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Earlier this year, Harri, a pet Australian galah, flew away from his home in Queensland and was missing for two weeks. The adventurous rose-breasted cockatoo flew to the Portside Wharf Cruise Ship Terminal about 2km away from his Brisbane home and took a ride on a luxury cruise liner bound for New Zealand!

Thankfully, Harri was microchipped and registered, which eventually led authorities back to its owners, according to a statement from the New Zealand's Ministry of Primary Industries. Perhaps Harri wanted to go on a holiday (and clearly didn't realise NZ had strict biosecurity laws!), but his owners were devastated as they searched desperately for their beloved bird fearing they would never see Harri again.

For many pet owners, losing a companion animal is like losing a member of the family, and that's terrifying! Sadly, every year, thousands and thousands of pets are reported lost/missing or even stolen. Reuniting lost pets with their owners is one of the most critical functions of shelters, councils and even veterinarians who see numerous strays coming through their doors each day.

Microchipping and registration systems/processes across the country are working to get companion animals back home as quickly as possible, but they are also creating some challenges, according to pet industry members.

Pet owner education and better microchipping/registration management are key to getting our pets safely and quickly back home. Do we need a national registry or share microchip registration data to work more effectively in reuniting our companion animals? What initiatives, programs and platforms are helping to increase the likelihood of owners finding their lost pets? Where can we improve the systems and processes?

Microchipping and registration of animals are a vital identification tool and is a step towards a lifetime of responsible pet ownership. Microchip implantation provides a reliable method of permanent,

unalterable animal identification. No personal information is stored on a microchip – only a unique 15-digit number that by Australian law meets the specifications of the world standard International Standards Organisation (ISO).

Benefits of pet registration include improved animal welfare and rehoming outcomes, as well as reduced euthanasia rates for dogs and cats across the country. On a larger scale, microchipping and registration can be invaluable following a natural disaster where a large number of animals can be displaced.

Many state government and local councils see the benefits and importance of microchipping pets, making microchipping and registration compulsory across most parts of Australia. This has helped increase the number of microchipped pets nationwide over the past three years, according to Animal Medicines Australia's 2016 Pet Ownership in Australia report.

The report states nationwide 83% of dogs (up 7% from 2013) and 72% of cats (up 9% from 2013) are now microchipped. Dog microchipping rates are higher in Victoria (89%) and lower in South Australia (72%) and Western Australia (73%).

So how many microchipped pets find their way back home compared to those without the electronic identification? The Australian pet/vet industry does not have national data comparing the 'reuniting' rate of microchipped animals to those without the electronic identification under their skin.

However, RSPCA Australia's 2016-2017 annual financial report has some national data that supports microchipped animals having a better chance of being reunited. Furthermore, many more owners reclaim lost dogs from the RSPCA than they do lost cats. The animals who don't return to their loved ones are mainly those who are not microchipped or their owners' contact information linked to their microchip registration is not current!

"The RSPCA stresses the utmost

importance of microchipping pets to ensure the best chances of reuniting pets with owners in the unfortunate event of a pet becoming lost," said Dr Bronwyn Orr, RSPCA Australia Scientific Officer for Companion Animals.

According to RSPCA's last financial year report, 40.63% of dogs and 4.93% of cats were reclaimed. During the 2012-2013 financial year, 36.5% of dogs and 4.6% of cats were reclaimed. The data does not specify how many of these animals were microchipped but given the increase in the number of microchipped dogs and cats over the past few years (thanks to compulsory microchipping legislation), microchipped animals have a better chance of returning home compared to those without the chip.

RSPCA Australia's report confirms this interpretation in its latest financial report. Also, with the increasing uptake of microchip identification for cats, the RSPCA hopes to see an increase in the number of lost cats that are reunited with their owners over the coming years.

"There are a number of initiatives run by councils, pet stores and some RSPCA shelters across the country where discounted microchipping is made available," said Dr Orr.

## INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY HELP FIND LOST PETS

Tony Ryder, Founder and CEO of Lost Pet Finders, the largest national, open lost and found pet database in Australia (conceived and launched in South Australia about 12 years ago), said most cats and dogs on the database are microchipped and that's a great start to getting them back home as quickly as possible.

"Microchipping is definitely recommended where possible as it is the most efficient way to be reunited with their pet once it has been secured," he said. "I believe the state governments are doing their best to introduce legislations that improve the welfare of lost and found pets. A state-run registry or national registry can work as long as they

