



FONDAZIONE



**MONDO
ANIMALE**

ONLUS

The Problem of Stray Animals

practical and effective management methods.

By Dorothea Friz
veterinary of LEGA PRO ANIMALE

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Castel Volturno, July 2002

Dorothea Friz

Section 1

The Problem of Stray Animals



1.1 Introduction and aims

The aim of this booklet is to show that the massive problem of stray animals that exists in some countries can be solved, providing suitable management methods are utilised. The Italian animal welfare organisation, Lega Pro Animale, operates in the south of the country, a region with a very severe stray problem. Their experiences have shown that certain management methods can, over a period of time, produce dramatic reductions in stray populations. These methods include

spaying and neutering; registration and identification; education and informing the public.

Dorothea Friz writes:

“Throughout the Mediterranean region and other countries all over the world, particularly where rubbish is openly dumped, you can find all kinds of abandoned animals, mostly dogs and cats. They are often in poor health, begging and searching for food in the rubbish.



You might feel sorry for these poor animals, or you might be afraid of them. But the question arises, why do you find this situation only in some countries? Why not in Germany or Britain or many other places? Is it a question of education, effectiveness, tradition, cleanliness, or something else?

One thing is for certain - for many, many years, every year, all over the

world, millions of healthy and friendly dogs and cats are killed for the simple reason - THERE ARE TOO MANY! And obviously not enough animals are put-down because there are still too many!

It is clear that the killing is NOT working! The killing does NOT reduce the total number of dogs or cats in an area in a permanent way. The killing does NOT reduce problems with diseases and THE KILLING IS EXPENSIVE!

This little booklet advises you on how you can manage your stray “problem” and how the authorities in certain areas are already dealing with it. You will find some examples and statistics to demonstrate how severe problems can be resolved forever without spending a fortune.

I am very interested to hear about your success in handling your “problem” and I hope you will find the time to get in contact with me. I wish you GOOD LUCK and lots of patience.”

Dorothea Friz

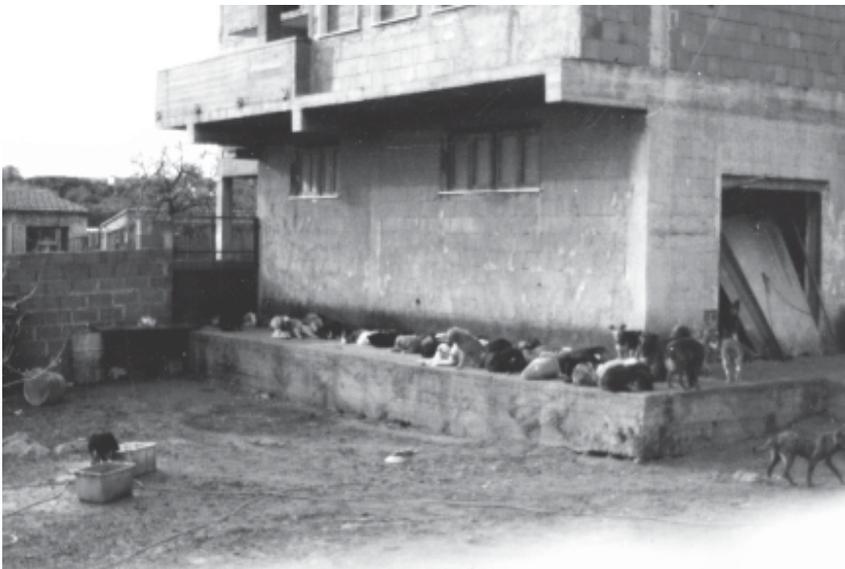
FONDAZIONE MONDO ANIMALE ONLUS

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1.2 Examples of differing approaches to the problem

Around the world, various approaches are adopted in relation to stray animals. For example, in Germany animal welfare organisations manage to re-home nearly all of the unwanted animals taken into their shelters, even if they are old and/or handicapped. Some of these organisations even help others, particularly in the Mediterranean and the Middle-East, by taking dogs and cats from there to re-home with families. There are no dogs on the streets. However, a stray cat problem is becoming apparent in several, especially rural, locations. Up until 1st June 1998, it was against the law to spay and neuter dogs and cats without any medical reason. It has been, and still is, against the law to kill healthy and friendly animals.

In Miami, USA around 20,000 dogs and cats are killed every year in shelters! Most of these unlucky creatures have been dumped by their owners. Many of them are healthy and young and a large number are pedigree. You rarely see a stray dog or a stray cat in this area. The catchers are doing marvellous work.



Up until 1997, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 300 dogs were killed every day in a de-compression chamber. This continued for many years and yet the suburbs were still full of stray dogs.

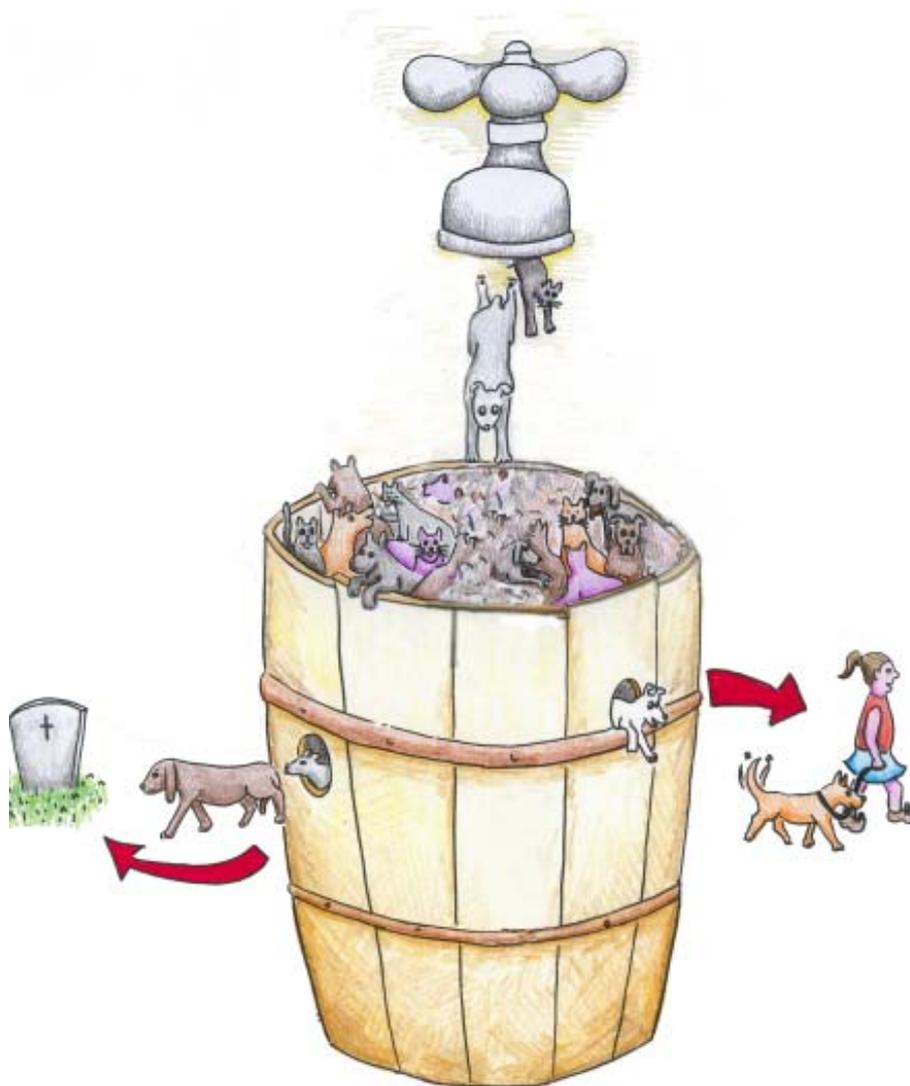
In the centre of Naples, Italy, up until 1991, 5,000 dogs were caught and killed every year

without ever resolving the stray dog problem. The city of Naples was overcrowded with dogs, often very, very sick. Animal protection organisations “rescued” as many animals as possible, but only to accumulate them in kennels. The quality of life for the dogs in most of these places is so terrible that it would have been better for them to be put-down.

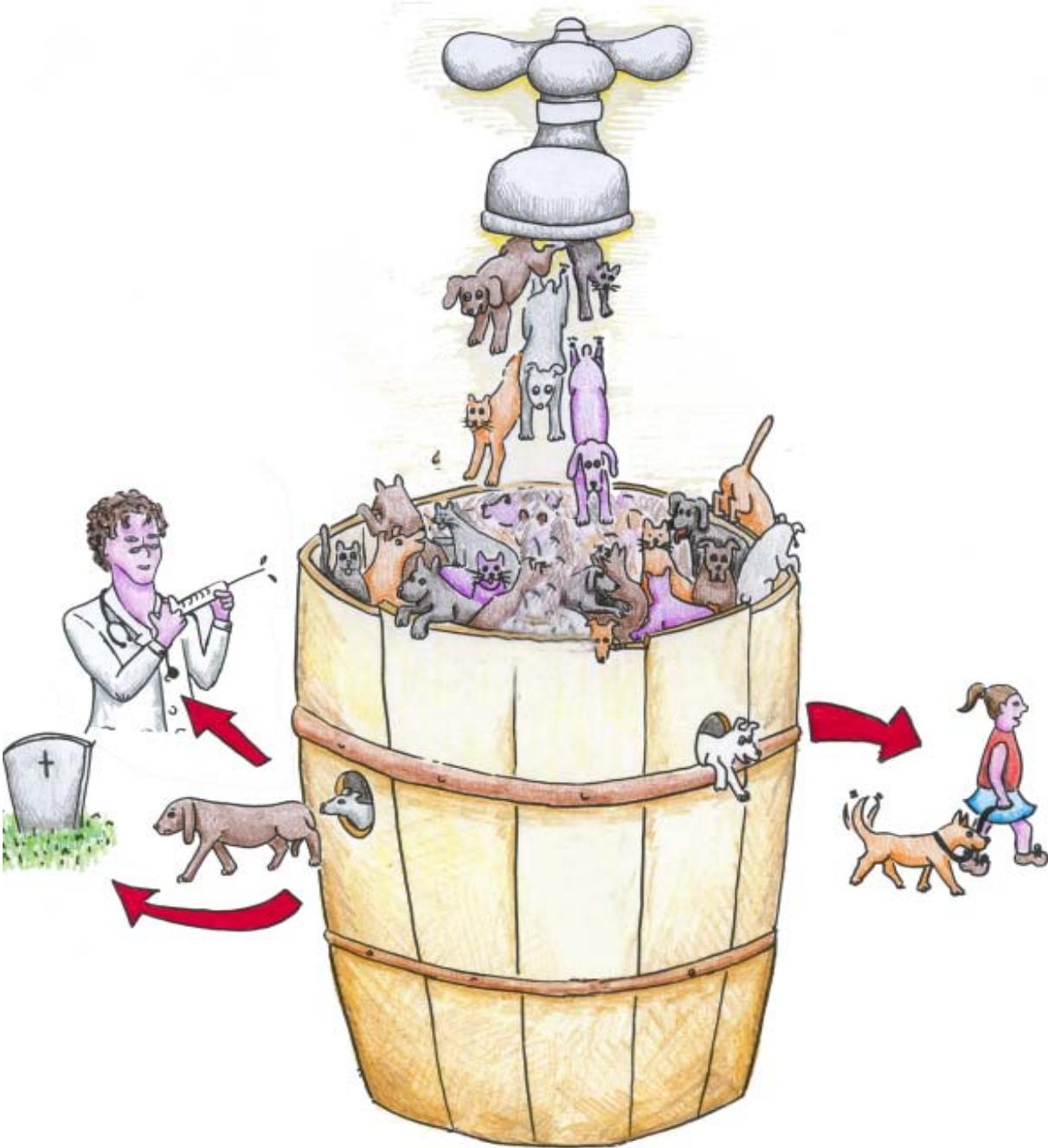
1.3 The objectives of stray management

The primary objective of stray management should be to keep the population of dogs and cats in a particular area down to a level where there is no need to destroy healthy and friendly animals, but without accumulating them in kennels. How this is achieved largely depends on the initial situation.

In general, **in an area where there is a balance between the numbers of incoming animals and losses through re-homing and natural death, no major problem exists** (for example, the current situation with dogs in Germany). In such circumstances, kennels have a function as a transitory shelter, where animals are kept for a short time until they are re-homed.



On the other hand, in an area where the incoming numbers exceed the numbers lost to re-homing and natural death, there will be too many animals to provide satisfactory living conditions for them.



