



Office of
Local Government

Office of Local Government

ANNUAL PERMITS

Questions and answers for NSW councils



JULY 2020

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Produced by the Office of Local Government

Version number:	1
Date of last update:	8 July 2020



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Annual permits overview and pet owner information

1. What are annual permits?

From 1 July 2020 owners of cats not desexed by four months of age will be required to pay an \$80 annual permit in addition to their one-off lifetime pet registration fee.

Owners of dogs of a restricted breed, declared restricted, or declared to be dangerous, including those already on the Register when the requirement came into effect, will also be required to pay a \$195 annual permit in addition to their one-off lifetime pet registration fee.

All restricted and dangerous dogs will require an annual permit.

2. Why are annual permits being introduced?

The NSW Government is committed to promoting responsible pet ownership and improving animal welfare standards.

Desexing improves the health and wellbeing of cats, including lowering the risk of some cancers, and reduces behaviours such as roaming and aggression.

Preventing unwanted litters eases the burden on pounds and shelters, reduces euthanasia rates, and helps address concerns about feral and stray cats and their effect on wildlife.

Annual permits for dangerous and restricted dogs will improve community safety by helping to reduce ownership of high-risk dogs and encouraging owners to better manage the behaviour of their animal.

3. How are annual permits different to previous requirements for the registration of undesexed animals?

Previously, a pet was required to be registered by 6 months of age and a 'base' registration fee was paid. If the animal was not desexed by the relevant age, an additional fee was imposed.

From 1 July 2020, all cats will be registered after paying the 'base' registration fee only, with an annual permit applying for those that were not desexed by four months of age.

The 'base' registration fee plus additional fee will continue to apply to dogs that aren't desexed.

4. How can pet owners avoid paying for an annual permit?

Pet owners can avoid the permit requirement by:

- desexing their cat by four months of age
- request an exemption from their vet. Cats that cannot be desexed, either temporarily or permanently, are exempt from paying an annual permit. A certificate from a vet is required to qualify for this exemption
- not owning a restricted dog

- managing their dog's behaviour to ensure that it's not declared dangerous.
- cat breeders can join a recognised cat breeding body.

5. How will pet owners pay for the annual permits?

In the majority of cases, pet owners will be able to pay for annual permits using the NSW Pet Registry website. Anyone registering a cat on the NSW Pet Registry will be informed that they must pay for an \$80 annual permit if their animal is not desexed by four months of age.

Councils are expected to accept annual permit applications and payments from pet owners and make the necessary updates to an animal's record in the Companion Animals Register. Councils may choose to enter an annual permit directly into the Register during an over-the-counter transaction, or by using the printable form provided to councils by the Office of Local Government (OLG).

At this stage, Service NSW can't accept an annual permit payment either online or at a SNSW centre/kiosk. Further advice will be provided to councils about this option once available.

6. When do pet owners need to pay?

New owners of cats that require a permit have two-months to obtain a permit and cannot be fined during that time. The two-month grace period begins from the date the cat was transferred to the current owner by the previous owner, not the date the new owner claims it on their NSW Pet Registry profile.

An annual permit is one of the requirements to own a declared dangerous dog. A permit is required on and from the date that is 7 days after the declaration that the dog is a dangerous dog.

An annual permit is one of the requirements to own a restricted dog. For all breeds declared to be restricted as at 1 July 2020, the permit is required from the date the animal is 6 months old.

Dangerous dog	Permit required by Declaration date +7 days
Restricted dogs (by assessment)	Permit required by Declaration date +21 days
Restricted dogs (by breed)	Permit required by DOB + 6 months
Undesexed cats	Permit required by DOB + 6 months (if undesexed at 4 months of age)
Undesexed cats - not recommended for desexing up to 18 months	Permit required by DOB + 18 months (if not desexed by 18 months)
Transition period - 21-day "grace period"	
Dangerous and restricted dogs as at 1/7/20	Permit required by 22/7/20
Unregistered, undesexed cats turning 4 months old after 1/7/20	Permit required by DOB + 6 months OR 22/7/20 (whichever period is longer)

7. What is the 21-day transition period?

Following the introduction of annual permits on 1 July 2020, there is a 21-day transition period to provide affected pet owners with additional time to update their animal's records and pay for an annual permit.

