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1a) **Are you aware of any scientific research or evidence showing that mandatory cat containment laws would reduce the spread of potential cat-related diseases? If there is any disease risk, are there humane ways to address this? If so, please provide details.**

As stated in our submission to the Inquiry one of the main reasons that mandatory cat containment laws will not be successful is due to the number of semi owned and unowned cats on the community.

It is FOUR PAWS position that the best way to manage cat health and potential cat related diseases is through a comprehensive and humane approach that includes:

Trap Neuter Vaccinate and Return (TNVR) TNVR programs have been shown to reduce the overall number of cats and improve overall cat health¹.

Community education: Educating the public about responsible pet ownership, including keeping cats indoors and ensuring they are vaccinated, can significantly reduce disease risks.

2. **The Biodiversity Council gave evidence that ‘we are in the position where we do need to euthanise cats around the street’. What is your response to this – do you agree we ‘need to euthanise cats’ taken off the street? What do you see as the possible negative outcomes if this was to take place, and what more humane solutions are available to avoid these negative outcomes?**

In addressing the inquiry, it is crucial to ensure that the burden of evidence is equally distributed among all participants. Those advocating for the killing of healthy cats should be required to provide independent and scientifically sound data to support their claims, such as evidence demonstrating that killing cats effectively reduces their population. This standard should be applied consistently, rather than placing the entire burden on animal welfare organisations to justify why these animals should not be killed based on isolated statements from select participants.

Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF): The APWF has found that traditional methods of euthanising stray cats do not lead to a meaningful reduction in their population. Instead, their research indicates that community cat programs, which involve desexing, microchipping, and returning cats to their original locations, are more effective. These programs have shown a 30-50% reduction in cat impoundments over targeted areas ²

¹ Rethinking Urban Cat Management,—Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Traditional Cat Management. 2025 by Jennifer Cotterell, Jacquie Rand, Rebekah Scotney

² Rethinking Urban Cat Management - Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Traditional Cat Management 2025 Cotterell J. Rand J. Scotney R Animals Journal



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FOUR PAWS work over decades using the Trap Neuter return method has been shown to reduce cat numbers and improve overall health ³

It is important to note FOUR PAWS do not accept so called 'euthanasia' as a way to dispose of unwanted pets or to reduce the number of animals in a shelter or reduce size of stray animal populations. Euthanasia should only be performed by qualified veterinarians on medical grounds i.e. as a necessary procedure to end the suffering of an animal with a poor prognosis after having exhausted all other treatment. Referring to killing healthy animals that may have been trapped off the street or are in shelters does not meet the definition of euthanasia.

FOUR PAWS Policy on Euthanasia calls on Governments to implement no-kill legislation in terms of both pets and stray animals, with the exception that euthanasia can only be performed as a means of ending the suffering of an animal with a poor prognosis after having exhausted all other treatment possibilities.

The trapping and killing of large numbers of healthy, unowned, or semi-owned cats is an outdated, inhumane and ineffective practice that is unaligned with modern scientific approaches. Such strategies are inconsistent with contemporary community values, which increasingly reject the widespread killing of healthy animals. Additionally, these practices can have a detrimental impact on the mental health of veterinary professionals tasked with euthanising otherwise healthy animals.

Community Cat Management programs have demonstrated effectiveness in controlling cat populations. These programs, which often involve trap-neuter-vaccinate-return (TNVR) initiatives and community engagement, significantly reduce the numbers of unowned or semi-owned cats in specific areas while offering a humane and sustainable alternative to traditional methods.

FOUR PAWS brings extensive expertise in implementing humane and sustainable solutions to stray animal population management, even in the most challenging environments, including war-torn countries and disaster zones. Our professional, evidence-based approach ensures that both animal welfare and community well-being are prioritised, and that government benefits through reduced costs and numbers of stray animals.

In FOUR PAWS experience the community does not accept widespread killing of healthy animals as a way to 'manage' populations, additionally FOUR PAWS experience delivering stray animal care programs across Europe and Southeast Asia is that mass killing of healthy animals is not sustainable.

It should be noted that there is currently no direct evidence that domesticated cats (owned and unowned) in urbanised areas have directly caused the decline of threatened species in Australia.