1.4 Responses to a stray problem

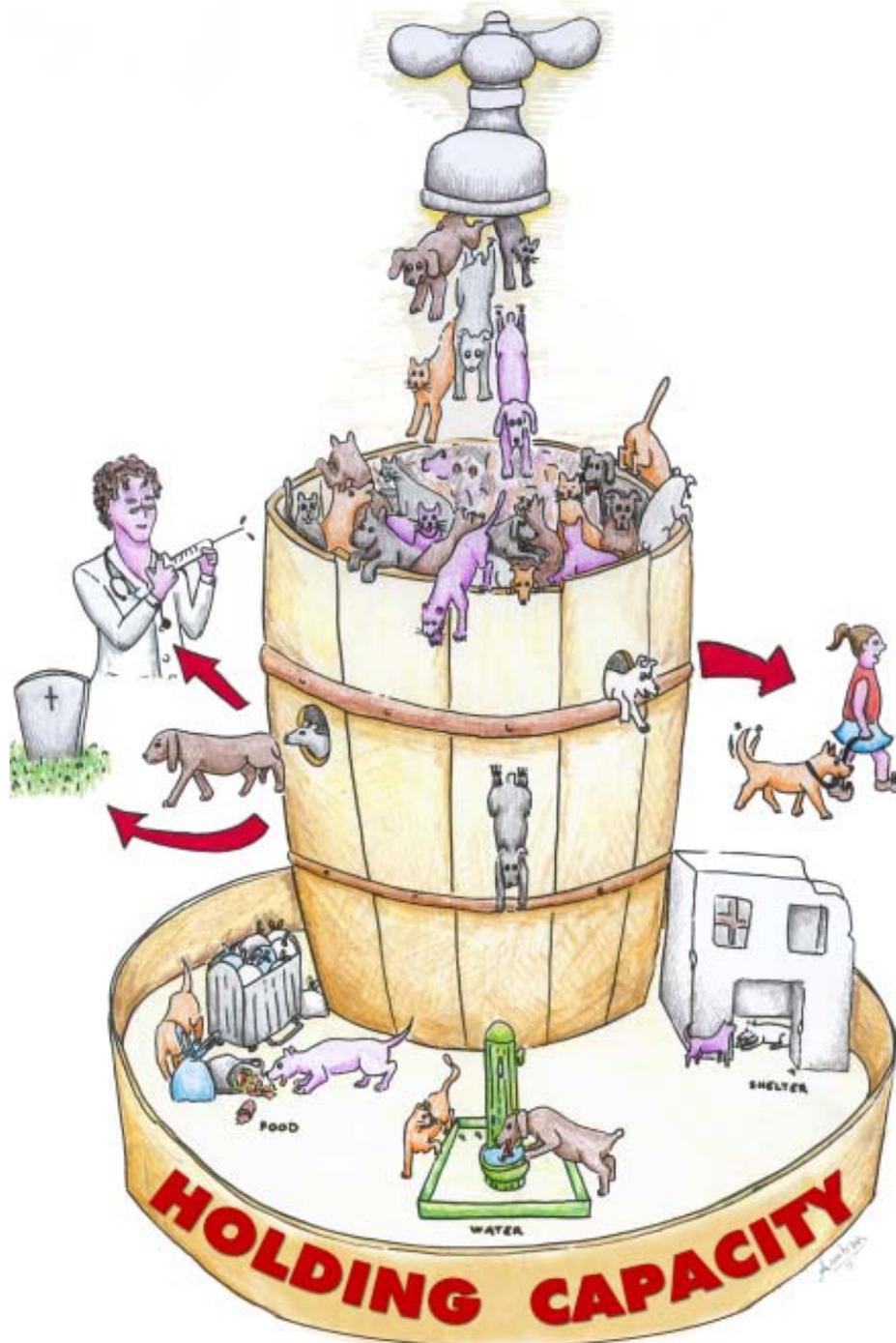
The various responses to a problem of an excessive population of strays in an area can be categorised as follows:

- a. ignoring the problem
- b. killing the excess animals
- c. influencing the “holding capacity”
- d. registration and identification
- e. spaying and neutering programs
- f. educational programs

a. Ignoring the problem

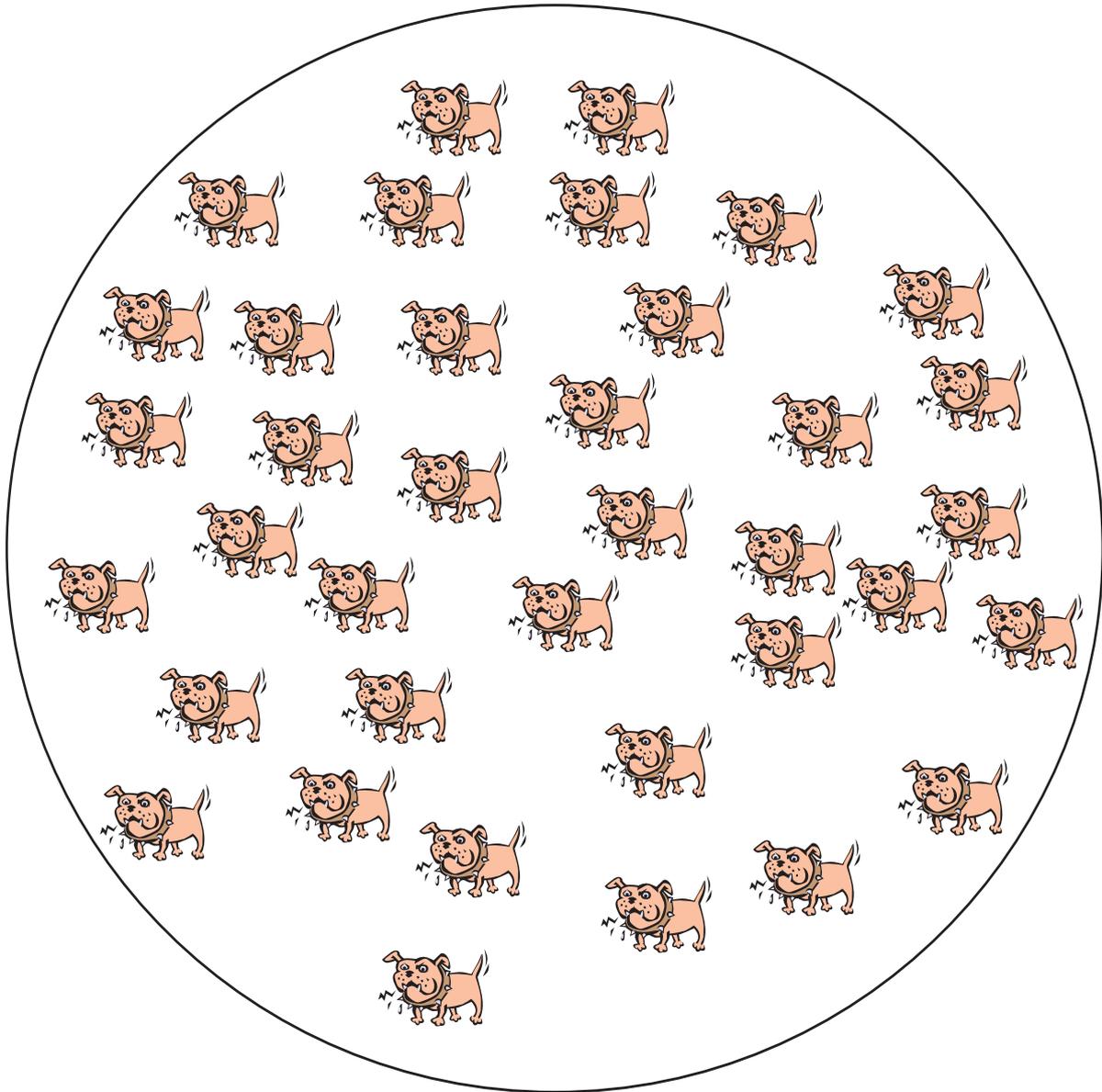


In many places, the authorities are not really interested in the stray animal problem. Nobody takes responsibility, even if there is a law prescribing what to do. In such circumstances, the logical consequence would be that the stray animal population would get ever worse. But this does not happen because there are “limiting factors”. These are the availability of **food**, **water** and **shelter**.



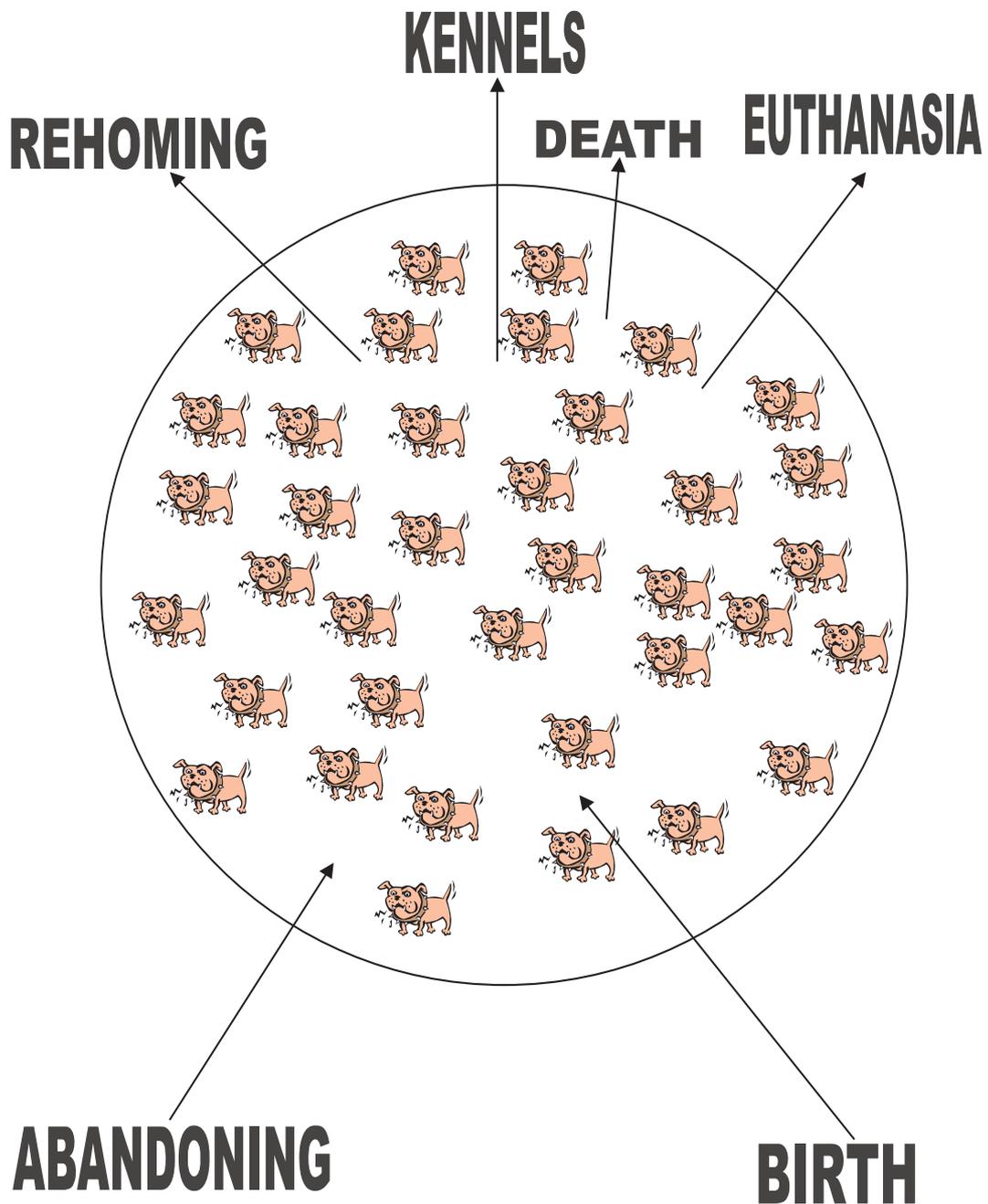
Thus, if a fixed quantity of food and water is available at a certain location, and there is adequate shelter for the animals to protect themselves against the weather and enemies, there will be a fixed maximum number of animals living there. This is known as the **holding** or **carrying capacity**.