For dangerous and restricted dogs declared as at 1 July 2020, a permit will be required by 22 July 2020. For unregistered, undesexed cats turning four-months old after 1 July 2020, a permit is required by the time the animal is six-months old or 22 July 2020 (whichever period is longer).

The transition period will also assist local councils, rehoming organisations and OLG to manage requests for support and advice as the new annual permit requirements are introduced.

8. Registration categories and fees for 2020/21

Registration categories have been changed from 1 July 2020 to accommodate the introduction of annual permits. More information on new registration categories and registration fees for 2020/2 can be found at www.olg.nsw.gov.au/public/dogs-cats/nsw-pet-registry/microchipping-and-registration.

Registration categories and fee changes are:

Registration Type	Registration description	Previous fee	New Fee (From 1 July 2020)
Dog – Desexed (by relevant age)	Registration fee for an animal desexed by the relevant desexing age	\$58	\$60
Dog – Desexed (by relevant age - eligible pensioner)	Desexed animal owned by an eligible pensioner	\$25	\$26
Dog – Desexed (sold by pound/shelter)	Desexed animal sold by an eligible pound or shelter	\$29	\$30
Dog – Not Desexed or Desexed (after relevant age)	Combined registration fee and additional fee for an animal not desexed by the relevant desexing age	\$210	\$216
Dog – Not Desexed (not recommended)	Animal with written notification from a vet that it should not be desexed	\$58	\$60
Dog – Not Desexed (recognised breeder)	Animal not desexed and kept by a recognised breeder for breeding purposes	\$58	\$60
Dog – Working	Working dog	\$0	\$0
Dog – Service of the State	Dog in the service of the State, for example, a police dog	\$0	\$0
Assistance Animal	Assistance Animal	\$0	\$0

Cat – Desexed or Not Desexed	Registration fee	\$58	\$50
Cat – Desexed or Not Desexed (eligible pensioner)	Animal owned by an eligible pensioner	\$25	\$26
Cat – Desexed (sold by pound/shelter)	Desexed animal sold by an eligible pound or shelter	\$29	\$25
Cat – Not Desexed (not recommended)	Animal with written notification from a vet that it should not be desexed	\$58	\$50
Cat – Not Desexed (recognised breeder)	Animal not desexed and kept by a recognised breeder for breeding purposes	\$58	\$50

9. Are there late fees?

A late fee of \$17 is payable if an annual permit fee has not been paid within 28 days of the annual permit due date. This is separate and in addition to a late fee that may be due for non-payment of an animal's registration fee.

10. Are there any discounts or rebates?

There are no discounts or rebates for annual permits. This also applies to pensioners.

Registration discounts are still available for animals purchased by eligible pensioners and/or from rehoming organisations.

11. Are there any exemptions?

Exemptions are in place for:

- cats that were registered before 1 July 2020
- those cats kept for breeding purposes by members of recognised breeding bodies
- cats that are unable to be desexed for medical reasons. For these exemptions:
 - a vet must specify in writing, before the pet reaches the relevant desexing age, that the pet should not be desexed either 1) until it reaches an age specified (a **temporary exemption**), or 2) that desexing the animal at any time of its life would constitute a serious health risk to the animal (**desexing not recommended for life**).
 - A vet can enter the exemption directly on the animal's NSW Pet Registry record. Alternatively, a vet certificate can be provided to a pet owner that they can upload as evidence as to why their cat was desexed after 4 months of age when they register their cat on the Pet Registry before six months of age.

12. Are there penalties for non-compliance?

Pet owners who fail to obtain an annual permit risk an on-the-spot fine of \$700 for restricted or dangerous dogs and \$400 for non-desexed cats.

If taken to court, maximum penalties of \$6,600 for restricted or dangerous dogs and \$5,500 for non-desexed cats may apply.

The *Companion Animals Regulation 2018* has been amended to include these new penalties. You can find more information about the amendments in Council Circular 20-27 at www.olg.nsw.gov.au/council-circulars/20-27-amendments-to-the-companion-animals-regulation-2018.

