Submission No 76

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Name suppressed

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

The free-roaming cat population in NSW poses significant threats to biodiversity and public health. Scientific evidence points to the negative impacts associated with uncontrolled cats including the ecological impact of unowned (feral) cats on native wildlife, as well as health risks associated with zoonotic diseases like toxoplasmosis.

Proactive measures, such as mandatory cat containment and the human removal from the environment of unowned or feral cats are reasonable and necessaary solutions to mitigate these threats. Despite the need for urgent action, government responses, particularly in New South Wales (NSW), have been inadequate for decades. Supported by organizations such as the RSPCA, Cat Protection Society, and Animal Welfare League, and urgent government action is necessary given the long-standing neglect of these issues.

Australia boasts a unique biodiversity, but it is increasingly threatened by invasive species, particularly uncontrolled owned and unowned cats (*Felis catus*). Data from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and various ecological studies indicate that an estimated 3.3 million feral and unowned cats roam the Australian landscape (Doherty et al., 2017). This also includes the impacts of these cats on human and other animals health.

Free-roaming owned and unowned (feral) cats are significant predators of wildlife in Australia, contributing to the decline of several native species. According to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee, approximately 100 native species have been affected by cat predation, leading to recent extinctions (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).

Feral and roaming cats have been implicated in the decline of numerous native species. Research indicates that cats are responsible for the extinction of at least 20 mammal species in Australia since European settlement (Woinarski et al., 2019). Key vulnerable species include ground-nesting birds and small mammals, which are particularly susceptible to predation (Loss et al., 2013).

Research indicates that cats are a primary threat to wildlife in both metropolitan and regional settings of NSW. A study by Legge et al. (2017) found that cats are responsible for the decline of numerous species, particularly ground-nesting birds and small mammals. In urban areas, habitat fragmentation exacerbates this issue, as cats often have access to diverse ecosystems that support vulnerable species.

The loss of biodiversity affects entire ecosystems, destabilizing food webs and diminishing ecosystem services. The Australian government has recognized cats as a major threat to biodiversity, yet efforts to manage their populations remain insufficient (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).

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

To effectively reduce the population of free-roaming cats and the negative impact they cause, mandatory NSW state wide cat containment legislation must be adopted. Such measures have proven successful in various regions, leading to increased public awareness and coexistence strategies (Lepczyk et al., 2003).

Proposed legislative Elements:

- All domestic (owned) cats must be retained indoors or in secured outdoor spaces.
- Local councils provided the ability to issue fines to anyone who does not control their cat, the same as applies to dog owners.

• Financial support from the NSW Government for councils to humanely manage unowned (feral) cat populations.

The RSPCA, Cat Protection Society, and Animal Welfare League have all advocated for the containment of cats to protect wildlife and public health. Their recommendations include:

1. Implementing mandatory cat containment laws in urban and peri-urban areas.
2. Supporting responsible pet ownership through education and outreach programs.
3. Establishing humane unowned(feral) cat management strategies, including the euthanasia of unowned or feral cats in residential areas.

(c) **welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions**

There is growing evidence that confined cats, particularly those kept indoors or in enclosures, enjoy better welfare outcomes. Some of the benefits of cat containment include:

- **Health:** Indoor cats are less likely to be exposed to diseases (e.g., feline immunodeficiency virus, feline leukemia) and parasites (e.g., ticks, fleas, worms) that can be contracted from outdoor exposure.
- **Longevity:** Studies have shown that indoor cats live significantly longer lives than outdoor cats due to reduced risk of injury (e.g., traffic accidents, fights with other animals) and disease.
- **Reduced Stress:** Outdoor roaming can expose cats to high levels of stress due to encounters with predators, traffic, or other cats. Confined cats have a more controlled, safe environment.
- **Enrichment:** Well-designed cat enclosures can provide cats with environmental enrichment, allowing them to engage in natural behaviors (e.g., climbing, hunting in a controlled environment) without the risks of roaming.