LEGA PRO ANIMALE 2000

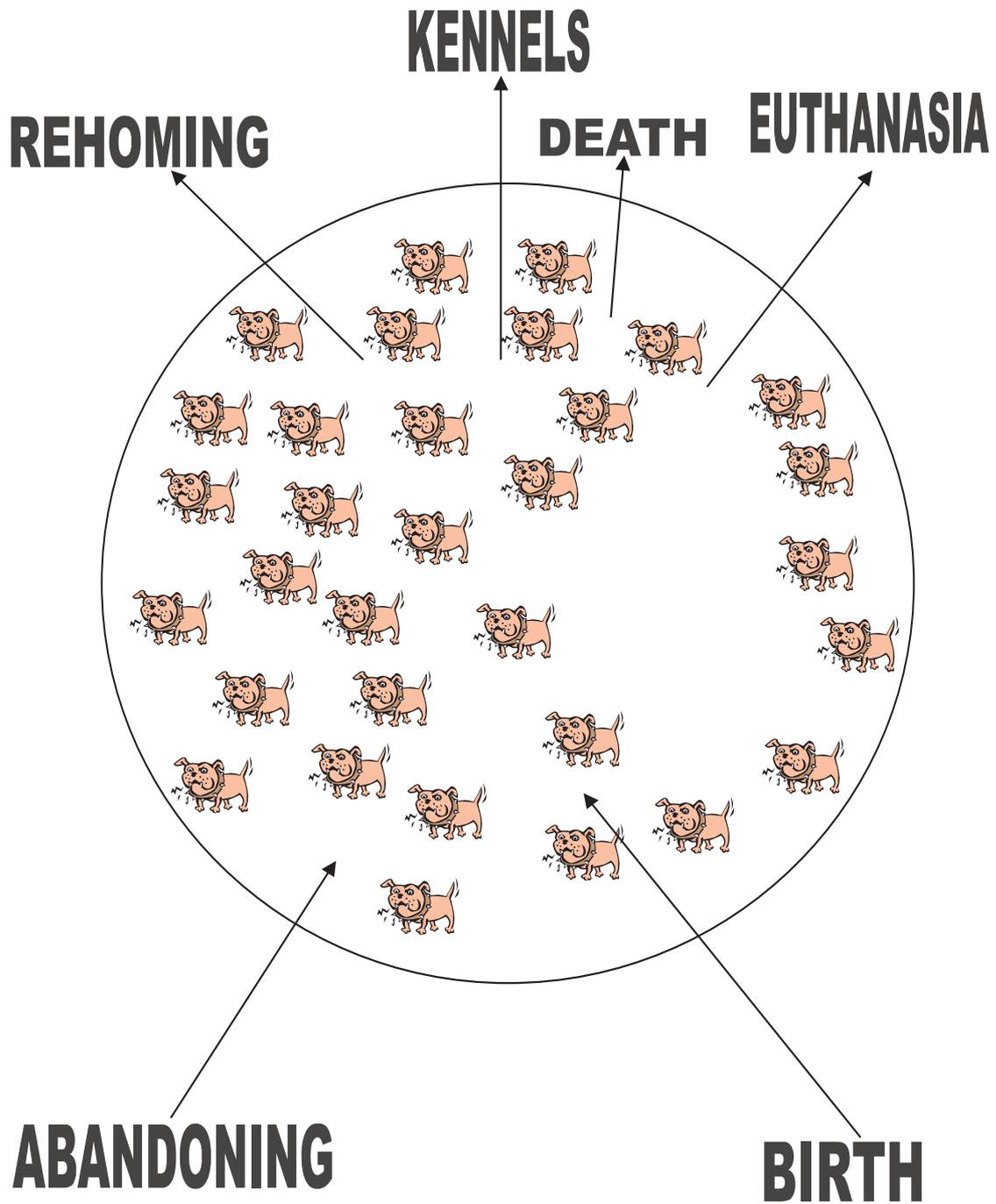


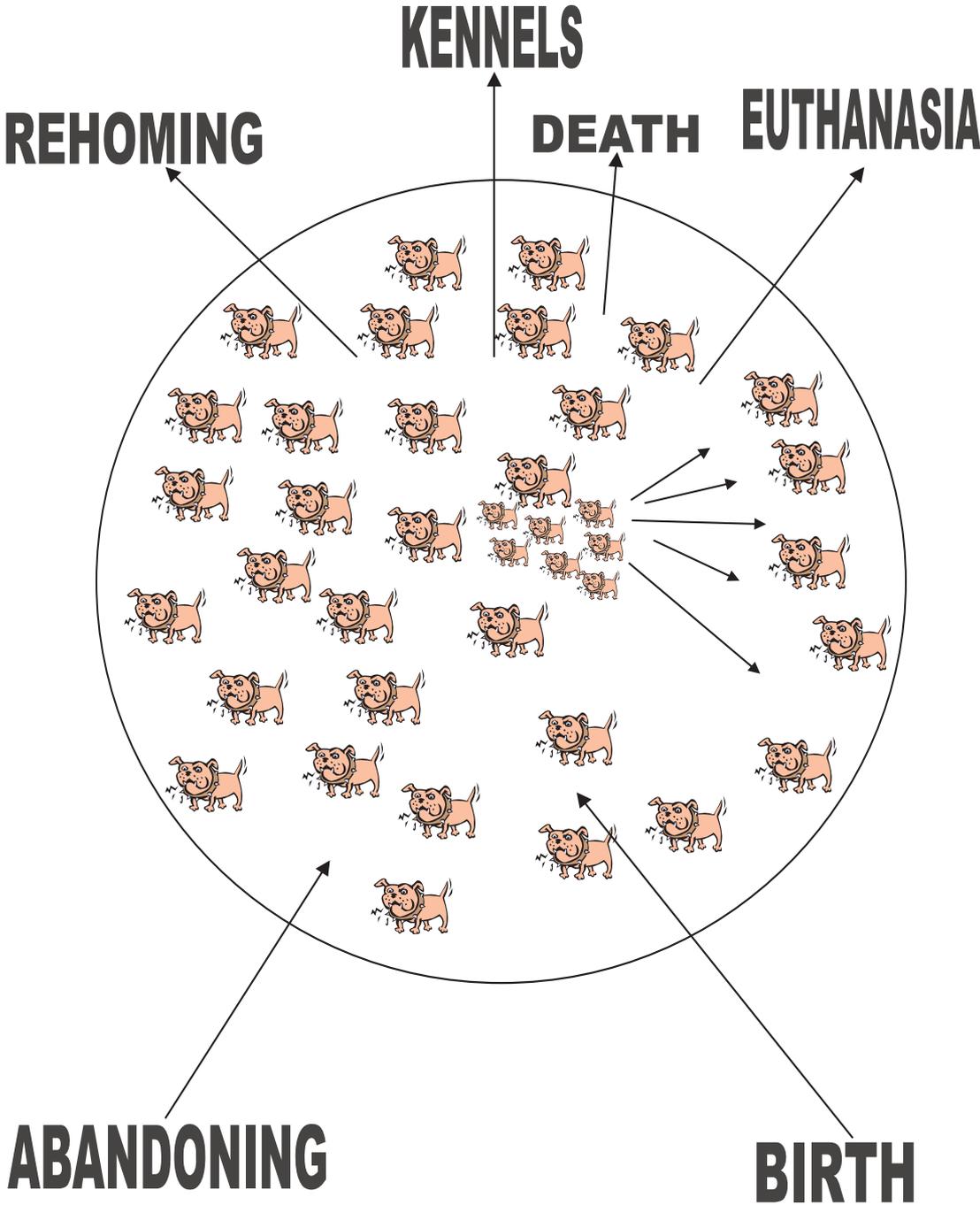
The **individuals** in this group will not always be the same but the number will stay roughly constant. It is regulated by the birth of puppies and additional abandoned dogs on one side and natural death, re-homing, kennelling or euthanasia on the other side.

LEGA PRO ANIMALE 2000



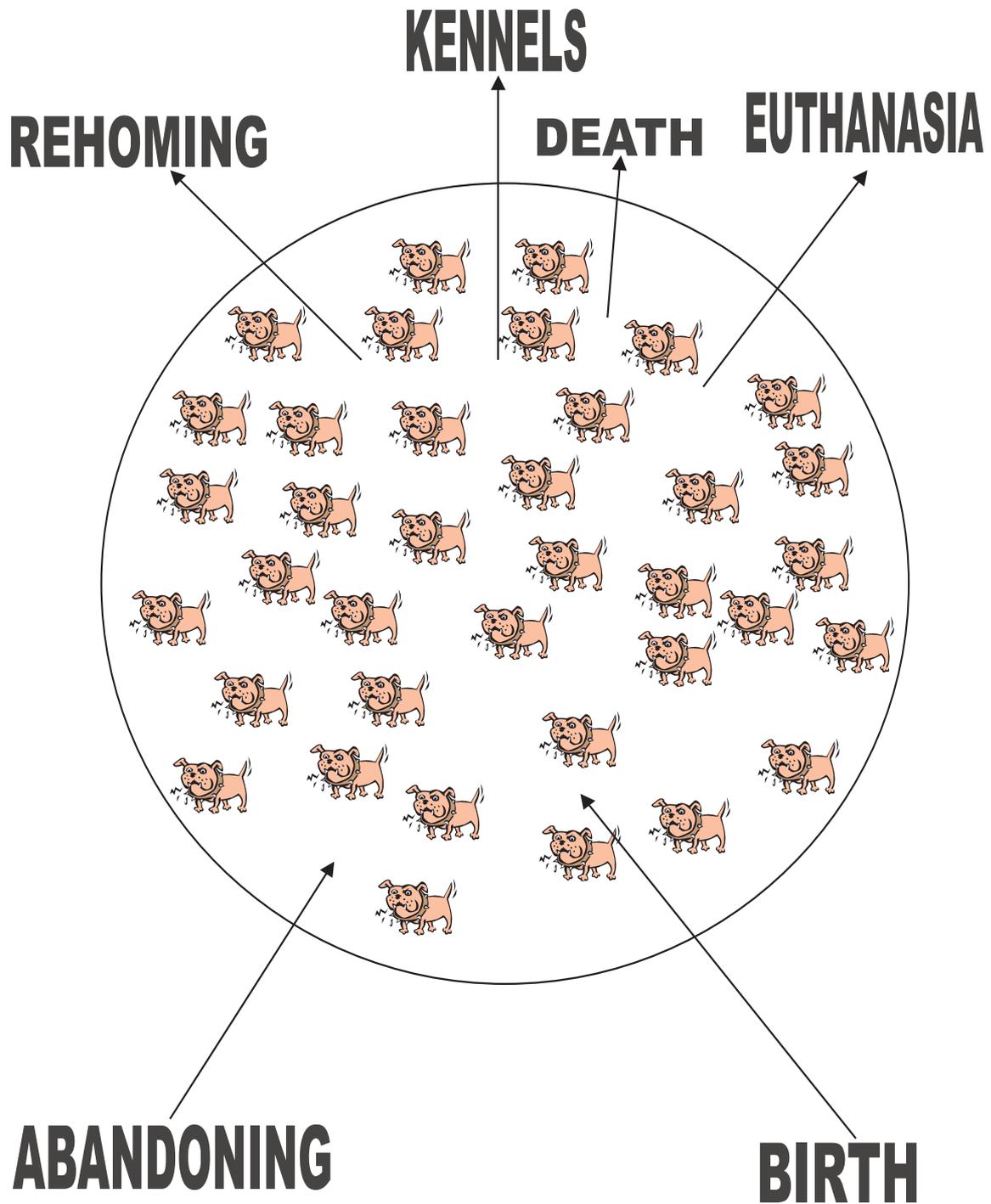
If a female produces young but the “holding capacity” does not change, the young will not remain. They will either die from disease or starvation or, when they become independent of the mother, they will move away in order to find a new habitat. However, if an animal is removed from the group, a “place” becomes free and a youngster can occupy it. If many animals are removed,





then more young will survive.

The total population will always return to the “holding capacity”.

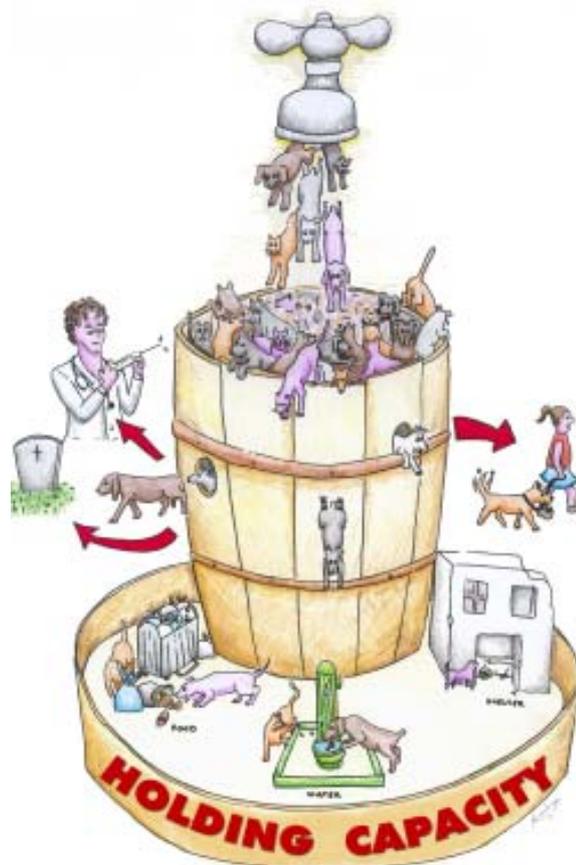


This statement has been clearly confirmed by Lega Pro Animale’s own experiences in dealing with stray dog populations in the various areas.

b. Killing the excess animals

For many years, all over the world, authorities and animal protection organisations have considered that the only way to get the stray “overflow” problem under control was through killing. In some places, they try very hard and manage it with well-trained staff, as in parts of the USA. However, we are confident that most people would agree that this should not be the goal of the problem solving and, also, it is a very expensive method. Thus, **eliminating the “overflow” by killing removes the symptom but will never remove the problem.**

In other countries, they try very hard to catch and kill stray animals, but do not succeed in catching all of the animals within 2 months, the length of pregnancy of dogs and cats. The remaining animals will do their very best to refill the territory by producing young. This is typical of places like Sao Paolo, the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries. This leads to a permanent stray population, the numbers governed by the “holding capacity”. Thus, **if it is not possible to catch all the stray animals in a territory within the breeding time, the total population will rise again to the “holding capacity”.**



c. Influencing the holding capacity

It is very difficult to influence certain aspects of the “holding capacity”: For example, the supply of **water** is largely in the hands of nature. Also, animals can be very resourceful in finding alternative sources.

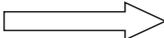


In terms of **shelter**, for example, ruined property can be removed thus denying strays a valuable source. However, dogs can dig holes under bushes and in woods, cats can hide in trees or roofs and in the strangest places.

The only parameter that can be seriously influenced is the **food** supply. In this respect, some simple remedies are available. For example, authorities should manage the rubbish problem properly; collect it regularly, use closeable rubbish containers, fence off rubbish dumps and educate the population. But where people and authorities permit dumping of rubbish in the streets, animals will settle down, dogs, cats, rats and others. And where there are dogs and cats in the streets, there will be animal lovers who feel sorry for them and feed them. This results in a vicious circle.

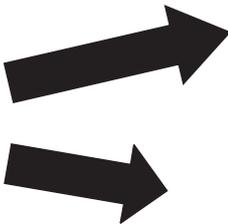
HOW TO INFLUENCE THE TOTAL NUMBER IN A POPULATION?

TO REDUCE THE "HOLDING CAPACITY"



- types of rubbish container
- frequency of emptying
- markets
- education
- immediate removal of carrion
- eliminate stagnant waters (leishmaniosis, leptospirosis)
- close the abandoned houses and ruins

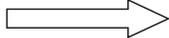
NEUTERING



PREVENTATIVE EFFECT:
 - fewer dogs on the streets
 - less abandoning

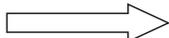
SYMPTOMATIC EFFECT
 spay/neuter and release to "treat" the colonies

IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION



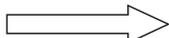
"A MARKED DOG CANNOT BE ABANDONED"

INFORMATION



- health education in schools
- flyers
- TV commercials
- events
- information stands
- toll free telephone number

TO REMOVE THE ANIMALS



- "CATCH AND KILL"
 - "CATCH AND SHELTER"
 - REHOMING OF STRAY ANIMALS

LEGISLATION AND PURSUANCE OF THE LAW



- controls by the authorities
- participation of the associations for the protection of animals

d. Registration and identification

A proper registration/identification system will help to prevent animals from being abandoned. This is because the owner can be traced and, ideally, will have to pay a fine for the abandoning. However, **it cannot prevent the abandoning of puppies and kittens**. Also, it does not prevent people depositing unwanted animals in kennels.

e. Spay/neuter and return programs

There are two aspects to these methods, which can be categorised as:

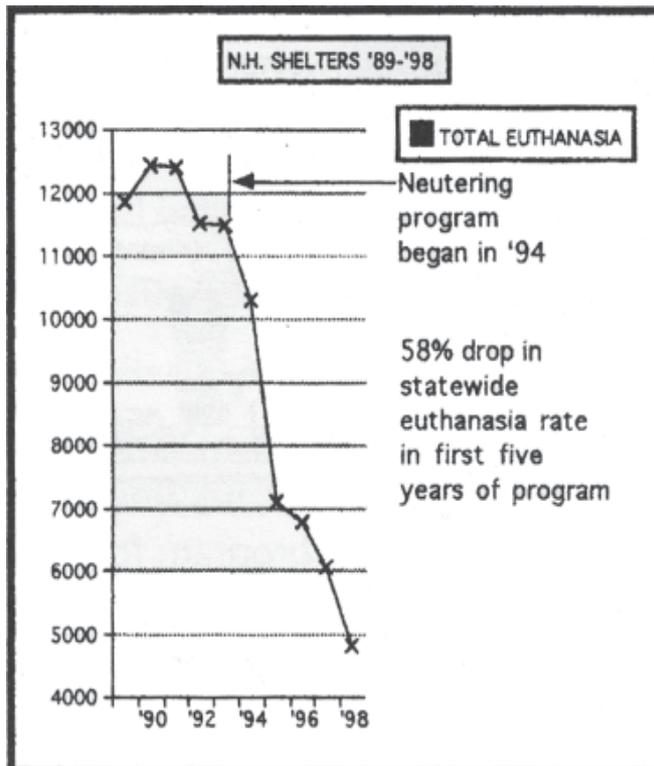
- (i) **Prevention and**
- (ii) **“Treatment”**

(i) **Prevention:**

Legia Pro Animale's experience in Italy shows that it is particularly puppies and kittens that are abandoned or taken into kennels. These are the offspring of pets whose owners do not know what to do with them. This is the main source of the problem. Very often they also abandon the mother but keep a male puppy. Thus, by removing the source of more births, the owners hope not to have any further problems. To reduce this common behaviour, free spaying and neutering could be offered to the pet owners. The following two case studies show that this is a very effective method and will save lots of money in the future:

Case Study 1 - New Hampshire, USA*.