³ <https://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/help-for-stray-animals/catch-neuter-vaccinate-return>



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Threats such as land clearing, development and other human activity have a greater impact and threat to endangered native wildlife than domestic cats⁴⁵

Australia remains one of the global hotspots for deforestation, with a recent report from Greenpeace and the RSPCA Queensland highlighting the staggering impact: an estimated 100 million animals are affected annually within cleared areas in Queensland and New South Wales alone, with a local wildlife vet commenting 'a significant proportion of the 24,000 wildlife patients admitted each and every year to our wildlife hospital are as a result of the long-term and ongoing effects of habitat destruction and fragmentation.'⁶

- a) What impact would this have on pound and shelter staff, or other frontline workers, if they were required to kill large numbers of healthy cats from the street? Please provide any examples and details if appropriate.**

Requiring pound and shelter staff, vets, vet nurses or other frontline workers, to kill large numbers of healthy cats can have profound psychological and emotional impacts. This practice can lead to significant mental health challenges for those involved.

Australian Pet Welfare have highlighted the severe emotional and psychological distress experienced by pound and shelter staff due to the high rates of 'euthanasia' This distress can lead to trauma, depression and substance abuse⁷. This approach has been shown to be ineffective thus compounding the distress experienced by shelter workers.

- (b) To your knowledge, is there any evidence that such a strategy of trapping and killing free-roaming cats would be effective in reducing the number of free-roaming cats?**

No, in our experience trapping and killing free-roaming cats is not an effective strategy to reduce or manage cat populations. The research we are aware of states the contrary.

We are not aware of any research that shows this approach is effective. According to RSPCA Australia, effective cat management requires a comprehensive approach that includes desexing, microchipping, and community education. The RSPCA emphasise that ad hoc killing does not lead to a meaningful reduction in cat populations and advocate for more humane and sustainable methods⁸.

- 3. Ms Jaana Dielenberg from the Biodiversity Council gave the following evidence with respect to trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs:**

⁴ Grayson et al 2007 ;Lilith et al 2010; Cogger et al 2017 As cited in Australian Pet Welfare Foundation. Key Issues in 24/7 Cat containment

⁵ <https://www.felineresearch.org/post/issue-brief-wildlife-impacts-of-outdoor-cats>

⁶ 'The Ongoing animal Welfare Crisis from Deforestation in Australia' Greenpeace and RSPCA Deforestation report 2024

⁷ <https://theconversation.com/profiles/jacque-rand-1301382>

⁸ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/how-can-we-best-manage-domestic-cats-in-australia/>



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I have been told by some advocates of that method that it is proven, but there is no evidence that it reduces cat numbers in the landscape over time. In fact, there's evidence that it doesn't.

What is your response to this – do you agree there is no evidence TNR programs work? If not, please explain why.

With respect to The Biodiversity Council, given their own stated goals of promoting evidence-based solutions, the above quoted statement is not based in evidence but is rather a second-hand account of an opinion.

Conversely, there is ample documented and peer reviewed research that provide evidence of the effectiveness of TNR programs. As such, FOUR PAWS strongly dispute the above statement.

FOUR PAWS has been conducting sterilisation and vaccination projects for companion animals since 1999, and sterilising and vaccinating over 230,000 dogs and cats worldwide. Since 2017 we have conducted targeted companion animal projects in South Africa, to enable veterinary care in resource-poor communities and provide sterilisation programmes to humanely control growing populations of dogs and cats.

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Community Cat Management programs have demonstrated effectiveness in controlling cat populations. These programs, which often involve trap-neuter-return (TNVR) initiatives and community engagement, significantly reduce the numbers of unowned or semi-owned cats in specific areas while offering a humane and sustainable alternative to traditional methods.

Can you please clarify if Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs are usually done with semi-owned and cats living in urban environments, or with wild cats living in non-urban areas such as national parks or remote bushland?

The majority of work and research has focused on delivering TNR programs in urban environments. However, FOUR PAWS runs an innovative spay, neuter, and vaccination (TNVR) program for stray dogs and cats in Kalimantan, Borneo, a region with critical biodiversity. The program's success highlights a non-lethal and humane model for managing stray animal populations while mitigating their impact on endangered wildlife and the local ecosystem.

