

## **Will cat decline threaten vet jobs?**

**A sharp decline in the Australian domestic cat population may lead to the loss of up to 300 positions for veterinarians, according to experts.**

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A report prepared by AusVet Animal Health Services for the Australian Companion Animal Council (based on data compiled by AC Nielson Research) predicted the country's cat population would decline to about two million by 2005.

The number of domestic cats has already fallen by 15 per cent between 1994 and 2002.

If the decline does not plateau it could cost between 200 to 300 veterinary jobs, according to Chris Baldock, Director of AusVet Animal Health Services.

Dr Baldock said while the domestic dog population "may be in a shallow decline", it was not nearly as dramatic as for the cat population.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the specific reasons for the cat population decline, higher rates of desexing are thought to be partially responsible.

"Entire cats are so separated in a sea of spayed and neutered cats that they do make the contact with each other as they used to," he said.

Changing household trends may also deter pet acquisition.

Dr Baldock said the number of single person households, single parent families and group households, where pet ownership rates were traditionally lower than that of family couples with children, were increasing.

"The ownership rate of pets is decreasing in these households, probably due to practical difficulties," he said.

It may be difficult for these households to acquire and care for pets due to restrictions imposed by landlords, long working hours or other lifestyle factors such as extended travel.

Animal behaviourist Kersti Seksel said it was becoming increasingly difficult for people to own pets, particularly if they were renting a property.

"It can be difficult to own a pet in an apartment due to restrictions imposed by the body corporate. Councils in a lot of areas also place restrictions on owning cats. As veterinarians we should be actively promoting the benefits of owning a pet, not just to our clients but also as part of the Australian Veterinary Association," Dr Seksel said.

She suggested another factor contributing to the decline in cat ownership was a reduction in the proportion of 'moggies' as opposed to purebred cats.

"It would be really nice to breed cats for temperament, and moggies have a great temperament.

If we are interested in having vets in the future, we need cats and dogs out there," Dr Seksel said.

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