(d) **the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives**

Many local councils have attempted to implement education programs to encourage responsible cat ownership, including desexing and keeping cats confined. However, research suggests that these programs are often **ineffective**. Some of the key issues include:

- **Lack of enforcement:** Without legislated mandates, many pet owners do not adopt guidelines on containment and desexing.
- **Limited public awareness:** Despite educational efforts, a significant portion of the public ignores the impact of roaming cats on wildlife or the welfare of the animals themselves.
- **Cultural attitudes:** In some communities, there is resistance to the idea of keeping cats indoors, as many people view cats as independent creatures that "need" to roam

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

The costs of impounding and managing stray cats, primarily unidentified cats, is significant for local councils throughout NSW. Due to the ongoing cost and the need for councils to be able to demonstrate efficient use of rates, many councils ignore the issue and avoid dealing with cats at all. Key expenses include:

- **Impoundment costs:** Local councils must fund enforcement staff, animal shelters, impounding facilities, and the staff required to manage and care for stray cats. This includes costs for feeding, veterinary care (e.g., vaccinations, desexing), and rehoming.

- **Ongoing care:** Keeping stray or abandoned cats in shelters involves ongoing costs, and many councils face overcrowding and strain on resources. The same applies to many rehoming organisations being at capacity
- **Humane management:** Many unowned cats entering pounds are not rehomed and have the be euthanised, this is a substantial cost overtime on top of the costs for the mandatory holding periods under the Companion Animals Act.

In NSW it is estimated that local councils can spend on average anywhere from **$200 to $500 per cat** on impounding, sheltering, and rehoming efforts. These costs can escalate significantly for pounds that have a low or no kill policy and where the problem of roaming cats is not addressed proactively.

If NSW fails to introduce statewide cat containment policies, the costs to NSW Rate Payer could be substantial. The ongoing expenditure related to cats, wildlife conservation efforts, and public education could increase by millions of dollars annually. Some other key cost areas include:

- **Increase in impoundment costs:** Without effective containment, the number of stray and roaming cats would increase, leading to higher sheltering, feeding, and veterinary costs.
- **Environmental degradation:** Without reducing the number of roaming cats, there could be more pressure on wildlife conservation efforts, leading to higher costs for ecosystem restoration and protection.
- **Health and welfare costs:** With more cats outdoors, local councils might face higher vet bills due to injuries and disease transmission among both domestic and feral cats.

In the long term, maintaining the status quo could cost councils millions, potentially offsetting any savings from not introducing containment measures.

(f) **the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs**

Large-scale cat desexing programs offer a range of significant benefits for both the animals involved and the wider community. Below are the key effectiveness and benefits of implementing such programs:

1. Reduction in Overpopulation

- **Prevention of Unwanted Litters**: Spaying and neutering prevent cats from reproducing, addressing the root cause of the overpopulation problem. Cats often reproduce multiple times a year, and each litter can have several kittens. This leads to an exponential increase in the stray cat population if left unmanaged.
- **Control of Feral Cat Colonies**: Large-scale desexing programs are critical in controlling feral cat populations. By systematically reducing breeding within feral colonies, the number of homeless cats decreases over time.

2. Improved Animal Welfare

- **Reduction in Suffering**: Cats living in overcrowded conditions, particularly those in feral colonies, often face high levels of suffering due to malnutrition, disease, injuries, and harsh living conditions. Spaying and neutering help reduce the number of animals exposed to these hardships.
- **Health Benefits**: Desexing can also improve the health of individual cats. For example, spayed female cats are less prone to certain cancers (like ovarian and uterine cancer), and neutered males have a lower risk of testicular cancer and are less likely to develop prostate issues. Neutering can also reduce behaviours like territorial aggression, which can lead to fewer injuries from fights.

3. Decreased Stray and Feral Cat Populations

- **Less Competition for Resources**: Large-scale desexing programs can help reduce the competition for food, shelter, and territory among both stray and feral cats, improving their quality of life.
- **Reduced Pressure on Animal Shelters**: With fewer unwanted kittens being born, animal shelters and rescue organizations face less strain in terms of capacity. They can focus on the care and rehoming of the existing animals rather than trying to address an overwhelming number of new arrivals.