The animal euthanasia rate per 1,000 human residents remained at a steady high level for the years prior to the commencement of the spay and neuter project. On average 9 animals per 1,000 inhabitants per annum were put-down during the previous seven years. The spay/neuter program started in 1994. Owners were given the opportunity to have their pets treated for \$10. Vets participating in the programme were reimbursed 80 percent of their usual fees. Within 7 years the euthanasia rate reduced to 2.4 per 1,000 inhabitants per annum. The conclusion is self-explanatory.



Estimated savings on impounding and sheltering these animals totalled \$3,000,000 US for the program's first six years, based on a per animal sheltering cost of \$105 US. The cost of the program was just over \$1,000,000 US during this time. Thus, New Hampshire taxpayers saved \$3.23 US for every dollar the state spent on the subsidized sterilization program.**

(*source: Animal Control Management, HSUS 2001 and SPAY/USA)

(** source: N.H. Department of Agriculture Markets and Food; Geoffrey Handy, Animal Control Management: A Guide for Local

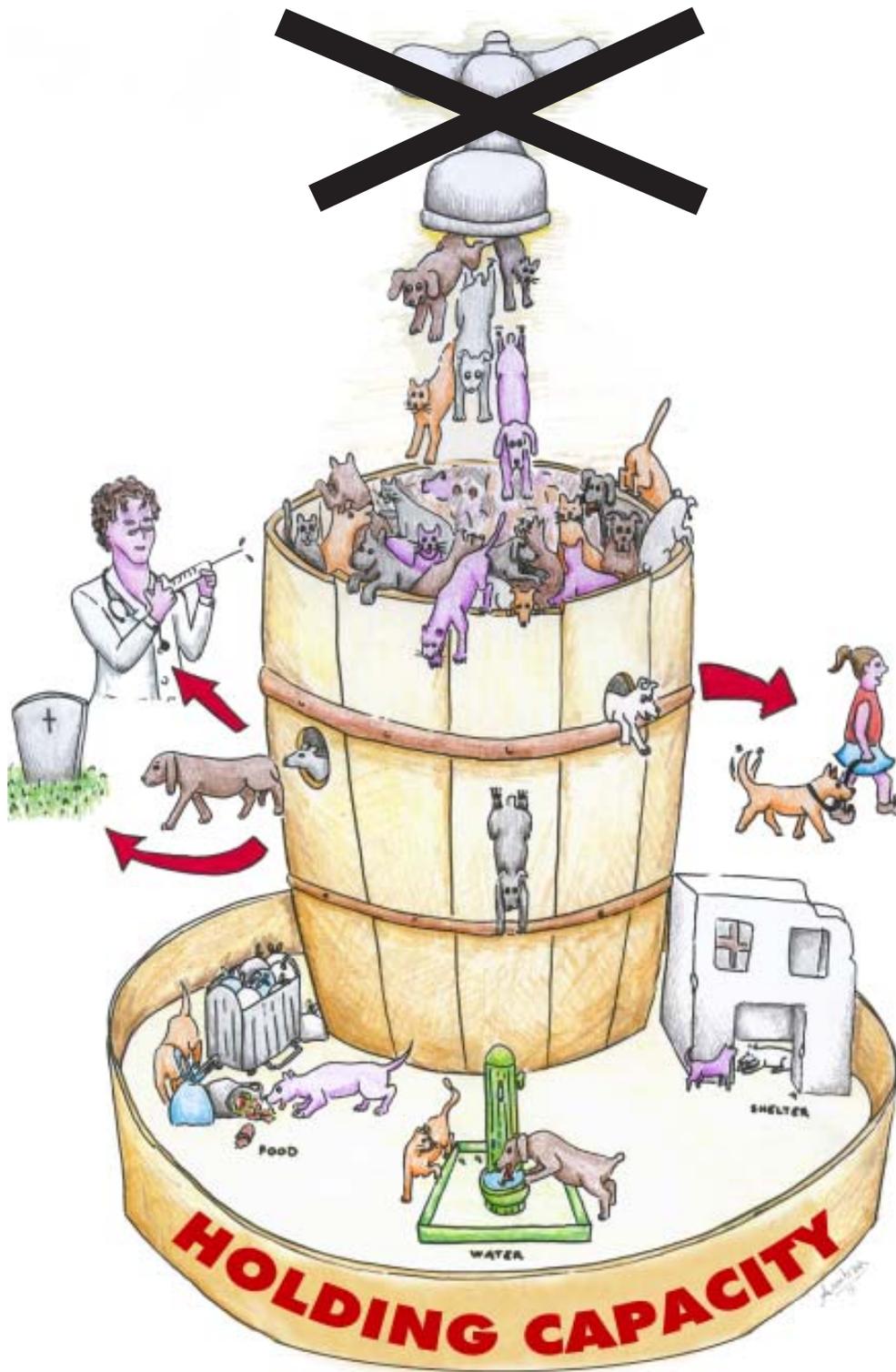
Governments, International City' County Management Association, February, 2002)

Case Study 2 – Dundee, Great Britain *

Up until 1988, every year around 2,400 stray dogs were taken into a dog pound and about a third of them were put-down. Dundee Council started a neuter program for dogs that were to be re-homed from the pound and also for privately owned productive bitches. Within 5 years the number of stray dogs collected fell 50% and the number of puppies collected also fell dramatically (1988: 447, 1993: 73, 1998: 1). Packs of dogs that had previously roamed the housing estates were no longer seen.

(*source - Dogs, Zoonoses and Public Health, CAB International 2000)

Thus, in areas where dogs and cats are not living permanently on the streets the number of unwanted animals being deposited in shelters can be reduced by free spaying and neutering of owned pets.

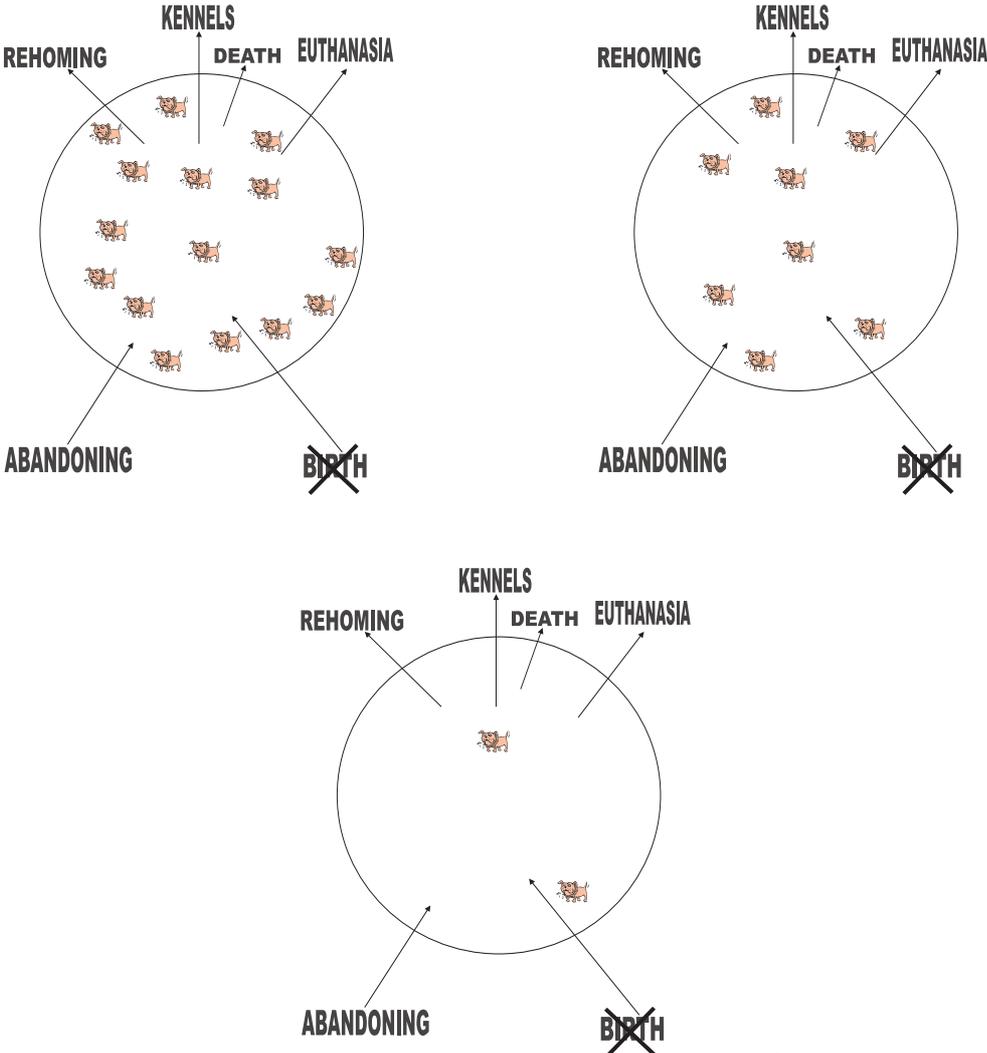


Furthermore, a possible fiscal measure to encourage dog and cat owners to neuter their animals would be a “fertility tax”. This could be charged on those whose animals have not been sterilised. On the other hand, for owners wishing to have their pet treated, the vet-bill would be entirely tax deductible. The less affluent could have their animals neutered free of charge by a vet contracted and paid for by the Government.

(ii) “Treatment”:

As previously observed, in an area where there are many abandoned dogs and cats and/or the catching system is not functioning well, the total number will always roughly equate to the “holding capacity”.

The only possible way to permanently reduce the total population is the use of a spay/neuter and return program. This is because in a population of sterile animals should one die of any cause there will be no young to replace it. Thus the total number will decrease.



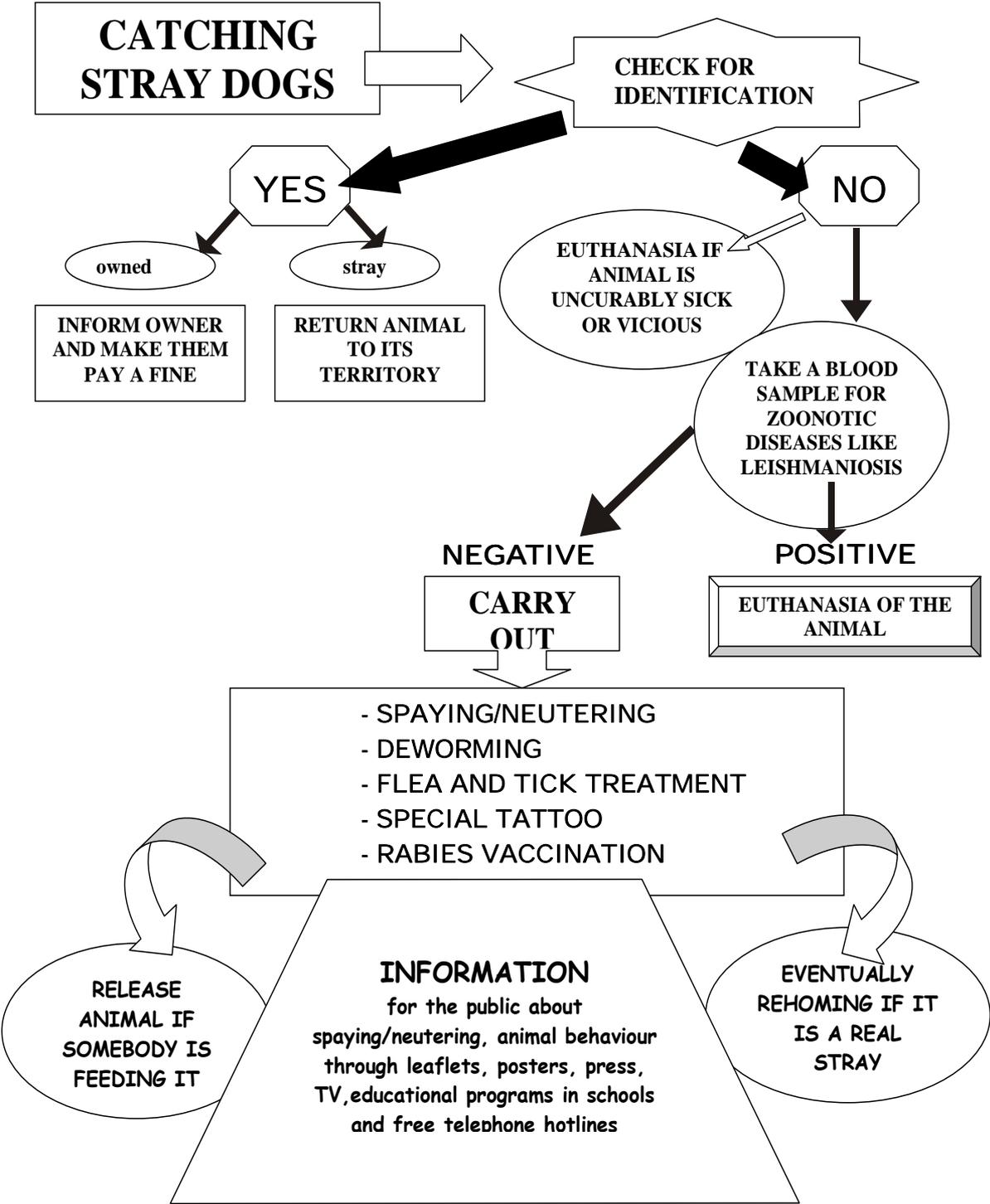
f. Information and Education

If children experience their parents abandoning animals it is more likely that they will do the same when they grow up. If they could better understand animals' needs, they might improve their attitudes. In the long run educational programs in schools, items on television, posters, leaflets, etc. can help to change children's and the public's perceptions and will be beneficial alongside spay/neuter campaigns.