Borneo's diverse ecosystem is home to endangered species such as sun bears, orangutans, and rare birds like the Bornean ground cuckoo. With thousands of stray animals, particularly cats, roaming freely, there is a heightened risk of competition, disease transmission, and predation affecting these sensitive species. FOUR PAWS identified a need for intervention to stabilise stray populations and address the threats these animals may pose to the region's wildlife, while also promoting animal welfare.



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FOUR PAWS collaborated with local animal welfare organisations, Pro Natura Foundation and Jejak Pulang, to establish a mobile clinic system providing medical care, sterilisation, and vaccinations for stray animals. By delivering this preventative care, the program improves animal health and reduces population growth, which subsequently lessens stray animals' environmental impact.

The sterilisation component prevents further population growth, reducing resource competition with wildlife. Additionally, sterilised animals exhibit fewer roaming and territorial behaviours, reducing incidents of predation on local fauna. Vaccination further minimises disease risks to both stray animals and the wildlife they may come into contact with.

The program demonstrates the benefits of humane population control through sterilisation and vaccination. **By improving the health and reducing the numbers of stray animals, it effectively lowers their impact on local wildlife without resorting to lethal control, which has been tried and failed in the past. Local communities are more accepting of the program as it aligns with compassionate, sustainable solutions that also improve community safety and wellbeing.**

The Borneo model highlights the potential for desexing programs as viable alternatives to lethal cat control in NSW. By adopting similar strategies, NSW could better protect its native species and ecosystems, reduce any threat posed by unowned or semi owned cats, and foster community support for humane, non-lethal methods of cat management.

In FOUR PAWS experience the community does not accept widespread killing of healthy animals as a way to 'manage' populations, additionally FOUR PAWS experience delivering stray animal care programs across Europe and Southeast Asia is that mass killing of healthy animals is not sustainable.

(a) Can you outline some of the successful TNR projects and research that have been done involving cats in urban or semi-urban areas?

FOUR PAWS brings extensive expertise in implementing humane and sustainable solutions to stray animal population management, even in the most challenging environments, including war-torn countries and disaster zones. Our professional, evidence-based approach ensures that both animal welfare and community well-being are prioritised, and that government benefits through reduced costs and numbers of stray animals.

Evidence based methodology

FOUR PAWS employs the internationally recognised *Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR)* approach for managing stray cat populations. TNVR is widely acknowledged by experts as the most humane and effective strategy for reducing stray cat numbers over time. By sterilising and vaccinating cats, further reproduction and the spread of diseases is prevented, allowing populations to stabilise and decline in a sustainable manner.

Community empowerment model

FOUR PAWS has 25 years of direct program experience that demonstrates large-scale desexing programs must be coupled with strong community engagement to achieve lasting change. FOUR



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PAWS collaborates with local authorities, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations, and community members to address the root causes of stray animal populations. Through education on responsible pet ownership and the dangers of abandonment, we foster a culture of prevention and care.

Data driven and Outcome focussed

Our projects incorporate robust monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of desexing initiatives. By understanding population dynamics and community interactions with stray cats, we tailor interventions to local needs and maximise results.

Humane and Sustainable

FOUR PAWS understands that each cat has its own intrinsic value, whether it is a companion animal, or a semi-owned cat cared for by local carers. Large-scale desexing programs not only improve the welfare of stray cats but also reduce the burden on overstretched shelters and pounds, alleviating pressure on local resources.

Large-scale cat desexing programs, when professionally implemented with community engagement, represent a humane, effective, and sustainable approach to managing cat populations while promoting animal welfare and reducing strain on local services.

In an Australian context The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation has implemented targeted desexing programs that have successfully reduced cat impoundment and euthanasia rates. For example, in the City of Banyule, Victoria, targeted desexing led to a 68% drop in cat impoundment and a 76% reduction in euthanasia⁹

FOUR PAWS Bulgaria: Strategic Cat Population Management

In response to the absence of a formal Cat Population Management (CPM) program in Bulgaria, FOUR PAWS initiated a targeted stray cat project in partnership with the Sofia Municipality in 2021. This was a geographically targeted initiative commencing in the Yavorov district which aims to reduce the stray cat population through a comprehensive, strategic approach. To deliver strategic, impactful, sustainable and humane stray animal projects, we focus on only a few municipalities simultaneously, for a longer period of time.

