

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Submission to the Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales, November 2024

The opportunity for the public and relevant organisations to provide input into this initial stage of the Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry is a positive step. I am a member of the public, member of a rescue and foster cat network, and previous employee of the NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage where I gained insight into manmade threats to NSW wildlife which included introduced species.

Recommendations for the Committee

1. Clearly define the categories of cat as (1) domestic including (i) owned (ii) semi-owned and (iii) unowned and (2) wild (feral).
2. Support council or state funding to manage TNR programs for wild cats and a no kill compassionate approach. Ban the poison product 1080 as it is cruel way of killing an animal and also kills native wildlife.
3. Support council funding for cat rescue and foster network co-ordination, including vaccinations, neutering, microchipping, public communications work, and a number of free cat runs made available to people who register their cat with council each year.
4. Engage with RSPCA, rescue and foster networks and organisations such as Love Rescue Collaborate. This inquiry is about management and these organisations have extensive experience in cat population management.
5. Change the existing narrative that allows cats to be demonised in Australia. In most of the rest of the world, no matter how long they have been part of the community, cats receive much more respect. Both cats and dogs did not ask to be introduced to Australia. They are not here to be punished. They should be managed compassionately as our responsibility for introducing them.
6. Do not support the introduction of legislation which requires cats to be fully contained. It is not a cost-effective proposal. This will not be manageable by councils, will cause cruelty to cats who accidentally escape and not enforceable. It begs the question, do what when a cat is found? take it away from the owner, put it down? It will also only serve to make attitudes towards cats more divisive and that will do no good.
7. Ban the sale of cats and dogs from pet shops and promote 'forever home' adoption through shelter/foster networks or breeders.
8. Provide positive stories about cat ownership for example people who have created enriching environments with own-built outdoor cat runs for instance.
9. Acknowledge estimates of kills caused by cats, are just that. Estimates. No organisation can credibly verify the very wide ranging numbers produced by some organisations.

Firstly, the issue of cat definitions needs to be addressed

A definition between feral/wild and domestic cats as this has profound consequences for the treatment and fate of individual cats. They are not like dogs which fall much more easily into wild or domestic and to develop appropriate policies, the following should be recognised from the outset by the Committee. The categories below are defined by RSPCA Australia and widely supported by other organisations: **The Committee should define all cats with some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans as domestic cats. Cats who are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans and reproduce in the wild should be defined as wild or feral cats.** Domestic cats (including owned/semi-owned and unowned cats) should be excluded from the legal definition of feral cats. This will achieve greater consistency in implementing management programs, legislation, research and evaluation activities as well as engendering community support. Cat management strategies should recognise three subcategories of domestic cats using the following definitions:

Owned – these cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person, and are directly depending on humans. They are usually sociable although sociability varies.

Semi-owned – these cats are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider they own them. They are of varying sociability with many socialised to humans and may be associated with one or more households.

Unowned – these cats are indirectly depending on humans with some having casual and temporary interactions with humans. They are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and may live in groups.

Reference: Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia, RSPCA (2018)

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management-in-Australia-RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018.pdf>

Further to this, in September 2024 RSPCA Australia responded to the Federal Government's Threat Abatement Plan, which shows just how problematic the wrong over simplified definitions can be *"Cat management is complex, and of course there's a need to control feral cats to protect wildlife,"* said RSPCA Australia Chief Science Officer Dr Suzie Fowler *"Under the most recent draft we've seen of the Government's feral cat Threat Abatement Plan, there are now only two types of cat — 'feral' and 'pet'. This means that unowned and semi-owned cats, cats who live alongside humans and have some form of contact with and reliance on people, will now be classed as 'feral'."*

"This includes cats who are provided with care by someone, often multiple people, people who often have strong relationships with the cats they care for. The cat who stops by your neighbours' houses for a pat and to get fed is not the same as a cat who lives completely wild, but this plan treats them the same. This means that thousands of domestic cats will be classed as feral, meaning at best it will add a greater burden to organisations that are seen as responsible for managing stray cats, and at worst, more cats will be killed, not to mention putting up an additional barrier to these cats being adopted or rehomed."

Dr Fowler said that the language used by the Government was also concerning. *"Vilifying cats and declaring 'war' on them shifts the focus away from what should be the key objective, to protect and conserve vulnerable native species, to instead promoting the killing of as many cats as possible. Oversimplifying the issue, and simply locking up or killing cats is not going to solve the problem. A considered and collaborative approach including community engagement, desexing, microchipping and encouraging keeping cats safe at home will be more successful in the long run."*

I am able to respond to the following Terms of Reference categories

(a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

It is important for the committee to recognise the distinction between three categories of domestic cat and the feral/wild cat as defined by RSPCA. Please make this clear in the Committee's work.

The widely used and often quoted generalised extreme numbers of wildlife impacts should be considered misinformation as based on inappropriate studies with flawed numbers and wildlife populations effects implied rather than investigated. <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Rand-Myth-cats-Wildlife-2023.pdf>

"...there is no scientific evidence that domestic cats... have any viability or conservation impacts at a population level on native wildlife. Australian population studies have not found a measurable effect"

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2023/07/10/position-statement-on-domestic-cats-and-australian-native-wildlife-populations/>

Estimates of kills caused by cats, are just that. Estimates. No organisation can credibly verify the very wide ranging numbers produced by some organisations.

I suggest banning the sale of cats and dogs from pet shops. The sale of them from shops was banned in the UK many years ago, because every January shelters became inundated and overcrowded with animals which were bad choices as Christmas presents and unwanted. Promote 'forever home' adoption through shelter/foster networks or breeders.