Latest research results from the United States (Animal Control Management, Humane Society of the United States, 2001) show that the age of dogs and cats abandoned in kennels is increasing. Previously it was mostly puppies and kittens that were received. Nowadays the average age in some areas is 6 months and older. Possible explanations are that either people cannot handle the animal, they expected something else, or they found out that the animals can proliferate and create "little problems" at this age. It is evident that education is needed for the owners of the animals and the animals themselves (behavioural assistance).

Section 2 - Examples of Stray Animal Management Projects

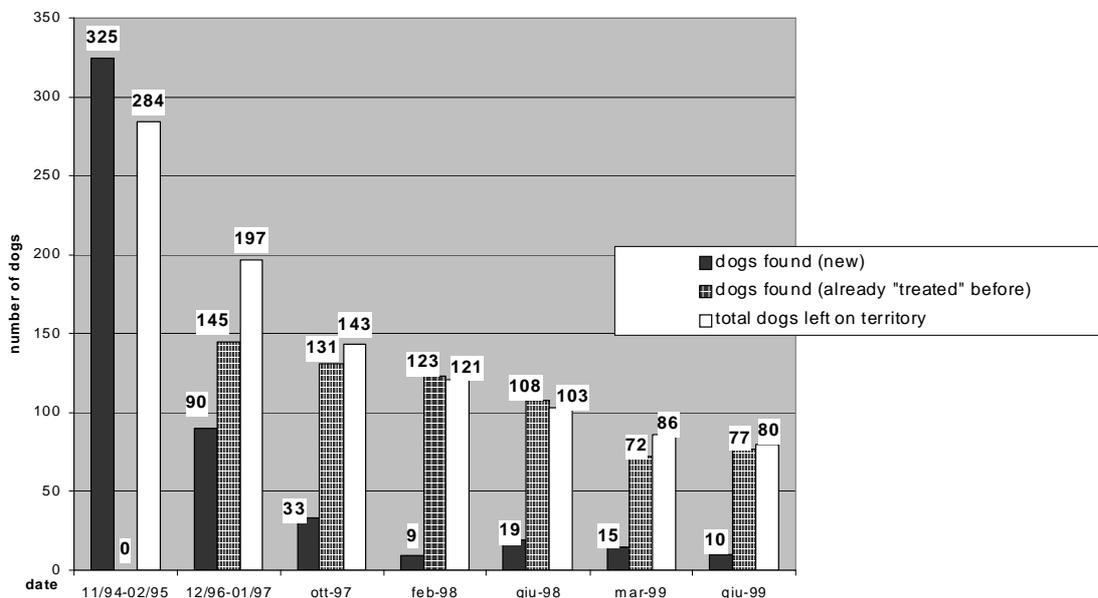
2.1 Lega Pro Animale Projects



a. The Italsider Steel Company, Taranto

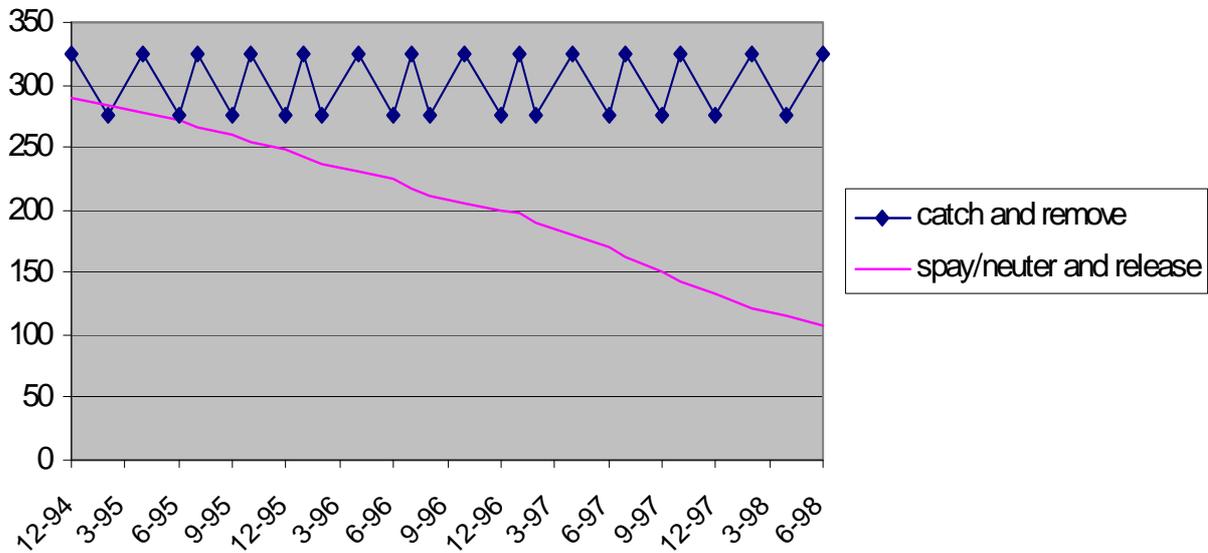
In 1994 Lega Pro Animale's first project commenced at the Italsider Steel Company. The site covers an area of around 70 square kilometres and approximately 25,000 people were employed there. 332 stray dogs were caught in four and a half months (97.6% of the total population). 278 dogs, including puppies, were neutered, vaccinated, tattooed, and then released. Further exercises were carried out in subsequent years. In total, over 500 dogs were caught and treated. Today there is no longer a problem, the dog population is now below 80! It is clear that **capture/neuter/return methods are effective**.

Reduction of the total number of dogs on the Italside area between 1994 and 1999



Prior to LPA's involvement another organisation dealt with the strays. They captured numbers of dogs some three or four times each year. The result would be that the population would be temporarily lowered until new puppies were born and then the numbers would rise again to the "holding capacity". This example clearly confirms that **capture and killing methods do not work**.

PRESENCE OF DOGS ON THE TERRITORY

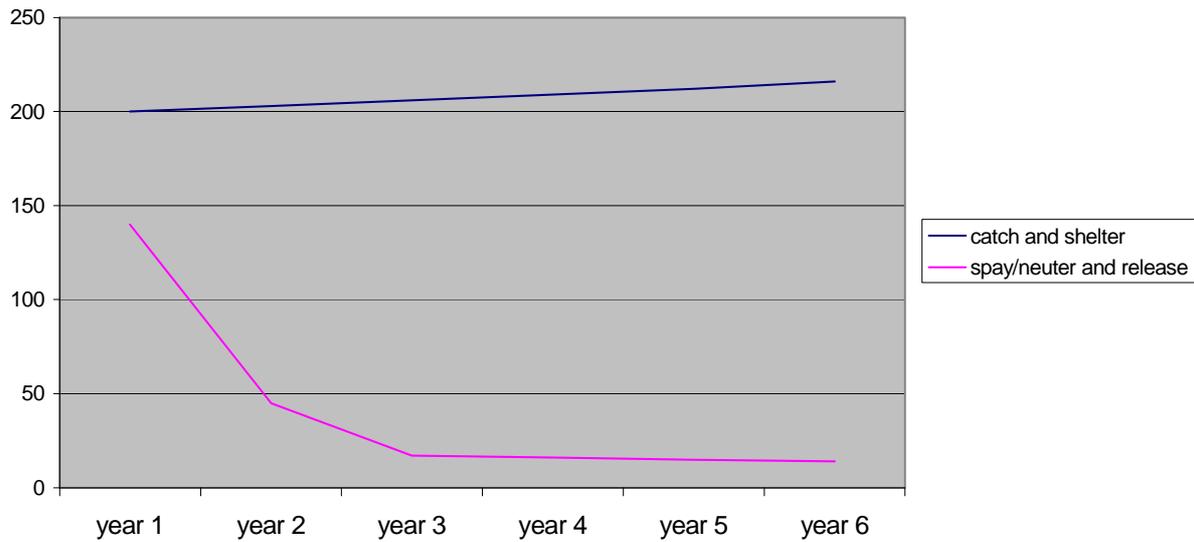


Another aspect of stray control became apparent during this project - the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the local people and workforce. At Italsider, many workers were protective towards the dogs, even hiding them when the dogcatchers appeared. Thus only limited numbers would be caught. However, once LPA's project commenced the people quickly saw that the captured dogs, once treated, were returned, perfectly healthy and happy. The consequence was that the workers were much more helpful towards the project team. This enabled nearly 100% of the dogs to be captured and treated. Therefore **it is important to create a good relationship with the local people. If not a stray management project is highly unlikely to succeed.**

Another important revelation of this project related to the financial aspects. Prior to LPA's involvement Italsider spent vast sums of money to have the strays captured and killed without ever solving the problem. Then the new law forbidding the killing of healthy and friendly dogs came into force, so this method became obsolete. Had LPA not intervened, in theory Italsider would have been required to house the captured dogs in shelters for the rest of their lives. Clearly the costs would have been phenomenal.

Thus LPA's methods not only solved a previously intractable problem but also saved Italsider massive sums of money. This clearly indicates that **capture/ neuter/return techniques not only work in terms of solving the stray problem but are also very cost effective.**

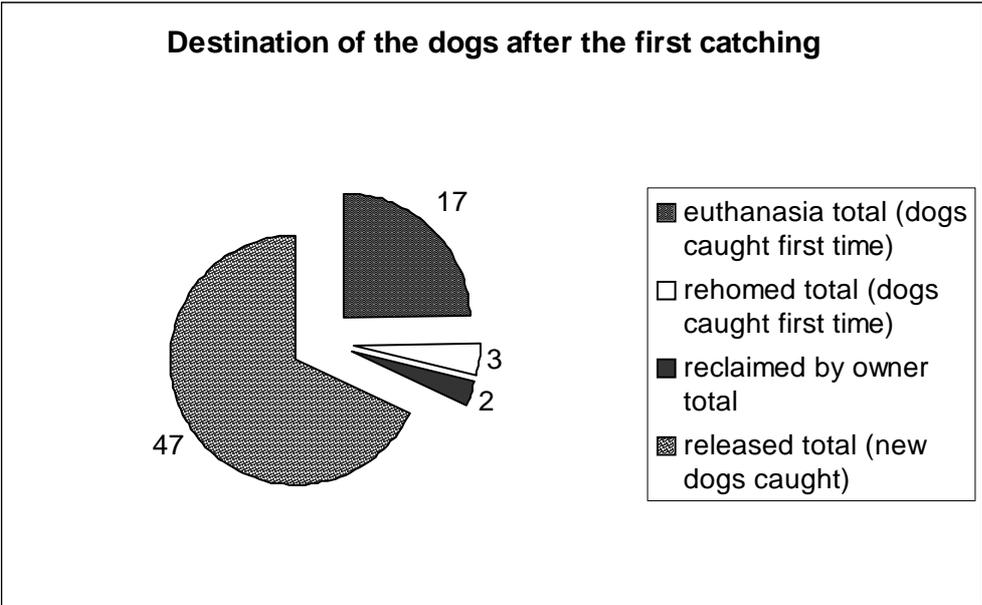
COST ANALYSIS IN MILLION LIRE



b. The Navy Dockyards, Taranto

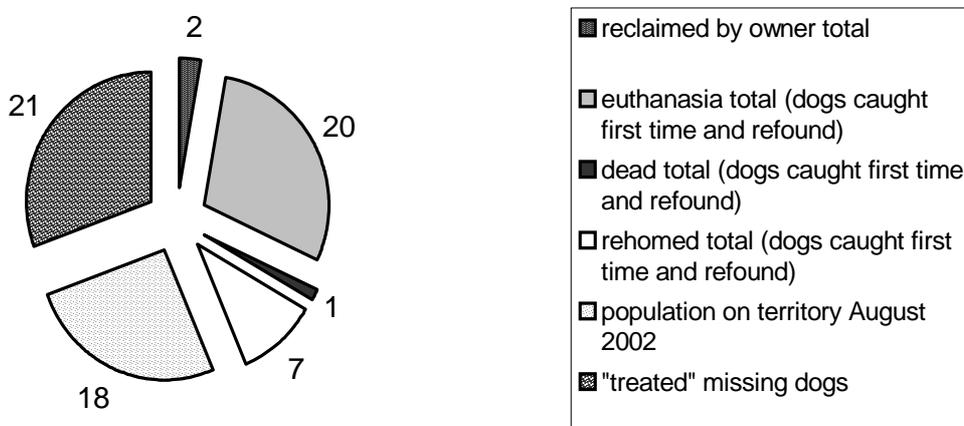
Lega Pro Animale's success at the Italsider plant was noticed by the Italian Navy authorities. They had problems with stray dogs at the Taranto dockyards for many years, including attacks on servicemen. They also had little success in dealing with the problem. In 1998 they requested LPA's help. As at Italsider friendly and healthy dogs were captured, vaccinated for leptospirosis and rabies, de-wormed, spayed/neutered, tattooed and then returned to their habitat. Subsequently the dogs were recaptured twice a year for further health checks and any necessary treatment. The stray problem is now under control with no wandering packs of dangerous and sick dogs.

The following statistics show LPA's results from work carried out between November 1998 and August 2002. These relate to a single, fenced-in base, with access only via controlled gates. The dog population is constantly changing with dogs roaming over large areas. This may explain why some were not recaptured on our return visits. Enquiries to people as to the whereabouts of missing dogs were met with variable and vague responses. Therefore we have used the classification "treated" for the missing dogs.