13. Where will the revenue raised from the annual permits go?

Annual permit fees will go directly to the Companion Animals Fund which pays for companion animal management by local councils including pounds/shelters, ranger services, dog recreation areas, and education and awareness programs.

The fund is also used to operate the NSW Pet Registry and carry out responsible pet ownership initiatives.

Advice specific to cats

14. Changes to registration fees for cats

The Government has made a one-off \$10 reduction to the lifetime cat registration fee (\$50) to encourage higher registration rates and adoption of cats from pounds and shelters. The fee for a dog for 20/21, adjusted for inflation, is \$60.

Cat owners that choose not to desex their cats will no longer pay a higher registration fee to register their non desexed cat as this has been replaced by the annual permit. That is, a non-desexed cat that is registered after 1 July 2020 will pay a once-off registration fee of \$50 and be required to purchase an annual permit for their cat each year at a cost of \$80, until it has been desexed.

Desexed cats registered after 1 July 2020 will pay a once-off registration fee of \$50. No additional fees are payable for these cats. This will create a stronger incentive to register cats and will encourage adoption of cats from pounds and shelters.

15. What if a pet owner sells or gives away a cat? Do the permits transfer or are there refunds?

If a pet owner sells or gives a cat away, the permit transfers with the animal until the permit expires. If a cat is desexed after a permit is paid for, there are no partial refunds. However, the pet owner would not need to pay for a permit in the following year.

16. If a cat is desexed after 4 months of age and then registered, does the pet owner pay annual permit for life?

The owner will only be required to pay for one permit in the first year. Permits are not required once the cat is desexed.

17. Why is the age for cats to be desexed set at four months?

In 2014 the Companion Animals Taskforce recommended that the Government reduce the desexing age for cats to four months in order to reduce accidental

litters of kittens and improve their health and behaviour. For example, negative behaviours like spraying, aggression and wandering are more likely to develop if animals reach full maturity before they are desexed.

The four-month period takes into account that cats can become pregnant as young as four months of age, are at high risk of accidental pregnancy and the age at which kittens can be safely anaesthetised for desexing.

The Government accepted this recommendation and, in 2016, the *Companion Animals Regulation 2008* was amended to introduce the lower age of desexing for cats.

18. Do cats adopted from rehoming organisations get an exemption from the annual fee?

Yes. People get an exemption if they have bought the animal from a rehoming organisation and it was desexed after 4 months because, for example, the pet was abandoned to the organisation after that age.

Advice specific to dangerous and restricted dogs

19. Does the annual permit requirement for dangerous and restricted dogs apply per dog?

Annual permits apply to an individual dog. A person who owns multiple dangerous or restricted dogs will need a permit for each animal. Note also that if someone owns one animal that is both a restricted breed and declared dangerous, that person will be liable for two permits for that animal.

20. Does the annual permit requirement for dangerous and restricted dogs also apply to declared menacing dogs?

No. Annual permits only apply to dangerous and restricted dogs.

21. Will working dogs and hunting dogs require an annual permit?

Like all other dogs, working and hunting dogs will only require a permit if they are of a restricted breed, or, have been declared to be a dangerous dog by a court or council.

22. Are there refunds for dangerous and restricted dog permits?

It is already illegal to give away or sell a restricted or dangerous dog, therefore no provision for part-year refunds apply.

If a dog is declared to no longer be dangerous during a permit year, there are also no partial refunds. However, the pet owner would not need to pay for a permit in the following year.

Council implementation and enforcement

23. What changes were made to the *Companion Animals Regulation 2018* to support annual permits?

The following summary of changes are explained in detail within Circular 20-27 - Amendments to the *Companion Animals Regulation 2018*. This is available on OLG's website at www.olg.nsw.gov.au/council-circulars/20-27-amendments-to-the-companion-animals-regulation-2018/:

- Provision for an annual permits transition period for compliance and enforcement
- Exemption for recognised breeders from needing annual permits for cats
- Defining 'recognised breeder' for annual permits purposes
- Excluding cats that cannot be desexed, either temporarily or permanently, from permit requirements
- Abolishing the additional fee payable when registering dogs desexed after the age of six months if the dog was adopted from a rehoming organisation
- Enabling notices for the seizure or surrender of animals to be served by email where an email address was provided upon registration
- Changing the registration fee category for cats so that the additional registration fee for cats not desexed by the age of four months is removed, to reflect the introduction of annual permits,
- Reducing registration fees for all cats by \$10 from 1 July 2020.

