particularly if the chip is 'encrypted', such that it requires a brand specific reader to decipher the chip number.

"We encourage pet owners who import an animal to ensure it has an ISO chip. If it doesn't, a second chip that meets ISO standards can easily be implanted," said Dr Hayward.

Dr Hayward has been a vet for 35 years during which he has held (and still does) various AVA roles, including local division president, member of the AVA's Urban Animal Management Committee and other veterinary groups, and represented the AVA on ACT and national animal welfare committees. He is currently a director of Gungahlin Veterinary Hospital in Canberra.

Numerous stray animals walk through the large 12-vet practice every single day. His analysis showed 86 stray dogs and cats came through the door in January!

"The good news is that the majority of animals have a microchip and for the most part, it's easy for staff to identify who owns them thanks to the Pet Address website," said Dr Hayward.

The problem arises when the microchip search comes up blank. Because the ACT is located in the middle of NSW, many lost pets were bred in NSW and are registered with the NSW Pet Registry, which as we know does not share data on Pet Address to maintain a level of privacy.

"Many breeders are good with transferring registry details to the new owners, but some take a long time to complete the transfer of ownership," said Dr Hayward. "This is a big deal for us because it's difficult to access data out of NSW's database. Our sole purpose is to return animals home. We vets have a legitimate right to check the microchip data. Animals may fail to be or be delayed in being registered on a database because of failures by the implanter, the breeder or the new owner."

"The AVA has lobbied governments to encourage them to not start their own registry," said Dr Hayward. "ACT government recognises there is no value in having their own registry. They maintain microchip numbers for compliance reasons, such as dog attacks."

To prevent potential problems with accessing information on the NSW and AGRA databases, Dr Hayward recommends all clients to also register on a national registry so that their contact information can always be accessed no matter where their pet goes missing. It's also easier for owners to update their information on the national databases, he added.

What could further help Pet Address work more effectively is making the sale of microchips illegal unless the skeleton record - including the microchip number, manufacturer and importer - is registered in a database, said Dr Hayward.

"The skeleton record should then be annotated each time the chip is sold from importer to wholesaler to retailer to implanter and then to pet (and owner). I would welcome regulation of microchips from importation through to implantation. It would provide security for pet owners and everyone in the industry," he said. "Increasing the number of databases - and particularly with restrictions that governments feel they need to work under - makes it difficult for pet owners and industry professionals to make the entire system work effectively and easily. Ideally, we should have a single national microchip registry, but that won't happen. The next best option is to have a common portal. Pet Address exists and does very well."

HOW DOES THE NSW PET REGISTRY WORK EXACTLY?
So how does the NSW Pet Registry work and how effective is it in reuniting lost pets with their families? Launched

in 2016, the NSW Pet Registry is the public portal to the Companion Animals Register and was a NSW Government election commitment to transition away from a dated, paper-based companion animals' management system.

One of the main aims of the NSW Pet Registry is to encourage lifetime pet registration, and the benefits of pet registration include improved animal welfare and rehoming outcomes, as well as reduced euthanasia rates for the state's cats and dogs, explained Kerrielyn Clark, media spokesperson for the NSW Office of Local Government.

Access to the NSW Companion Animals Register is restricted to vets and other authorised users, but the public Pet Registry portal (www.petregistry.nsw.gov. au) enables pet owners and breeders to update the register including their contact details and transfer of pet ownership, and allows them to complete all-important lifetime pet registration.

"There were 100,000 paid registrations logged on the NSW Pet Registry for the 16-17 financial year," said Ms Clark. "A key benefit of keeping pet details up-to-date on the NSW Pet Registry is that owners can also report pets missing, allowing pets and owners to be more easily reunited."

Via the NSW Pet Registry every year around 5,000 cats and dogs are reported lost or missing, and about half of these are successfully reunited with their owners, helping to reduce the numbers of animals in animal shelters and the numbers of animals needing to be euthanised, said Ms Clark. In addition, the NSW Pet Registry also helps manage nuisance, dangerous and menacing dogs, improving community safety.

"All fees collected by the NSW Pet Registry go back into the management of companion animals," she said. "Eighty per cent of the revenue is used by councils for services such as rangers and running pounds. Twenty per cent goes towards the NSW Government's Responsible Pet Ownership Program (RPOP), which helps ensure that families enjoy the benefits of owning a pet, while minimising the risks of dangerous dogs especially to young children."

"" The good news is that the majority of animals have a microchip and for the most part, it's easy for staff to identify who owns them thanks to the Pet Address website