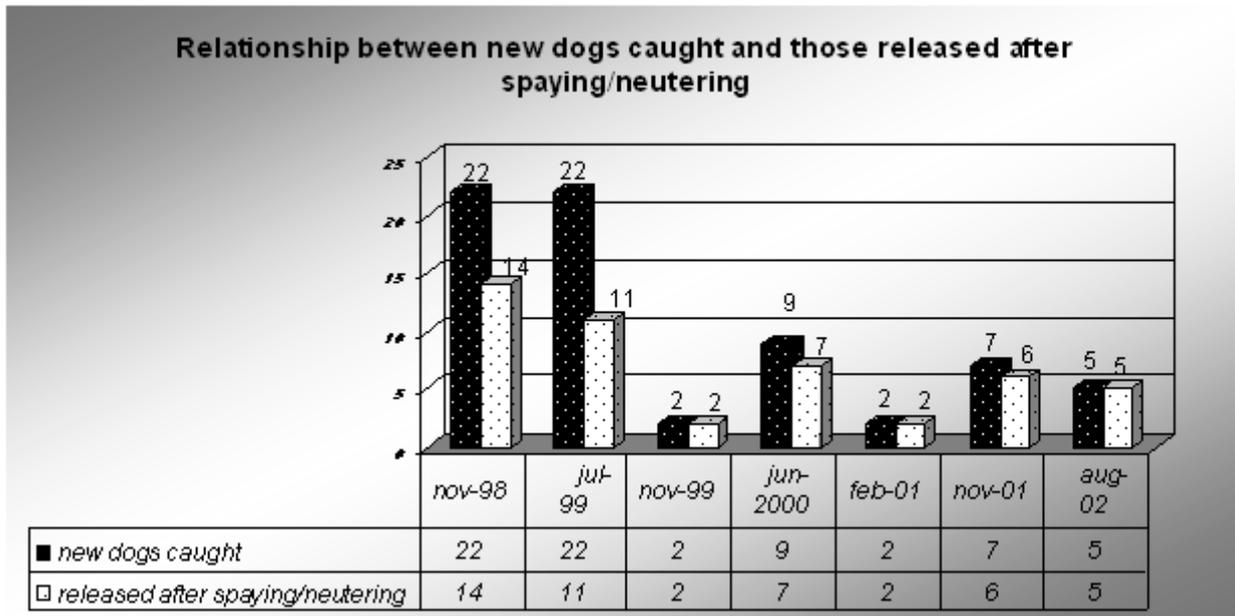
The dogs that were returned to the site were friendly and healthy. After spaying and neutering they ceased roaming in packs and, therefore, the dangers of attacks on personnel diminished dramatically. In fact no “biting” attacks have been reported since, even though they were previously common. Also the remaining dogs defend their territory against newcomers who attempt to move in. These findings indicate that **capture, spay/neuter/return methods have additional benefits in improving animal behaviour.**

Outcome of dogs caught, released and caught again



The financial success of the Italsider project was reiterated by the experiences at the dockyards. Had the Navy needed to house the healthy and friendly dogs at the dockyards, the costs would have been enormous.

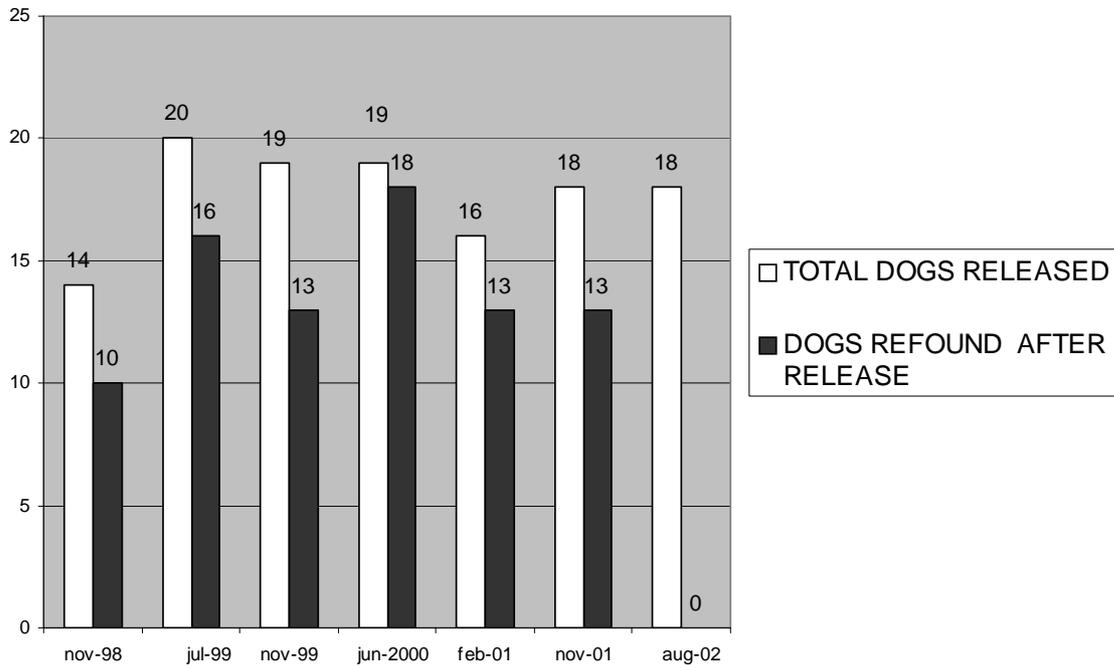
The following graph shows the numerical relationship between the captured dogs and those returned to the site. It can be seen that, on the first two visits (12/98 and 07/99) it was necessary to “rehabilitate” the site by putting–down the aggressive and sick dogs. On subsequent visits far fewer dogs needed to be removed as the population was, by then, generally in good health.



LPA’s activities at the Taranto dockyards have shown the problems that exist in an area that has a large number of roaming dogs and where it is impossible to capture and treat the entire population within the important two-month timeframe. In such circumstances it is better to keep a small group of controlled animals vaccinated, spayed and neutered on the territory. This way the dogs do not form into packs and cannot proliferate because all are sterilised. Any new dogs settling in the area must be treated immediately and will not, therefore, produce young. Within ten years (the average life of a semi-stray dog) the total population will decline as some die but no young replace them.

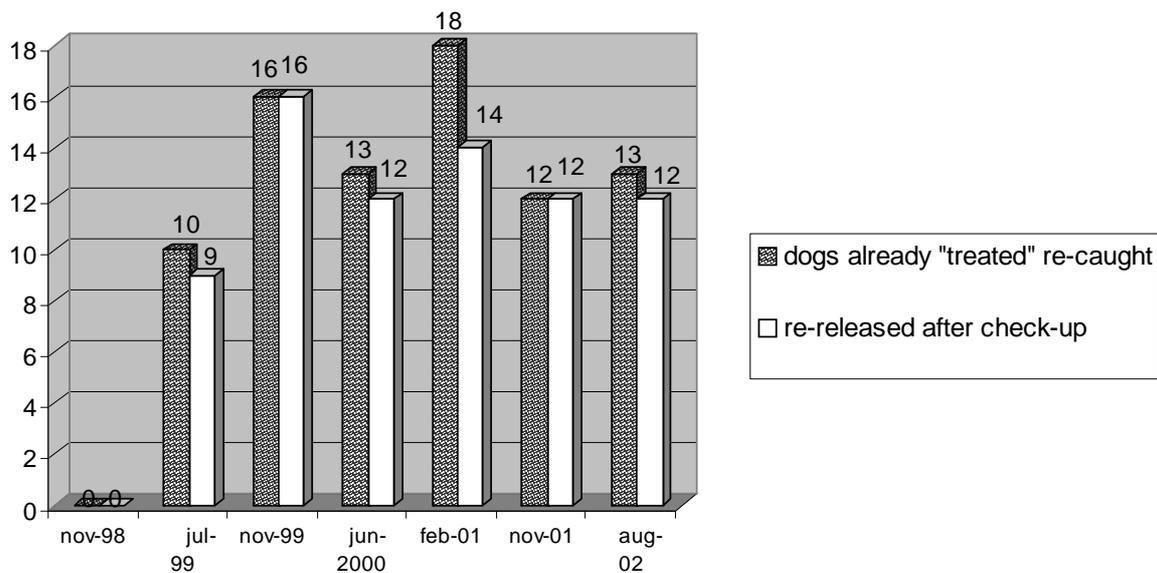


Relationship between dogs released and those refund



This method has proved effective and is far less expensive than housing the strays. It is also less expensive than “capture and kill” because experience has shown that unless all of the dogs are killed new births will rapidly return the population to the “holding capacity”.

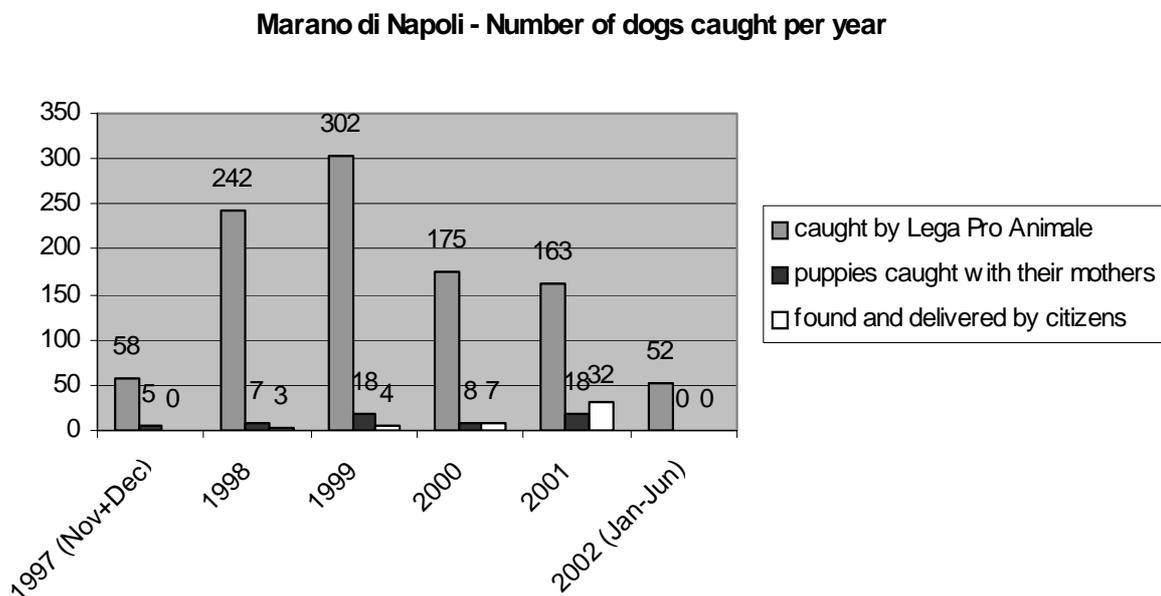
Relationship between dogs caught again and those released after check-up



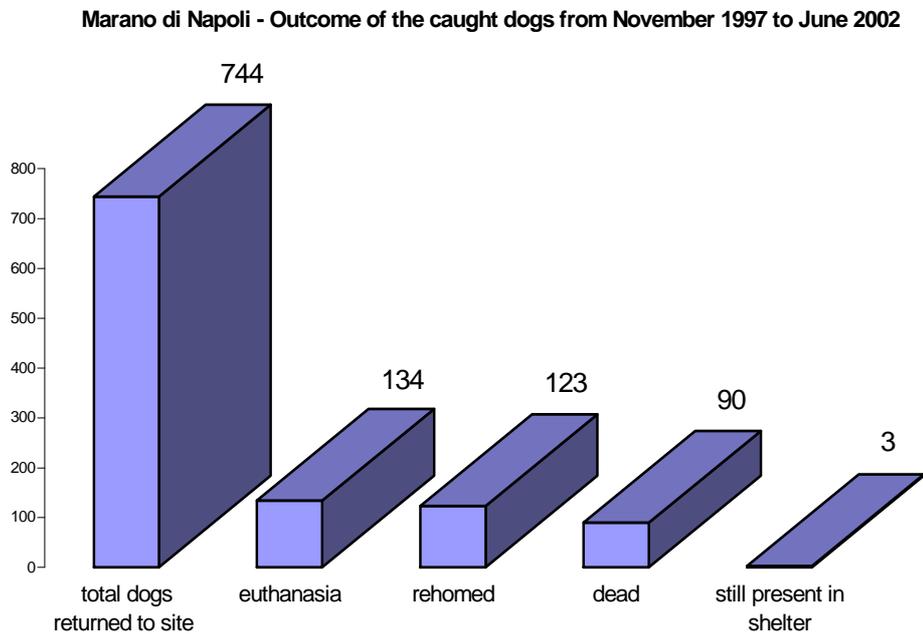
c. Marano di Napoli

The Mayor of Marano di Napoli, Mauro Bertini, can confirm the success of Lega Pro Animale's methods. Marano is a big city to the north of Naples. The population is approximately 75,000 and it covers an area of about 15.2 square kilometres. Its neighbours are the cities of Mugnano, Calvizzano, Quarto and Qualiano. Along with many other difficulties in the area there was also a major problem of stray dogs. Hundreds were roaming the streets searching for food. Sometimes they collected in large packs which became aggressive if a bitch on heat was in evidence. The poor condition of the strays was also causing a public health concern. The Mayor contacted Lega Pro Animale and, since November 1997, they have taken responsibility for the stray problem in the area.

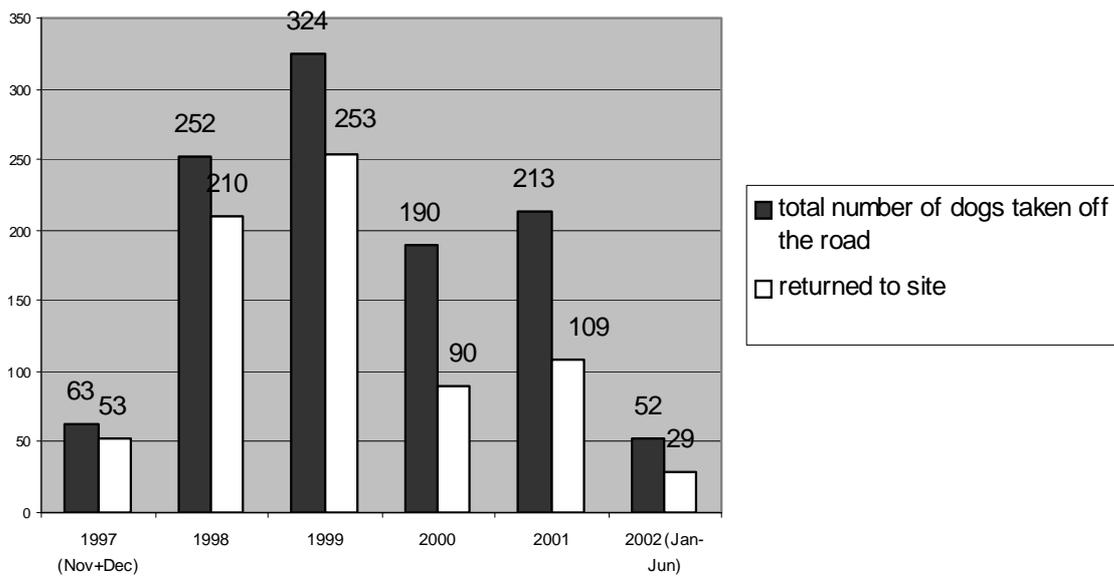
From November 1997 until August 2002 1,094 dogs were captured. The following graph shows how this number is broken down:



The following graph shows how the captured dogs were dealt with:



The following graph shows the relationship between the numbers of captured dogs and those returned to the capture site:



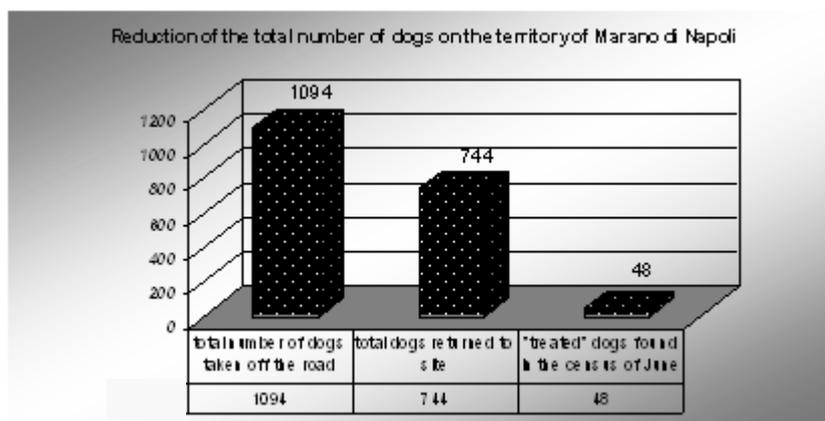
As can be seen 53 friendly and healthy dogs were returned to site in November and December 1997. This is the number that, had they not been treated by LPA, would in theory have been required to be kept in a publicly funded shelter for the rest of their lives. Even allowing only 3 Euros per day for their keep Marano Council would have had to spend in the region of 5,678 Euros just for the one and a half months. This makes no allowance for additional costs such as medical treatment, vaccinations, sterilisation and capture fees.