The program integrates several key components, including:

- **Population Surveys:** Conducting detailed street cat and household surveys to assess the scale of the issue and inform targeted interventions.
- **TNVR (Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return):** Implementing humane population control measures to stabilise and gradually reduce the stray cat population.

⁹ Chua D., Rand J. and Morton J. 2023 'Stray and Owner Relinquished Cats in Australia – Estimate of numbers entering municipal pounds, shelters and rescue groups and their outcomes (<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/11/1771>)



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- **Community Engagement:** Utilising tools to foster local collaboration and support for the program.

Stray Cat Voucher Program

Since 2011, FOUR PAWS has operated a *Stray Cat Voucher Program* in Sofia, in partnership with private veterinary clinics. Annually, 2,000 vouchers are distributed to the public, enabling individuals to bring stray cats to participating clinics for neutering. This approach leverages the capacity of local clinics, saving resources and extending the program's reach. The voucher system empowers the public to actively participate in stray cat management while ensuring rapid and efficient responses to community needs.

Goals for Sustainable Cat Population Management (CPM)

1. District-Level Cat Population Management:

- Expand the CPM program to a new district in Sofia (to be determined) and achieve at least an 80% sterilisation and vaccination rate among stray cats.

Continuation of the Voucher Program:

- Sustain the Stray Cat Voucher Program within the CPM framework, providing 1,500 vouchers annually for stray cat neutering.

Improved Access to Veterinary Care:

- Conduct mobile clinic projects in resource-poor communities, offering vital veterinary services to stray cats, community animals, and pets. Many of these animals would otherwise never receive medical attention.

Impact

- FOUR PAWS' efforts in Bulgaria demonstrate an effective and scalable model for humane stray animal management. By combining TNVR, community engagement and education engagement, and access to veterinary care, the program not only addresses stray cat populations but also fosters a community-driven solution to animal welfare challenges.

Additionally, studies have demonstrated that TNR programs in urban areas can stabilise and reduce cat populations effectively. In Sydney, Australia, a TNR program implemented over nine years resulted in a significant reduction in the free-roaming cat population, improved health status of the remaining cats, and reduced complaints from the community¹⁰

¹⁰ https://www.saveacat.org/uploads/4/8/4/1/48413975/ch_5.pdf



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(b) There was some evidence at the inquiry that implied that TNR programs would not work in national parks or remote bushland and that that was a reason not to support TNR in more urban areas. Can the evidence of TNR programs in non-urban remote environments be compared to TNR in urban environments? If not, why not? Please explain the difference and how TNR programs are being run in urban areas in a successful way.

Different approaches are required for different geographic areas and communities.

In non-urban remote environments, such as national parks or bushland, the challenges include limited access to veterinary services, difficulty in monitoring and maintaining cat colonies, and the potential impact on native wildlife. These factors can hinder the effectiveness of TNR programs in such setting. However, with investment in resources and engagement with community programs in regional and non-urban areas have shown to be successful as demonstrated by our Borneo project described above.

(a) Do you agree with Dr Filmer that the welfare of cats released as part of a TNR or community cat desexing program are 'suboptimal'? If not, why not?

The work of FOUR PAWS over three decades has demonstrated that implementing TNR has been successful in both reducing the number of cats over time and improving cat welfare. This is particularly true when cats are part of a community cat program.

(b) What kind of care is typically provided to a free-roaming cat that has been trapped for vaccination and desexing by a rescue or community cat carer?

Four Paws, the care provided to a free-roaming cat that has been trapped for vaccination and desexing typically includes several key steps:

Initial Health Check: Upon trapping, the cat undergoes a thorough health examination to check for any immediate health concerns, such as fleas, ticks, mites, or other parasites

Vaccination: The cat receives necessary vaccinations, including those for rabies and feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and panleukopenia (FVRCP). These vaccinations help protect the cat from common and potentially fatal diseases

Desexing (Spaying/Neutering): The cat is desexed to prevent reproduction. This procedure is typically a day procedure, where the cat is dropped off in the morning and picked up later in the day after recovering from anaesthesia

Post-Operative Care: After desexing, the cat is monitored for a short period to ensure it recovers well from the surgery. Pain relief is administered before and after the procedure to minimize discomfort

Microchipping: The cat may also be microchipped for identification purposes, which helps in tracking and managing the cat population more effectively.