24. Are local councils responsible for enforcing annual permits or will OLG be following up pet owners?

Councils have primary responsibility for enforcing the new annual permit requirements consistent with their other companion animal management practices.

OLG is providing support and guidance, as well as managing the CAR and Pet Registry and undertaking state-wide education and awareness raising.

Like for registration, councils need to follow up with pet owners. Councils can get a report from the CAR of those pet owners who have a microchipped animal and aren't yet compliant. For pet owners who are not on the Register at all, councils can follow it up just like non-compliance with identification (microchipping) and registration requirements.

25. How are council rangers meant to enforce this legislation effectively?

Following 1 July 2020, councils only need to follow up on restricted and dangerous dogs immediately. In the first instance, council should use the CAR to identify these dogs in the area and write to owners by mail or email to advise they require a permit.

Councils can issue penalty notices as well as notices to comply with its own penalty for non-compliance.

Importantly, for dangerous and restricted dogs, holding an annual permit is also a control measure under the relevant Act sections. So that should be checked during routine dog inspections.

26. Are local councils responsible for sending annual permit renewals out to pet owners, or is this the responsibility of pet owners?

Councils are expected to take action. Councils can run reports on the CAR and chase owners to pay for permits, should they choose to take this action.

There are no automated messages or letters through the CAR or Pet Registry. If a person goes to register an animal on the Pet Registry and a permit is also due, the system will prompt them to pay.

Councils are responsible for compliance and enforcement in their local area. Under the Companion Animals Act this includes an education and awareness role as well as specifically, the management of dangerous and restricted dogs.

27. Has OLG developed a template permit?

In the majority of cases, pet owners will pay for annual permits via the NSW Pet Registry. The animal's annual permit status will be recorded on the registration certificate, which will be the record of the animal's compliance with the requirement to hold a permit.

OLG has provided template offline permit application form which will be sufficient as a record of that owner holding a permit for the specified animal. However online transactions are preferred.

28. What format does the permit take i.e. tag, licence receipt, compliance certificate?

There is no tag or separate document. An animal must be registered first to have a permit, so the permit details form part of the registration certificate, which can be printed or emailed to the pet owner.

29. Should annual permit payments be receipted separate or receipted as a registration?

The CAR is set up to receipt Annual Permits and Registrations separately.

30. What are the time frames for reporting and reconciling permits to OLG – monthly or annually?

OLG will be issuing invoices and financial statement for annual permits monthly, the same way we issue registration invoices/statements. Council should check their receipts against the financial statements we send each month and complete a reconciliation.

31. Is the total amount of the permit fees collected to be returned to OLG?

Yes, the total permit fees and late fees will be invoiced to council – the same way registrations are.

Policy rationale

32. Why reduce registration fees for cats but not for dogs?

The registration fee is being reduced for cats because a lower proportion of cats are registered than dogs – there is a greater need to encourage people to register cats. This will support cat owners to choose to desex their cats – after these changes, they will pay less to comply with the law by registering.

The registration fee reduction for cats will also further encourage more people to adopt cats and kittens from pounds and shelters. Desexed animals purchased through pounds and shelters are entitled to a 50% discount on registration fees. As there is an overpopulation of these animals that require a home, this will reduce euthanasia rates.

33. Why are permits being required for cats rather than dogs that are not desexed?

Cats are more likely than dogs to have unwanted litters as they can breed at a younger age and have more litters.

There are a large number of cats in NSW that are not desexed, so we now have a problem with over population as a result of accidental litters. Many unwanted litters of kittens are being surrendered to pounds and shelters, who are struggling to rehome them.

Unfortunately, many of these cats are being euthanised because they cannot be rehomed. This is unfair to these animals and to the councils and other rehoming organisations that care for them.