Assuming that 10% of these dogs die (which should not really occur if they are well kept) then only 47 will remain during 1998. The cost to the Council would rise to 51,465 Euros in that year, not allowing for any further dogs to be captured. If we then allow for those dogs captured progressively during 1998, say an average of 100 for the full year, this will cost the council a further 109,500 Euros.

If this calculation is projected for 1999 and making all due allowances, the total cost to the council during that year would be 362,445 Euros.

In subsequent years, even allowing for an unusually high mortality rate, the annual cost to the council would be in the region of 360,000 Euros. Therefore the sum total over the approximate 5 year period would be in the region of 1,654,866 Euros! Again this is not even allowing for the extra care and medical costs. This massive sum must be related to the actual costs of Lega Pro Animale's activities, which were just over 200,000 Euros, or around 33,000 Euros per year.

Clearly, **LPA's methods have brought about a massive saving of public money. Also, and most importantly, the number of captured strays decreased from an initial 1,094 to only 48 found in June 2002. This figure may seem unbelievable but it is officially confirmed and documented by the Marano police.**

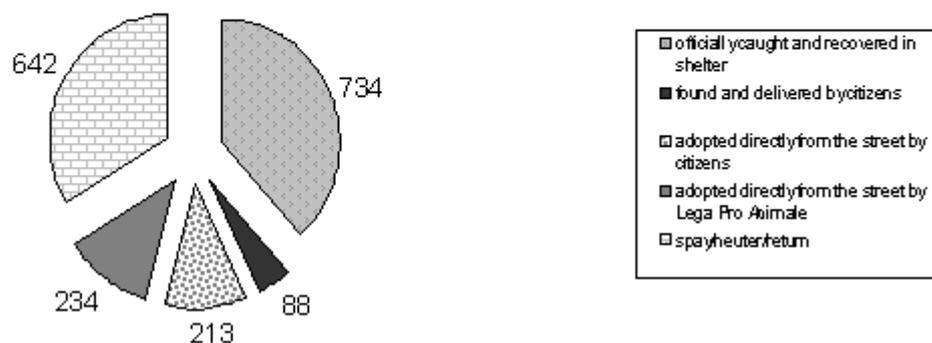


d. Castel Volturno

Over a number of years Lega pro Animale had approached the mayor of Castel Volturno many times offering to help with the stray dog problem in the area. Finally in 1995, the Council agreed that LPA could, free of charge, capture the strays, spay or neuter them and then return them to their usual haunt. In the early stages it was necessary to find an option for those dogs that, for any reason, could not be returned to the streets (e.g. minor diseases, prone to chasing or other unacceptable behaviour). LPA agreed to house the dogs at their shelter and then attempt to find new homes for them.

Between October 1995 and August 2002 1,911 dogs were captured on the streets of Castel Volturno (circa 270 per annum on average). The following graph shows the origins of these dogs:

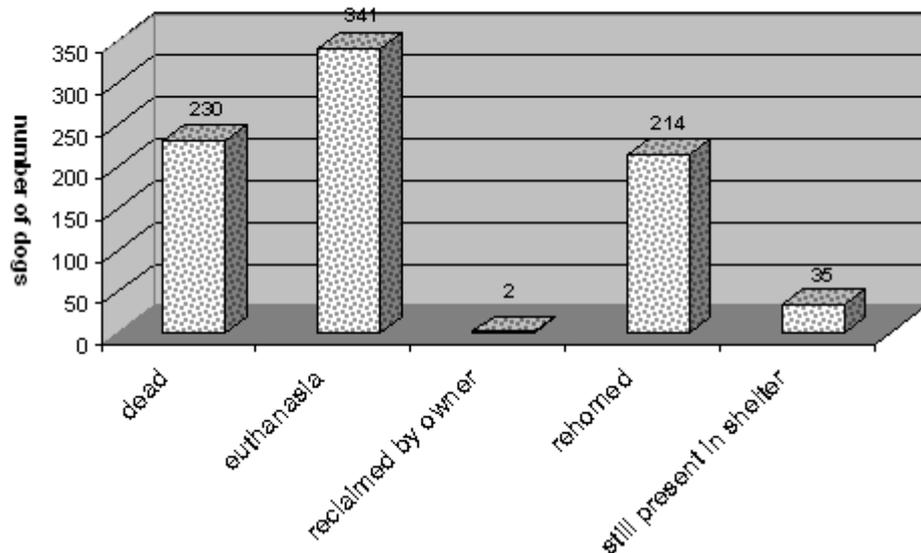
Origin and outcome of stray dogs caught in Castel Volturno between October 1995 and August 2002



The following graph shows what subsequently happened to the dogs that were brought to the LPA shelter. A large number had to be put-down because they were incurably sick or very aggressive. Many puppies died from viral diseases. In 7 years of work only two dogs were reclaimed by their owners. Possibly others may have been deterred by the prospect of a fine. Also if they waited, they knew their dog would probably return after a week or so, spayed/ neutered and healthy, all free of charge!

It is not easy to re-home dogs from shelters in southern Italy. 642 of the dogs taken from the streets were friendly and healthy and, by law, would have required keeping in a shelter. It is safe to conclude, therefore, that **it would have been impossible to control the stray problem in the Castel Volturno area without a spay/neuter and return policy.**

Outcome for stray dogs captured and brought to the LPA shelter between October 1995 and August 2002



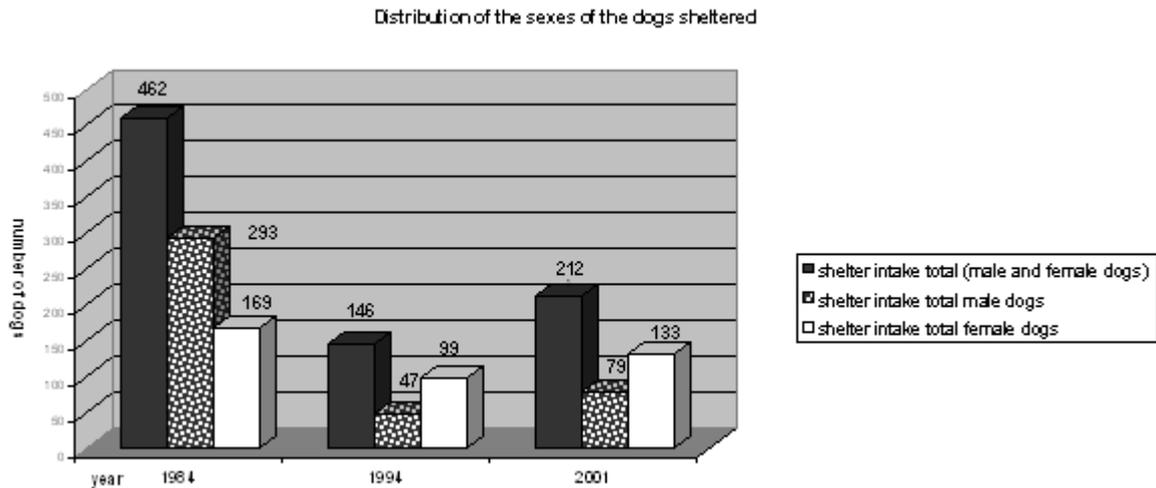
e. Lega Pro Animale shelter statistics, 1984-2001.

Lega Pro Animale was founded in 1983 in response to the chronic stray problem and poor animal welfare conditions that existed in Campania at that time. The capture and killing of strays was commonplace, in Naples around 5,000 dogs per year, but without successfully reducing the problem. Overcrowded kennels, often with many sick dogs were evident everywhere.

The following statistics and graphs show what LPA has achieved to date. The 2001 statistics exclude figures from Marano di Napoli and Castel Volturno, but include all others.

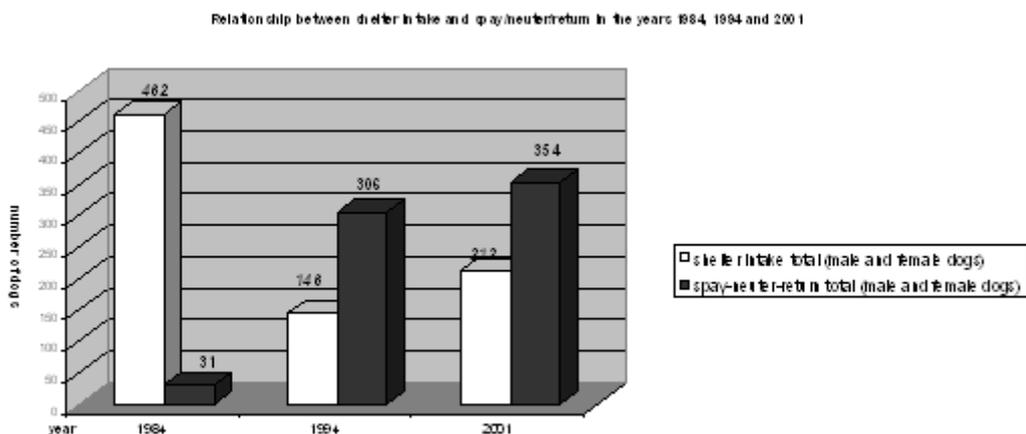
1984 - At that time, LPA accepted all unwanted animals that were brought to their shelter. This was in order to avoid them being dumped elsewhere. The animals most suitable for adoption were selected and the rest were put-down. Spaying and neutering were virtually unheard of at that time within Italy .

1994 - In 1991, a new animal welfare law was passed in Italy. As a consequence, it was no longer permissible to put-down healthy and friendly animals. Subsequently, LPA could no longer accept all the animals brought to them. By 1994, spaying and neutering was becoming more evident. The following graph shows the progressive reduction in LPA's intake of dogs and also the relative number of males compared to females.

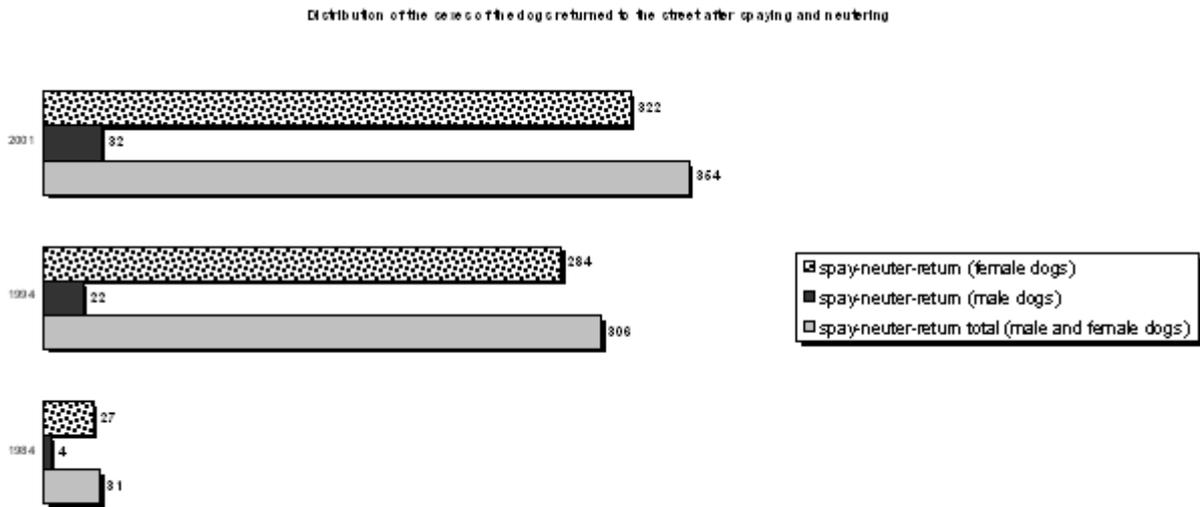


As it was now impossible to accept all the dogs brought to the shelter, an alternative was needed. LPA promoted spaying, neutering and subsequent release of the animals and encouraged local people to then take care of them.

The following graph shows the relationship between the intake of dogs and spay/neuter/return numbers over the years.

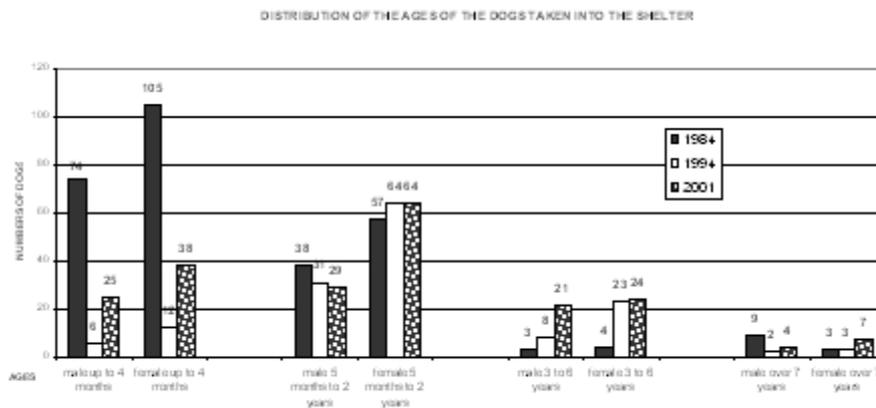


It is interesting to see the relationship between the number of male and female dogs brought for spay/neuter.



