

NSW Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Hearing: 16 December 2024
Supplementary questions

Ms Kristina Vesk (Cat Protection Society of NSW)

How can the "One Health/One Welfare" framework improve cat management outcomes?

Applying a One Health/One Welfare framework enables consideration of multiple concerns and listens to multiple voices; it helps to build trust, understanding, knowledge and cooperation.

While a One Welfare framework can be applied as an overarching principle, in practice, One Welfare also means working on issues (whatever they might be) at a highly local level. So-called "wicked" problems cannot be solved with a single simplified approach and what works in one town might not work in another, what is a high priority or risk in one area might not be relevant at all in another. Along with relevant subject experts, local people, lay people, are critical to identifying and understanding issues; knowing the obstacles to achieving preferred outcomes; and finding the potential solutions to problems.

Taking a single, ill-considered approach and applying it universally is inappropriate. As we and others have noted, requiring every cat everywhere to be contained 24/7 is a social justice issue, an animal welfare issue, and an expensive and cruel folly that is unlikely to achieve much for native wildlife if their habitat continues to be razed, logged and burned. It is also dangerous to take generic approach to diverse situations as it misses opportunities to build communities, to strengthen trust, to innovate and to work towards shared goals.

One Welfare, recognising that valid, legitimate interests can sometimes compete, offers a constructive pathway for locally guided policies and practices that are more likely to be embraced and respected, and therefore more likely to be successful.

As we noted in our submission, cats cannot be isolated as a separate entity because their lives are entwined with people, other animals and the environment around them. "Cat management" policies can have a profoundly negative impact, including serious trauma, on people, not just cat owners, cat carers, shelter workers, companion animal staff, veterinarians and their teams. Conversely, constructively and sincerely engaging such people in local initiatives can have a profoundly positive impact on people, cats and the environment.

Developing and applying One Health/One Welfare as the framework to guide policies at the local level will build a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of health, social and environmental issues and services, and foster trust and community. Whether it's literacy, loneliness, domestic violence, pets, animal welfare,

employment, the natural environment, biosecurity, mental health, accessibility – there are connection points between all the big issues that we face, and it would serve public policy well to acknowledge this.

Kristina Vesk OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Cat Protection Society of NSW

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With regard to early-age desexing on cat populations that you have trialed in areas – would you please provide the mapping data to the Inquiry?

Early-age desexing of cats should be standard practice because it is safe, confers benefits to the cats, the community and environment, and prevents pregnancies. The reference I made at the hearing, to Professor Julia Beatty's comment about the 'pregnancy gap' is from the article below, which refers to her study on the prevalence of early-age desexing of cats in Australia (also below).

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2021/01/19/why-you-should-desex-your-cat-before-puberty.html>

[Scientific Reports A shift towards early-age desexing of cats under veterinary care in Australia](#)

Whether for kittens admitted to our shelter or for kittens in any of our adoption or desexing programs, we always provide early-age desexing; there is no need to trial the practice. Decades of data prove that early-age desexing of felines is safe and beneficial.

With respect to mapping areas of high demand for cat desexing, Cat Protection is in the very early stages of research planning. We would be pleased to provide the Committee with information when it is available. We will be waiting for the completion of referrals under the DIVA Cats program to make the report, so we anticipate being able to send the Committee some results after July 2025. The report is likely to look at desexing more generally; whether the cats were desexed prior to 12 weeks won't always be known but age of desexing will still be an area of investigation.

Kristina Vesk OAM
Chief Executive Officer
Cat Protection Society of NSW

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