Importantly, a proportion of these cats become strays, causing nuisance in communities and attacking native birds and other wildlife.

34. Why is the Government not making desexing of cats and dogs mandatory?

The Government strongly encourages pet owners to desex their pets. While it is important that as many cats and dogs as possible are desexed, there are animals that are deliberately kept for breeding purposes or cannot be desexed for medical reasons.

There is also a risk that mandatory desexing will deter pet owners from identifying (microchipping) and registering their pets and from seeking veterinary care when required.

The Government's view is that providing stronger incentives by requiring annual permits for cats that are not desexed will prompt many pet owners to desex their cats.

Annual permits strike the right balance between promoting desexing and imposing an unnecessary regulatory burden on pet owners and councils who enforce companion animals legislation.

35. What are the benefits of desexing cats?

Increasing the proportion of cats that are desexed will help to control the population of stray cats, reduce attacks on wildlife and the number of unwanted litters of kittens surrendered to pounds and shelters. This should help to reduce the number of kittens that are euthanised.

For cats, desexing has many health and wellbeing benefits including:

- reduced risk of cancer, reproductive disorders and some other diseases;
- longer average lifespan and better health outcomes;
- reduced risk of adverse health consequences associated with breeding females;
- reduced likelihood of escape, wandering and fighting other animals; and
- reduced nuisance or aggressive territorial and anti-social behaviour.

36. What is the benefit of having annual permits for restricted and dangerous dogs?

The community continues to express concern about dog attacks and incidents, particularly those involving children. Annual permits for restricted and dangerous dogs will help to further manage these risks by creating a further disincentive to owning 'problem' dogs, encouraging dog owners to manage their dog's behaviour, and ensure that councils and NSW Police are aware of the up to date location of high-risk dogs. They will also help to distribute the costs of regulating companion animals to the owners of pets that generate the highest costs.

37. What is the government doing about restricted or dangerous dogs? What about dog attacks?

The NSW Government has the strongest framework for the regulation of high-risk dogs in the country. There are strong controls for restricted breeds of dog, which the Commonwealth bans from being imported into Australia, as well as dogs that have been declared to be dangerous or menacing.

In 2013, the Government made changes to strengthen this framework, building on the recommendations of the Companion Animals Taskforce. These changes introduced a new category of menacing dogs, with controls to better control the risks of dogs that pose a risk but cannot be declared to be dangerous. This also increased the maximum penalties for dog attacks to as high as \$77 000 in fines and imprisonment for up to 5 years.

However, despite these changes, there continues to be an unacceptable number of dog attacks in NSW, with significant injuries caused to children, adults and other animals.

Annual permits for dangerous and restricted dogs will impose higher costs, deterring people from choosing to continue to own these animals or encouraging them to take active steps to reform the behaviour of their dogs.

More frequent updating of the location of these animals under annual permits will also enable councils to more closely monitor compliance with enclosure and other control requirements to protect public safety.

Importantly, these permit fees contribute to the Companion Animals Fund, which pays for local council and state-wide efforts to achieve responsible pet ownership.

38. How will annual permits support rehoming organisations?

Recent legislative changes and the introduction of annual permits supports the work of rehoming organisations, as well as council shelters and animal welfare enforcement agencies, by extending temporary exemption from registration fees to annual permits for non desexed cats, for pets fostered for rehoming by approved rehoming organisations under the Companion Animals Act, and encouraging people to rehome and register cats by lowering lifetime registration fees.

Cats kept for breeding purposes by members of a recognised breeding body are exempt from annual permits. The *Companion Animals Regulation 2018* has been amended to apply this exemption consistent with the current exemption from paying higher registration fees for a cat or dog that has not been desexed by the relevant desexing age, if the animal is kept for breeding purposes.

Over time, the changes will also reduce the burden of surrendered and seized animals on rehoming organisations by putting in place arrangements to reduce the number of animals that need to be rehomed, reducing euthanasia and supporting animal welfare. This will occur by reducing the number of litters of kittens that are surrendered to be rehomed, by introducing annual permits for cats that are not desexed.