4. Behavioural Benefits

- **Reduced Aggression and Marking**: Neutering male cats can reduce aggressive behaviours and the tendency to spray urine to mark territory. This helps reduce conflicts between cats and makes them more manageable in urban and suburban environments.
- **Less Roaming and Wandering**: Neutered cats are less likely to roam in search of mates, which can result in fewer accidents (like being hit by cars) and less disturbance in neighbourhoods.

5. Public Health Benefits

- **Reduced Disease Transmission**: Cats, especially those in feral colonies, can spread diseases like feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) through fighting and mating. By controlling the population and reducing the number of street cats, the spread of such diseases can be slowed or prevented.
- **Zoonotic Disease Prevention**: Although rarer, cats can carry diseases that may affect humans (e.g., toxoplasmosis, cat scratch fever). Reducing the number of feral cats reduces the risk of humans coming into contact with these diseases.

6. Community and Environmental Benefits

- **Less Noise and Disturbance**: In neighbourhoods with large numbers of unneutered stray cats, noise from fighting and mating behaviour can be a nuisance. Spaying and neutering help reduce these disruptions.
- **Reduced Impact on Wildlife**: Feral cats are known to have a significant impact on local wildlife, particularly birds and small mammals. By reducing the overall population of cats, particularly feral ones, these programs help protect local ecosystems and biodiversity.

7. Cost-Effectiveness

- **Lower Long-Term Costs for Animal Control**: While the upfront cost of implementing a large-scale desexing program can be significant, the long-term costs are usually much lower compared to the expenses of managing and euthanizing unwanted cats. Over time, the reduced demand on animal shelters, veterinarians, and animal control services leads to significant savings.
- **Reduction in Euthanasia Rates**: Without spaying and neutering, shelters often face the painful decision to euthanize healthy, adoptable cats due to overcrowding. By reducing the number of unwanted litters, euthanasia rates can be lowered, leading to more positive outcomes for cats.

8. Long-Term Sustainability

- **Sustainable Population Control**: Large-scale desexing programs can be designed to ensure long-term sustainability by targeting key areas of cat populations, monitoring progress, and adapting strategies as needed. Over time, this leads to a reduction in the number of stray and feral cats, resulting in a more manageable and humane population.

Large-scale cat desexing programs are one of the most effective tools for managing stray and feral cat populations, improving animal welfare, and addressing public health concerns. These programs are cost-effective, reduce the burden on shelters, and help preserve local wildlife, ultimately benefiting both the cats and the communities in which they live. When combined with public education and responsible pet ownership initiatives, desexing programs can create a more sustainable and compassionate solution to the challenges posed by cat overpopulation.

(g) **the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system**

Cat containment is a vital aspect of wildlife conservation and urban management in Australia. The "pound system," or animal shelters, is an integral part of this issue, as cat containment policies influence both the number of cats in shelters and their impact on local ecosystems. An overview of the positive impacts of cat containment on Australia's pound system includes;

1. Reduction in Stray and Abandoned Cats

- **Impact on Animal Shelters**: One of the most direct positive impacts of cat containment is the reduction in the number of stray and abandoned cats. With more owners keeping their cats indoors or in enclosed yards, fewer cats end up in the pound system. Shelters face less overcrowding and can more effectively manage the intake of animals.

Statistics: The RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and other animal welfare organizations have noted a reduction in the intake of stray and feral cats as more jurisdictions introduce mandatory or voluntary containment policies for domestic cats. This can lead to reduced operational strain on shelters, allowing for better care and rehoming of the animals in need.

2. Prevention of Cat Euthanasia

- **Fewer Cats in Shelters**: With fewer stray and feral cats being brought into shelters, there is less pressure on facilities to euthanize animals. Shelters can focus more on rehoming cats rather than managing overcrowding. This has been a key factor in improving the welfare of cats in pounds and reducing euthanasia rates.
- **RSPCA Findings**: In regions where cat containment is actively enforced, euthanasia rates for cats have seen a decline. This is particularly true for areas with high levels of stray cat populations, such as urban centers and regional towns in Australia.