The Committee should engage with RSPCA, rescue and foster networks and organisations such as Love Rescue Collaborate. This inquiry is about management and both those organisations have extensive experience in cat population management.

The existing narrative that allows cats to be demonised in Australia must be changed. In most of the rest of the world, no matter how long they have been part of the community, cats receive much more respect. Both cats and dogs did not ask to be introduced to Australia. They are not here to be punished. They should be managed compassionately as our responsibility for introducing them.

Within that narrative change, there needs to be more positive stories about cat ownership socialised, for example people who have created enriching environments with own-built outdoor cat runs for instance.

(b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

The Committee should not support the introduction of legislation which requires cats to be fully contained. It is not a cost-effective solution. Where containment policies have been introduced, the impact on wildlife has not shown benefit. A fully contained policy will not be manageable by councils, will cause cruelty to cats who accidentally escape and not enforceable. It also begs the question, do what when a cat is found? take it away from the owner, put it down? It will also only serve to make attitudes towards cats more divisive and that will do no good.

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation has findings from a number of councils which show cat containment does not achieve the aims and does not provide value for money.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/08/31/australian-pet-welfare-foundation-position-statement-on-cat-containment/>

Studies on information from Hobson Bay, Hume, Casey and Yarra Ranges councils has been assessed. It recognised that mandated containment contributes to risks for increased cruelty to cats for stray and pet cats.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

Long term studies are needed before such proposals could be credibly considered. "Due to the ambiguity surrounding the risks and effectiveness of 24/7 containment, the RSPCA advocates that further research is undertaken to provide evidence of the positive and negative outcomes of cat containment before 24/7 containment can be adequately assessed."

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-15/mayor-says-halls-gap-cat-ban-success-native-wildlife/102337372>

(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

"...there is growing evidence of environmental contamination from home furnishings and dust affecting cat health... Keeping cats indoors can cause frustration and unwanted behavioral challenges leading to stress and compromised health, especially in multi-cat homes" <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7829302/>

"There are some circumstances under which a cat's physical and mental needs will not be successfully met in containment due to a range of factors including the presence of other animals, space available, human factors, and ability to modify the property. There are also some cats who are unable to cope with containment... Mandatory 24/7 containment may increase the potential for negative impacts on animal welfare and the community, compared to voluntary implementation of 24/7 containment on an individual basis, by imposing it on people and cats who are not suited or capable of implementing it appropriately"

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

(e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

Support is required for council funding for cat rescue and foster network co-ordination, including vaccinations, neutering, microchipping, communications work and a number of free cat runs made available to people who register their cat with council each year.

Blue Mountains City Council brilliantly offered a number of large outdoor cat runs last year on the basis of people documenting their cat ownership with them. This is a very appropriate initiative.

Local councils require support and financial resources to implement effective cat management programs.

RSPCA Australia recommends: State governments should encourage and support local councils to develop and implement cat management plans that include:

- defining and quantifying cat management aspects with a focus on impact
- setting clear, achievable and consistent objectives
- using humane, ethical and sustainable strategies

- identifying the responsibilities of key stakeholders
- consideration of owned, unowned and semi-owned cats
- securing sufficient resources for implementation
- facilitating the collection and storage of standardised data
- formally evaluating management strategies using agreed measures.

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management-in-Australia-RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018.pdf>

(i) options for reducing the feral cat population

Research by RSPCA Australia in 2018 found a high level of public concern that treating feral cats as simply a pest has a detrimental impact on the treatment of both feral and domestic cats, including inciting deliberate cruelty and unlawful killing.

Ensuring the definition of a feral cat excludes domestic cats, recognising all cats as sentient animals, and avoiding demonising feral cats in information materials will contribute to mitigating this.

Support council or state funding to manage TNR programs for wild cats and a no kill compassionate approach.

Ban the use of 1080 poison. 1080 is not a humane approach to killing any animal (RSPCA, Animal Liberation, APWF, Animal Justice Party) and was banned in other countries decades ago, the impacts of 1080 include convulsions likened by a vet to be electrocuted for up to 2 days, and it kills many non-targeted native animals.

<https://www.al.org.au/ban-1080>

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-using-1080-for-pest-animal-control/>

(j) other matters

Finally, wild cats have been traced to domestic cats which were brought to Australia. Supporting rescue, foster and adoption networks take cats which are suitable to be homed, off the streets and therefore reduce the risk of potentially causing feral/wild cat populations to grow if they become more distant and less reliant on human contact. There are so many benefits to foster and adoption programs.

I have begun fostering with the Hazelbrook Cat Shelter (HCS) organisation, a network of fosterers for rescued cats. These people are willing to invest time and care to help these animals become socialised and prepare for their 'forever home'. The role of being a fosterer is wonderful. The cat, almost one year old, I currently have had under my care has been with me for 4 months and will shortly be ready for adoption. His mother and siblings were captured in response to a phone call from a truck stop night security guard who was feeding the family of cats and the business was relocating so he called the Shelter. During the past 4 months I have seen this timid creature which was uninterested in anything, become less scared, warm, begin meowing to humans because he wants to be stroked, food or a chat, begin purring and rubbing round our legs at home. He is inquisitive, cheeky and loving. Cats like dogs, should have access to the outdoors for the same reasons of enjoyment, adventure and exercise. I am currently converting our large chicken pen to become an outdoor cat space. My self-confessed "dog person" partner has also been converted to "cat person". I hope this foster cat will be one of many success stories of another cat taken in, now healthy and suitable for living in a home.