cent of the residents surveyed are in support of the cat bylaws.

"We're not talking about hurting cats. We're talking about education and providing a framework for cat management we can work in."

Other councillors agreed that it was up to the council to lead the way.

"I think there will probably be a huge outcry from the community, but that will settle down," councillor Colin Campbell said. "The community is looking to Mitcham Council to provide some leadership."

"This is a good thing for cat owners," councillor Elaine Grimm said. "If someone's moggy does go walkabout and the RSPCA gets it, they'll get it back."

But several councillors had serious concerns about the efficacy and cost of the bylaw.

"This bylaw is not going to work, and it's going to cost us a lot of money," councillor Mark Ward said, citing a council report which showed similar legislation in Victoria and New South Wales had failed to curb the cat problem.

Councillor Judith Weaver said the community had not been consulted about the cost of the bylaw.

"The bylaw is approximately \$57,000 for one year, \$101,000 for two years," Ms Weaver said. "For five years it is \$252,000. This is pretty relevant to the community. They haven't been asked whether they'd rather have this - it is documented that it does not work and it is costing the community."

Ms Weaver also proposed an alternate solution - a two-year trial program in association with a community group, Cats Assistance To Sterilise (CATS), which would see subsidised or free desexing at no cost to the council.

"The community is being duped into thinking this is going to work," Ms Weaver said. "It's not going to work. Ninety-five per cent of the problem is desexing... the bylaw does not address desexing."

"Here we have an organisation working with 12 of the 18 metro councils successfully, desexing cats for very little cost." Ms Weaver said. "Burnside, Unley, Norwood Payneham & St Peters all support it. But we're above it, we're prepared to sink big money into this bylaw."

CATS president Christine Pierson said the council was making a huge mistake with the bylaw.

"The council has totally ignored the scientific fact that have been presented that the bylaw will not reduce cat numbers and will not reduce cat-related problems," she said.

Ms Pierson commended the four councillors who voted against the bylaw.

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