

can be accessed 24 hours a day and the data shared between agencies to prevent duplicate owner registrations.”

Asked how many pets go missing each year, Mr Ryder said it is impossible to calculate the numbers due to a number of factors, such as how long a pet has to be missing to count as missing or how far from home they wandered.

“A true increase in the ratio of lost pets would likely be due to other influences including rising unemployment. We have been able to maintain a low ratio of lost pets through innovation and technology,” he explained. “Any increase in lost pets being reported would be more likely related to online resources becoming available and more visible, such as our lost pet Facebook boosting which allows us to promote lost pets on social media like an advertisement targeted locally.”

Database analysis over the past few years shows 1.5% of lost pets registered in 2015, 5% from 2016 and 4.6% from 2017 are still actively missing on the Lost Pet Finders registry.

“There is no one simple solution for finding a lost pet - including microchips. They all have their disadvantages,” said Mr Ryder. “The solution has always been to let as many people know about the missing pet and to provide a platform like Lost Pet Finders where lost and found pets can be recorded and matched locally and nationally.”

The problem with microchipping, he said, is that the chip only works once the pet has been captured. “Some pets can roam for many weeks/months!” he exclaimed.

Microchips can also fail, migrate or be removed. And because there is more than one microchip registry, a vet or shelter/pound may not have access to the database the chip is registered with and it can take a council pound several days to scan a microchip, he explained.

Animal rescue organisations may not verify chip details for surrendered pets

and most importantly, chips are no good unless they are scanned! The main problem reported to Lost Pet Finders is that the owner’s information recorded against the chip is not up to date, said Mr Ryder.

“Any of the registries have the chance of being effective but are only as good as the information they contain, so if pet owners do not keep their contact details up to date, none of the systems will work. It also relies on all of the pet-related industries, such as vets, pounds and councils, doing their part by scanning for chips in a timely fashion - especially on deceased pets which are often overlooked,” he said.

“There is also some hesitation by members of the public to surrender a found pet as they are concerned for the pet’s welfare once at the pound, so the microchip may never be read by a pet professional. Plus, having a microchip can give pet owners a false sense of security. Some people falsely assume that the chip can be found via GPS or that an ear tattoo is a mark that the pet has been chipped. Some also believe that the pet is not chipped if they cannot feel the capsule under the skin.”

UNDERSTANDING MICROCHIPPING AND REGISTRATION IN AUSTRALIA

Whilst compulsory microchipping is helping to reunite lost animals with their families, inconsistent legislation on microchipping and registry operation/management across the Australian states and territories is preventing many others from returning home.

In summary, at the current time, all states except Northern Territory have made microchipping compulsory. When it comes to registration, only dogs – not cats - must be registered in ACT, QLD, WA, TAS, while in NSW and SA dogs and cats must be registered. Northern Territory does not have any requirements for registration of pets at this time².

Remember, pets in NSW are registered for life, unlike other states that require the annual renewal of pet registration. Online forums include complaints by pet owners who have moved interstate from NSW and confused about registering their pet again and then having to pay annually, which has suddenly become an additional financial burden for some.

And just to clarify, council registration is separate to national animal microchip registration. Furthermore, if you live in NSW or South Australia, you will need to register your pet with the state government-run registry, which won’t really help identify the owner of the animal if lost interstate.

The advice given to the travelling public by the NSW Pet Registry, an online state government-run database of microchipped and registered cats and dogs living in NSW, is to also register their pets with a national microchip registry.

“Why can’t all the registries – including the state government registries - share the microchip data to help our lost animals come back home more quickly?” asked Pet People Network Director Maryann Dalton, who consults on issues involving the companion animal industry.

“We are a transient population that travels around Australia with their pets, whether it be for holiday or a permanent move. If you relocate from NSW to WA, nobody tells you that your lifetime registration in NSW means nothing if you’re living on the west coast. You need to transfer your pet’s chip to a WA register and renew every year. Otherwise, if your animal goes missing and gets picked up, the microchip won’t register and your pet could end up in the pound!”

Ms Dalton was a member of the Animal Registries Working Group - made up of representatives from commercial microchip registries, vet industry and some members of local governments - which aimed to formalise a national microchip register. This register would work as a national portal where anyone who owns a microchip animal in Australia could access the portal to search for lost pets regardless of the state they lived in, she explained.

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