
From: Kristina Vesk
Sent: Sunday, 19 January 2025 2:55 PM
To: Animal Welfare
Subject: CM: RE: Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales – Post-hearing responses – 16 December 2024

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OF NSW



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Hello

I did finish these on Friday night, but I was too tired to proofread then ... please find attached answers to questions on notice, supplementary questions and a letter to clarify an answer that I gave at the hearing.

Thank you
Kristina

Kristina Vesk OAM | Chief Executive Officer

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NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Hearing: 16 December 2024

Questions on notice

Ms Kristina Vesk (Cat Protection Society of NSW)

Question from The Hon Emma Hurst:

- I know that as part of the grant that you received, you have desexed over 1,800 cats to date. Do you have any indication as to how many reduced kittens and litters that impact would have had? You can take that on notice, if you like. I'd be interested to know – 1,800 desexed cats is a lot – what kind of flow-on impact that has.

(At the hearing I said: "You could do lots of different sorts of estimations, but even if you imagined that half of them weren't going to be desexed – so that's 900 – they could've had three litters by now of, say, four cats each. I can't do the maths in my head right now but it's a lot. The impact is enormous, particularly because cats are very fertile.")

The flow-on impact of desexing cats is significant, both in constraining population growth and in positive health and welfare outcomes. The impact of preventing more kitten births is reduced feline suffering, less pressure on rescues, shelters, pounds, veterinary staff and concerned individuals, fewer kittens and cats being euthanised, and by curtailing population growth (and ultimately aiming to stop it altogether) it reduces negative impacts of cats on the social and natural environment.

To illustrate how quickly undesexed cat populations can grow, the timeline below shows that a population of 1,800 cats could swell to 16,200 within a matter of months. (A pregnancy can average 60-65 days; litters can be anywhere up to 6 or 8 kittens; and cats can become pregnant as young as 12-14 weeks. For ease of reference, this timeline assumes litters of 4 kittens; pregnancies of 60 days; and first pregnancies at about 17 weeks.)

Day 0: 1,800 cats. Assume half (900) are female and each is pregnant with a litter of four kittens; pregnancy approx. 60 days

Day 60: population is the original 900 male cats and 900 female cats, plus 3,600 kittens. Assume the half kittens are female (1,800)

Day 120: population is original 900 male cats + 1,800 male kittens = 2,700 males; original 900 female cats + 1,800 female kittens = 2,700 females; total 5,400

The kittens are now about 8 weeks old; the original 900 female cats can get pregnant again at this point, so 60 days later ...

Day 180: original 900 female cats produce another 3,600 kittens (assume half those kittens are female: 1,800)

Day 180: the 1,800 female kittens born on Day 60 are now about 4 months old and can get pregnant

Day 180: population is now 4,500 males; 4,500 females; total 9,000

Day 240: 1,800 female kittens born on Day 60 each has a litter of 4 kittens = 7,200 new kittens, assume half are female (3,600)

Day 240: the original 900 female cats can get pregnant again

Day 240: population is now 8,100 males; 8,100 females = 16,200

For unowned cats, this level of population increase is unlikely to happen because many cats and kittens will die from illness, disease, parasite burden, malnutrition, exposure and accidents, and many won't survive birth or early kittenhood. While these events suppress population growth, they cause enormous suffering. Some unowned cats will be removed from the population to be desexed and find homes. However theoretical these numbers are, they demonstrate the fertility of cats and the absolute importance of desexing to managing feline population growth and promoting feline health and welfare.

Likewise, these numbers reveal how critical early-age desexing is, even for owned cats. If desexing is delayed and 900 female cats have just one pregnancy, that still means homes will need to be found for 3,600 kittens.

Kristina Vesk OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Cat Protection Society of NSW

17 January 2025

NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Hearing: 16 December 2024

Questions on notice

Ms Kristina Vesk (Cat Protection Society of NSW)

Question from The Hon Peter Primrose:

- Is there anywhere in the world, including Australia, that you think is doing a great job in relation to managing cat populations – that you could say to us, “They’re doing well. You should have a close look at what they’re doing”? ... Even within Australia, are there any places that are doing it well?

(At the hearing I said: “I think, as the people before me said, the experiences aren’t necessarily transferrable: different environments, different populations ...I would say I’m not aware.”)

Every situation is unique which is why we recommend highly localised strategies, developed in a One Welfare framework, that consider the unique needs and challenges of people, pets and wildlife and the local ecology.

Managing cat populations in towns and cities is going to be different from wilderness areas, obviously, but even between different suburbs there might need to be different approaches. In terms of areas with high populations of people, engaging their assistance in ensuring cats are desexed, and desexed as early as possible, is a key strategy. This means removing barriers (real or perceived) to desexing cats; many submissions to the Committee (including Cat Protection’s) discuss this.

The work that is being led by Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand and her team at the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is building an evidence-based body of research which will inform what is likely to work well in certain situations in Australia.

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Chief Executive Officer
Cat Protection Society of NSW

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Ms Kristina Vesk (Cat Protection Society of NSW)

Question from The Hon Peter Primrose:

- Local Government NSW has raised a number of significant issues in its submission that it believes need to be clarified in the Companion Animals Act, including specifying the powers that a council has to seize a cat. There is a whole range of those. Could you take on notice those recommendations to amend the Companion Animals Act? I would be interested in your comments as to whether you'd support those or not.

It is our view that local councils already have capacity under the existing legislation to achieve better outcomes for people and pets. In fact, the submission of Local Government NSW at page 8 points to a number of successful initiatives by the City of Sydney.

We agree that any policies need agreed definitions and as we noted in our submission, Cat Protection supports the definitions of cats as given in the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation's submission (which have been adapted from the definitions in RSPCA Australia's report Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia).

In terms of 'powers to seize' this section has been interpreted disingenuously by some councils to refuse to take in stray cats from members of the public. I note that the Circular to Councils issued by the Office of Local Government in April 2021, which provides guidance on this issue, was tabled at the Committee Hearing by Mr Troy Wilke.

Animal welfare laws (including POCTAA) in NSW can certainly be improved and updated but we do not support a piecemeal approach.

Kristina Vesk OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Cat Protection Society of NSW

17 January 2025