3. Improved Public Health and Safety

- **Healthier Cats**: Contained cats are less exposed to diseases and parasites that are common in free-roaming populations. This leads to healthier animals being brought into shelters, which in turn increases their chances of adoption. Cats that are kept indoors are less likely to contract feline diseases like FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) or FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus), which can be transmitted through fights or mating with other cats.
- **Public Safety**: By reducing the number of stray cats on the streets, there are fewer risks to public health and safety, such as car accidents involving animals and the spread of zoonotic diseases (diseases that can transfer from animals to humans).

4. Reduced Impact on Native Wildlife

- **Wildlife Protection**: Australia has a unique biodiversity that has been heavily impacted by invasive species, including domestic cats. Free-roaming cats, both feral and pet cats, are known to prey on native wildlife, including small mammals, birds, and reptiles. By limiting outdoor access, cat containment helps reduce the predation of native species and contributes to the protection of Australia's threatened wildlife.
- **Scientific Evidence**: Studies, such as those by the Invasive Species Council, have shown that domestic cats, if allowed to roam freely, can have a devastating effect on local wildlife populations. Reducing the number of free-roaming cats indirectly supports the work of wildlife conservation programs, many of which are managed by organizations like the Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

5. Economic Benefits

- **Reduced Shelter Costs**: With fewer cats coming into pounds and shelters, local governments and animal welfare organizations can reduce the costs associated with the care, feeding, and medical treatment of cats. Resources can be reallocated to other areas, such as spaying and neutering programs, which further contribute to reducing the number of unwanted cats in the future.
- **Sustainability**: Long-term cat containment policies can help reduce the ongoing financial burden on shelters, allowing them to focus more on prevention programs (e.g., adoption, spaying, and neutering) rather than emergency response efforts to deal with large populations of stray or feral cats.

6. Boosting Adoption Rates

- **Adoptable Cats**: When cats are kept indoors and properly cared for, they are healthier, more socialized, and better prepared for adoption. As a result, adoption rates at shelters increase, and more people are able to provide homes for well-adjusted cats. Animal shelters also report that cats who are raised or contained in controlled environments tend to integrate better into family homes.
- **Example**: In Melbourne, a city with progressive pet management policies, adoption rates have been shown to rise as fewer cats are euthanized, and more are placed in homes.

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2. **RSPCA Australia (2022)**. "Cat Management and Containment". Available at: https://www.rspca.org.au
3. **Invasive Species Council (2020)**. "The Impact of Cats on Australia's Native Wildlife". Available at: https://invasives.org.au
4. **Australian Wildlife Conservancy (2021)**. "Saving Australia's Wildlife from Feral Cats". Available at: https://www.australianwildlife.org

(h) **the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories**

In Australia, cat containment policies can vary significantly between states, territories, and local councils. These policies generally fall into two categories: full containment and partial containment.

- **Full containment** means that domestic cats are not allowed to roam outdoors and must be kept indoors or in enclosed outdoor areas (e.g., cat enclosures, cat runs).
- **Partial containment** involves regulations that restrict free roaming during certain hours (e.g., overnight curfew).

Cat Containment Across Australia

- **New South Wales (NSW):** NSW does not have statewide legislation for mandatory cat containment. Some local councils have recommended that cats be kept indoors or contained on private property, however as there are no legislative supports for this the adoption rates have been minimal.
- **Queensland:** In 2021, the Queensland Government introduced a state-wide policy mandating all cats be confined to the owner's property at all times by 2024, with exceptions for supervised outdoor time or cat enclosures. The state's policy requiring cats to be confined to their property has been positively received by many conservationists and has led to lower numbers of wandering cats. However, there are concerns about the adequacy of enforcement and the time needed to phase in the changes.

