

## Standing Committee on State Development

### Inquiry into Animal Welfare Policy in New South Wales

Hearing – 16 March 2022

Supplementary questions to Cat Protection Society

**In the Consultation Outcomes paper, it is stated that “The NSW Government does not support Trap-Neuter-Release programs (TNR)”. The Bill also fails to expressly allow for TNR. What is your opinion about this decision?**

In rejecting TNR, the Consultation Outcomes paper refers to consideration in 2016 of TNR programs. To our knowledge, at that time there was little to no comprehensive Australian research on which to conclude the efficacy or otherwise of TNR in Australian contexts.

The Cat Protection Society of NSW is financially supporting ground-breaking research into the management of community cats in Australian towns and cities. This research is led by Emeritus Professor Jacque Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist of the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, working in collaboration with five Australian universities, four local governments and 10 animal welfare and rescue groups, as well as veterinary care and medicine partners, and two international partners. It encompasses feline health and welfare, as well social and environmental sciences, and it seeks to find an evidence-based humane and effective way to manage urban stray cat populations.

This research presents an opportunity to build an evidence-base from which to evaluate non-lethal cat management programs. In our opinion, this research should be financially and practically supported by governments.

In our opinion, lethal approaches have not only failed, but incurred a significant cost, both financial and psychological, to people, as well as obvious untold suffering to cats. The horror of the ‘cull’ of cats at the Stockton breakwall in December 2020 (contracted by the Port of Newcastle) proved the cruelty and ineffectiveness of a lethal approach. It also very clearly demonstrated that lethal action is not supported by the community.

To quote from the Foundation’s website <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-faq/>

*This research project on the Community Cat Program shares a common goal with conservationists – fewer cats on the landscape. Where we disagree is on how to get there. Many wildlife advocates seek the complete removal of all outdoor cats from our communities. We believe this is highly impractical and unlikely ever to be*

*attempted, let alone succeed. Eradication of cats on a large scale has only been achieved at great expense on remote, uninhabited islands using a variety of techniques that are not safe or acceptable in urban settings. This has included the introduction of feline disease, wide-spread poisoning and hunting. Based on published calculations for removal of cats from islands, it would cost more than 2-3% of our GDP every year for 10 years to substantially reduce the numbers of feral and urban stray cats across Australia.*

*By contrast, research has found that in cities and towns, desexing stray cats and leaving them in their home territories is less costly than trying to kill them and much more effective at lowering cat numbers. It is also more aligned with public opinion.*

Cat Protection's vision is that every cat has a loving and responsible home. The sad reality is that they do not but as we strive to achieve our vision, we seek to follow a path that is humane, realistic, and evidence-based, and that path could include managed community cat programs.

**Do you have any further comments on the RSPCA's proposal to reduce holding periods for 'stray' cats?**

As noted during the hearing, identifying whether a stray cat is 'owned' can be difficult. Even if a cat is microchipped and registered, sometimes microchips are dislodged and sometimes cannot be read. Many years ago, Cat Protection took in an elderly cat from a pound facility to discover she was chipped, however the pound's microchip scanner was not sensitive enough to read the chip. Sometimes people haven't yet had their cat registered, or updated registration details, or they have submitted paperwork to their council but it has not been processed (or has been processed incorrectly). Some people consider a cat to be their pet cat but haven't had them microchipped and registered. Still, it is a legal requirement for people to have their cat registered and being able to be reunited with a lost pet is strong incentive to do so. Improvements to the NSW Pet Registry should improve compliance and reliability of data.

Cat Protection supports the RSPCA's view that shorter length of stay is better for individual animals as well as shelter health.

In our view, unless they had been deliberately stolen from a person who owned a nursing mother cat, infant kittens found as strays could not realistically be regarded as 'owned'. Orphaned neonates without a surrogate mother cat are very unlikely to survive and are very likely to be suffering. Section 155 of the Bill would apply if a veterinarian was of the opinion that it was cruel to keep the animal alive; such an animal would not have to be held for any statutory period.

The concept of 14 days' notice seems outmoded when most (but not all) people have email addresses and smartphones. Is the issue not so much the number of days but the exhaustion of potential avenues by which to contact (or identify) the owner? The reclaim table in the RSPCA submission certainly suggests that.

Other than owner-surrendered cats, most cats coming into pounds and shelters are unidentified (which doesn't necessarily mean unowned). It's important that hasty decisions are not made about their future simply on the basis that they appear to be unidentified. If an owner cannot reclaim their animal within a prescribed timeframe (but they still wish to claim their animal) then efforts should be made to that end; (usually) the best outcome for the pet and their person is to be reunited.

Reduced holding periods are likely to assist with shelter health, and therefore also rehoming. However, if legislated holding periods are reduced then the legislation or regulations need to provide relevant guidance on appropriate efforts that must be made to locate an animal's original owner. The animal holding facility should be permitted, from the initial admission of an animal, to take necessary steps to protect shelter health, for example, vaccination and parasite treatment of an animal on entry.

We think the approach in Victoria, of eight days for both identified and unidentified cats, seems reasonable but we believe that before any change is made, the NSW Pet Registry needs to be improved, there needs to be consultation with pet owners, and there needs to be continued public education on responsible pet ownership.