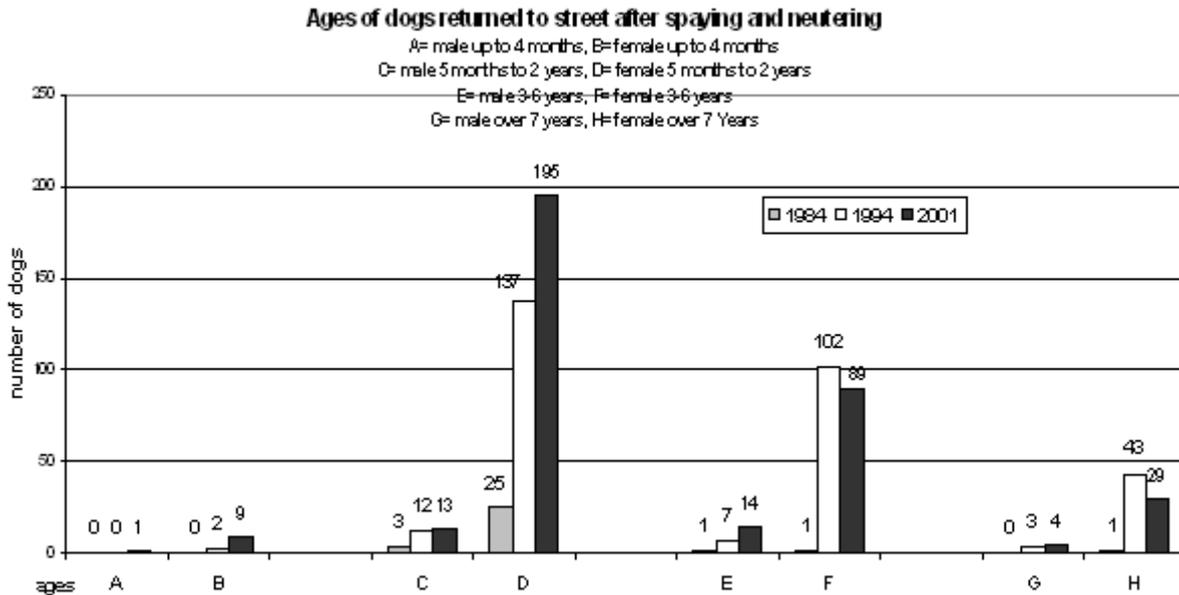
It is clear that it is predominantly females that are brought in. LPA's research indicates that it is commonly believed that only female animals are responsible for the stray overpopulation. However, LPA advocate the spay/neuter of both sexes. Allowing animals to continue sexual activity following male vasectomy or the female having her ovaries tied-off (as opposed to neutering) causes severe health and behavioural problems in both sexes (e.g. tumours of the sexual organs, false pregnancy, mammary tumours in females, uterus infections, prostate hypertrophy and aggression). Attempting to separate the sexes during the female fertile cycle can be considered cruel. Animals will still follow their natural instincts and attempt to mate, even climbing very high walls etc. to do so. Therefore, **LPA strongly advocates the neutering of both sexes, whether strays or owned pets.**

The following graph shows the relative age of dogs taken in by the LPA shelter over the y



It is clear that dogs of up to 2 years are the major problem. LPA have concluded that free spaying and neutering would significantly reduce the numbers of new births and subsequent dumping of the young animals.

The next graph shows the distribution of ages of dogs brought to LPA to be spayed/neutered and returned to the street.



This shows that requests for females during their most productive years (aged 5 months to 6 years) is very high.

In Conclusion:

Without the “safety valve” of spay/neuter/return, it would have been impossible to help all the animals brought to LPA over the last 19 years. This is particularly so following the 1991 law change forbidding the “putting-down” of healthy and friendly animals. The use of spay/neuter/return methods has reduced the average number of animals held at the centre at any time to only around 70-80.

2.2 Study of stray dogs in an Italian village.

Dr. Rosario Fico, an Italian public vet, carried out some research on the behaviour of stray dogs. He focused on Pescasseroli, a small village in the Abruzzi National Park (Veterinary Public Health Reports, WHO/FAO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Veterinary Public Health, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy: Study and management of a dog population - 1995). He found the following important results:

- 98-100% of the stray dogs had an “owner”.
- 40% of puppies born died from diseases or accidents within the first two months of age.
- only 2.75% of the dogs has been registered and identified.

Dr. Fico concluded that capturing and removing dogs from a balanced population will cause a change of the general behaviour of the dogs on the territory and weaken the general health of the individuals. Younger dogs which are more prone to diseases, more aggressive and more liable to proliferate will be introduced.

He also observed that there was a poor relationship between the public dog catchers and the local people. This resulted in a lack of co-operation with the stray identification and registration scheme. Furthermore, the dog catchers failed to capture some of the more aggressive dogs and these became increasingly suspicious of any further attempts to catch them. Consequently, it became much more difficult to administer any medical treatment or sanitary control. Under such circumstances, there is a possibility that these dogs could run wild and cause severe problems by attacking livestock. There is even the possibility that they could interbreed with the last pure line of wolves still living in the area.

Dr. Fico identified a beneficial “educational effect” on the local population of capturing strays and fining the owners. Of course, this relies on the registration and identification scheme working satisfactorily. However, he states that even a good scheme will never fully control a stray dog population.

Dr. Fico’s recommendations regarding the stray dog problem in Pescasseroli were:

1. Try to educate the population to:
 - a. feed the dogs sufficiently
 - b. neuter as many dogs as possible
 - c. avoid using working females when on heat

2. Try to control the stray dogs food sources by:
 - a. improving the rubbish collection system
 - b. using closed rubbish containers
 - c. limiting the breeding of unprotected livestock
 - d. properly burying or disposing of all dead animals
 - e. enclosing/fencing of all rubbish dumps

Dr. Fico concluded that the stray problem in Pescasseroli is representative of many other Italian mountain villages. He feels that the best use of human and financial resources is on preventative measures such as education and informing the public and also a proper registration and identification system. Capture of stray dogs should only be attempted in special cases, such as when a dog is dangerous.

Section 3 – Practical and Effective Stray Animal Management

3.1 Summary

In summary, Lega Pro Animale has reached the following conclusions following many years of dealing with stray animal problems:

- The widely used **capture and kill methods do not work**. They produce only a temporary reduction in stray numbers and are very expensive.
- **Capture and home in shelter methods are not practical** due to the large numbers of animals involved and the consequent massive care cost.
- **Capture/spay/neuter and return methods do work**. Over a period of time the number of stray animals will be significantly reduced. These methods are also substantially less expensive than the above. In addition, these methods have beneficial side-effects such as improved animal behaviour.
- **Registration and identification** methods are beneficial in controlling animal populations and reducing abandonment.
- **Education** of the public, particularly children, is crucially important in improving understanding of animal care and needs.
- **Training** of animal care workers and vets to a high standard is also crucially important in order to successfully carry out the capture/spay/neuter/return programs.

3.2 Further detail

Practical and effective stray management methods can be further categorised as follows:

- i. Methods aiming to reduce animal abandoning and
- ii. Methods aiming to reduce animal birth rate.

i. Methods aiming to reduce animal abandoning:

a) Free spaying/neutering of owned pets

As we have seen from the New Hampshire project and by analysing the reasons why pets are abandoned, it is clear that an enormous reduction in the number of abandoned pets will be achieved if the authorities offer free or low cost and affordable spaying and neutering.

b) Registration and identification

This method involves the tattooing, or better still microchipping, of dogs and cats and the subsequent registration of details on an easily accessible databank. In consequence the animals cannot be so easily abandoned since their owner will be traceable. Ideally they will have to pay a fine unless the loss of the animal has been reported. Clearly such regulation will require adequate enforcement in order to be effective.

c) Education

The public need to understand the responsibilities involved in keeping a pet, how to train it, how to feed it and how to take care of it. School education programs will be beneficial in this respect. Also in the event of a dog or a cat showing behavioural problems, special courses could be offered to control these.

ii. Methods aiming to reduce animal birth rate.

a) Free or low cost and affordable spaying/neutering of owned pets

As described above this will clearly also be beneficial in reducing animal birth rate.

b) Spay/neuter and return of strays.

As Lega Pro Animale has shown, this method is highly effective at reducing stray populations in a very cost effective way.

c) Education

Education of the public regarding animal welfare matters using all available means and media will ultimately produce a lower birth rate.



SPAYING AND NEUTERING
IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION
INFORMATION AND EDUCATION
CONTROLLING THE HOLDING CAPACITY
REHOMING OF STRAYS
COOPERATION

Post scriptum:

SPAY/NEUTER/RETURN AND WELFARE OF ANIMALS

Very often I get letters from other animal protection organisations about returning dogs or cats to the streets. They are convinced that these animals are going to die; that they will be mistreated by the human population; that they will have accidents; that they do not have medical care in case of diseases; that they will die from hunger and thirst..... Yes, they are right: dogs and cats in the street have a very dangerous life, they risk a lot.

But your resources are limited:

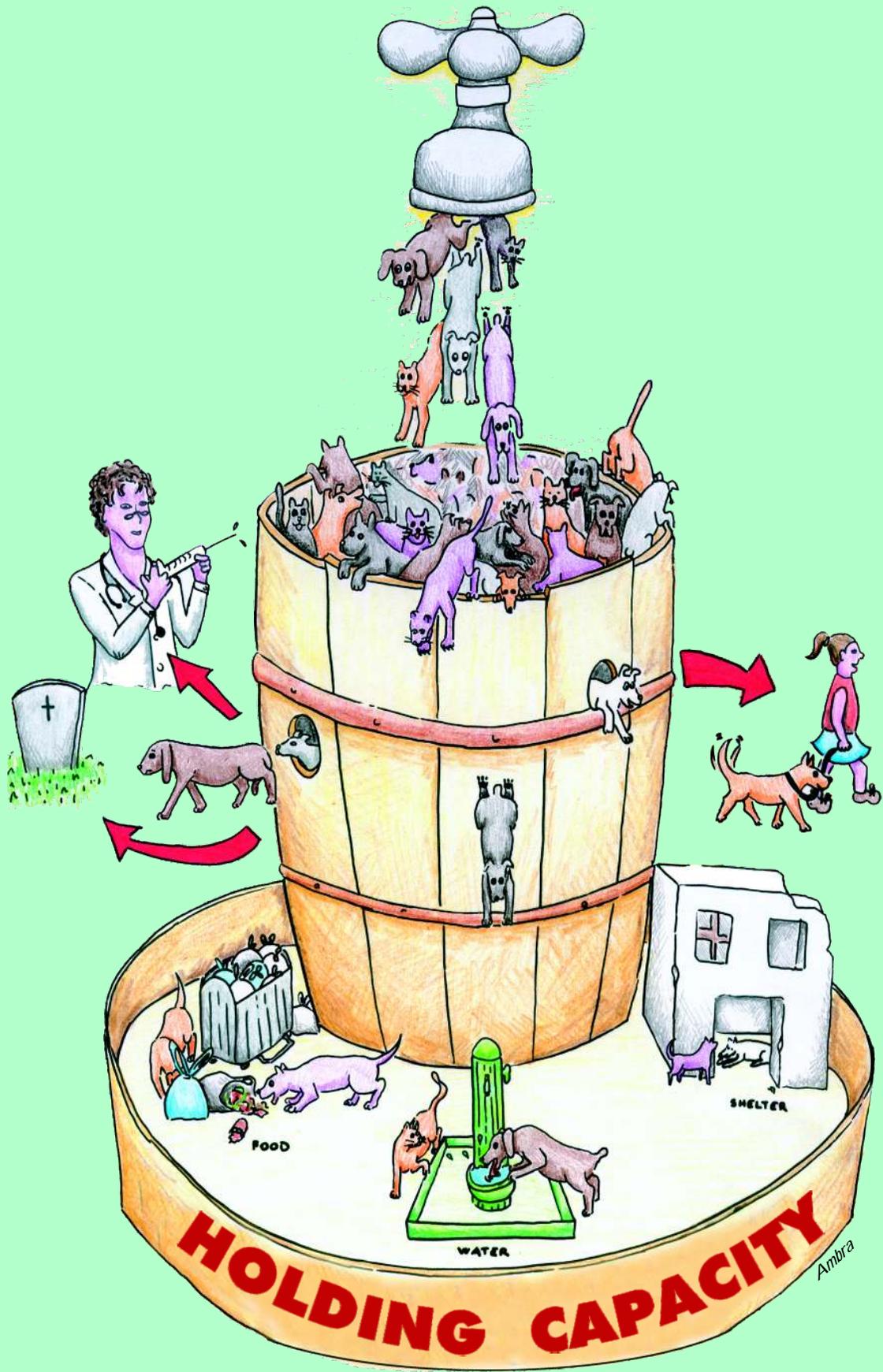
1. you do not have enough staff to catch all the animals within the period of two months (length of pregnancy)
2. you do not have enough space to recover all the animals to kennels
3. you do not have enough money to pay for the services needed

therefore you are never going to succeed in reducing the total number of animals. You will catch some of them but newborn puppies will substitute them immediately. If you do not use an effective catch and kill method the only thing you obtain is that the average age of the animals in the population goes down. And do you really think that inexperienced young animals have a greater chance than the “old” ones? If an animal reaches a certain age in the street, it is surely smarter than a newborn puppy which has to learn where to find food; how dangerous it is crossing a street; that there are some humans not to be trusted.....

But not all humans are mean and potential animal abusers. There are so many dividing their meals with strays, helping them in any way they can. Some people are afraid of dogs and cats because they think that they carry diseases. If you start on a street project, when you catch the animals or you are taking them back healthy and clean, most of the people living in the street come together to ask questions about the diseases and habits of the animals. You should never miss this excellent opportunity for education! And do not forget the children. They love their strays, they give them names and will try to hide them if you want to catch them for killing. In our experience the poorer the population is the more attached they are to the stray animals. (We work in the suburbs of Naples in southern Italy where nearly every day a person is killed by the local Mafia, where robbery and theft is something “normal” and where, with the crazy traffic, many people lose their lives in road accidents.)

Think about it before you “rescue” an animal to eventually euthanise it or take it to prison for a life time.

grafiche Calderone - Casal di Principe



HOLDING CAPACITY

Ambra