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Return and Monitoring: Once the cat has recovered, it is returned to its original location. Community cat carers or volunteers continue to monitor and provide food and shelter for the cat, ensuring its well-being.¹¹¹²

(c) Do you agree with Dr Filmer that it would be impossible to re-trap a cat that is part of a TNR program or cat colony, in the event they required further vaccinations or veterinary care?

FOUR PAWS do not agree with Dr Filmer that it is impossible to re-trap a cat that is part of a TNR or colony program. FOUR PAWS has experience in re trapping cats, there are multiple options when trapping cats including using drop traps, or nets. Over time, cats involved in community cat program build relationships with community members who feed and monitor them and with vet and shelter staff that conduct welfare checks.

(d) Do you have any other concerns or comments about the evidence given by Dr Filmer?

FOUR PAWS is concerned that Dr Filmer does not understand what is involved in TNR and community cat management programs. Cats that have been desexed and returned are often semi owned cats and/or part of a community program where the cats are fed, monitored and provided veterinary care when required. FOUR PAWS comprehensive approach to cat management is detailed above and involves ongoing care and monitoring. As described above cat health and welfare improves significantly when they are desexed and monitored.

(6) An inquiry witness expressed the view that, on balance, she believes it is better for the animal's welfare to kill a cat, rather than desexing and releasing that cat back into the community. Do you believe that killing a cat is better for their welfare than desexing the animal and providing ongoing care in the community? If not, why not- please provide details.

From the perspective of FOUR PAWS, killing a cat is not better for their welfare compared to desexing and providing ongoing care in the community.

Health Benefits: Desexing has significant health benefits for cats, including reducing the risk of certain cancers and infections. It also helps in controlling behaviours associated with mating, such as aggression and roaming

Population Control: Desexing is a humane and effective method for controlling cat populations. It prevents the birth of unwanted kittens, thereby reducing the number of cats that may end up in shelters or living in poor conditions.

Ethical Considerations: Killing healthy cats is considered inhumane and unethical by many animal welfare organisations, including FOUR PAWS. Providing ongoing care through community cat programs ensures that cats can live healthy lives while also addressing population concerns.

¹¹ <https://fourpaws.org/cat-vaccination-and-medical-schedule/>

¹² <https://www.4pawsvets.com.au/Desexing.aspx>



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Community Support: Community cat programs, which include desexing and returning cats to their original locations, often receive strong support from local communities. These programs help improve the relationship between humans and free-roaming cats and also promote responsible pet ownership.

FOUR PAWS advocates for desexing and providing ongoing care as it aligns with both ethical standards and effective, evidence-based population management strategies.

(7) Can it be difficult to tell the difference between a scared domestic cat (who may have escaped from their home, gotten lost or been abandoned), and an ‘unowned’ or ‘Will they sometimes exhibit the same behaviour

When cats are trapped, whether they are scared domestic cats or wild cats, they can exhibit similar behaviours due to stress and fear. Cats often hiss and growl as a warning signal when they feel threatened. This behaviour is common in both scared domestic owned cats and semi owned, unowned or wild cats ¹³

Trapped cats, whether pets or wild, often try to hide or avoid human contact. This behaviour is driven by their instinct to protect themselves from perceived threats. A pet cat that has escaped and is frightened may act just like a wild cat in this situation¹⁴.

Owned pet cats, semi owned or wild cats can all display aggression when trapped. This includes unprovoked aggression due to the stress of being confined. The heightened state of fear can lead to exaggerated responses, making it hard to tell if the cat is a pet or wild¹⁵. Not all pet cats wear collars or have visible identification. A lost or abandoned pet cat may look dishevelled and behave similarly to a wild cat, making it difficult to identify without proper training.

These factors highlight the challenges in distinguishing between a pet cat and a wild cat based solely on their behaviour when trapped, particularly for those who are not trained in animal behaviour.

¹³ <https://www.felineresearch.org/post/issue-brief-feral-cat-health>

¹⁴ https://www.mdpi.com/journal/animals/special_issues/cats_behaviors

¹⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/j.jfms.2011.03.012>