- **Victoria:** Cat containment policies vary, but *Melbourne City* has introduced regulations requiring that all cats be confined to the owner's property. In rural areas, the policy is less stringent. In Melbourne, local councils that have enacted containment laws report fewer complaints about wandering cats, and wildlife groups have noted reductions in cat-related predation.
- **Australian Capital Territory (ACT):** ACT has imposed a statewide law where all cats must be kept on the owner's property, either indoors or in a contained outdoor space. ACT's mandatory cat containment laws have shown promising results, with fewer cats impounded and a reduction in the predation of native species. Some challenges remain in terms of public compliance.

- **South Australia:** South Australia's *Cat Management Plan* requires owners to keep cats confined within their property boundaries and encourages the use of enclosures.
- **Western Australia and Tasmania** have less uniform policies, with some local councils adopting containment measures, but the state governments have not yet implemented comprehensive statewide programs.

ⓘ **options for reducing the feral cat population**

The reference to feral cats needs to be tempered and a realistic definition of Unowned cats adopted universally. Reducing the population of unowned cats in NSW through humane euthanasia is considered a necessary measure to protect native wildlife, particularly given the severe ecological impact that feral cats have had. Here are the key benefits of this approach:

1. Protection of Native Wildlife

- **Predation Pressure**: Feral cats are highly efficient hunters and pose a significant threat to many species of native animals, particularly small mammals, birds, and reptiles. Some species are on the brink of extinction due to predation by feral cats. For example, the *night parrot* and *bilby* have been severely impacted.
- **Biodiversity Preservation**: By reducing the number of feral cats, the survival chances of vulnerable native species are improved. This helps to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem health by allowing native animals to thrive without the constant pressure of predation.

2. Ecological Balance

- **Regulating the Ecosystem**: Feral cats disrupt ecological balances by preying on native species that are often poorly adapted to dealing with such predation. By controlling their numbers, you can help restore these natural balances and prevent the depletion of species that play critical roles in the ecosystem, such as pollinators or seed dispersers.
- **Habitat Restoration**: Reducing the cat population can also help restore habitats that are affected by the decline of certain native species, which in turn affects the wider food web and ecosystem services.

3. Ethical and Humane Considerations

- **Humane Euthanasia**: While controversial, a controlled and humane euthanasia program can be seen as a more ethical response to the feral cat problem than allowing populations to grow unchecked, which can result in suffering due to starvation, disease, or injury. Humane methods focus on minimizing pain and distress for the animals.
- **Avoiding Suffering**: Feral cats often live in harsh conditions where they suffer from malnutrition, disease, and injuries. Humane euthanasia ensures that they do not experience prolonged suffering, which can be the alternative in the absence of intervention.

4. Controlling Population Growth

- **Fertility Control Limitations**: While sterilization and contraception programs for feral cats have shown promise in some areas, they are not always practical or effective on a large scale due to the costs and logistical challenges. Euthanasia can more quickly and directly reduce the population.
- **Long-Term Impact**: Without control measures like humane euthanasia, feral cat populations can continue to increase exponentially, further exacerbating the threat to native species. Reducing their numbers can slow down this growth and provide time for long-term recovery efforts for affected wildlife.

5. Public and Conservation Support

- **Political and Community Buy-in**: In Australia, where wildlife conservation is a significant public concern, measures that aim to protect native species often have strong community support. When the methods used are transparent, humane, and scientifically supported, it can garner both public and governmental backing.
- **Collaborative Efforts**: Many conservation organizations, Indigenous communities, and scientists have come together to support feral cat management programs that include humane euthanasia as part of a broader strategy to protect Australia’s threatened species.

6. Science and Research

- **Informed Decisions**: Ongoing research into the effectiveness of humane euthanasia, along with its ecological and ethical implications, helps refine methods for managing feral cat populations. Continued scientific engagement ensures that policies remain grounded in evidence and that they evolve based on new understanding.
- **Monitoring Success**: Monitoring the impact of euthanasia programs provides valuable data on population control and recovery of native species, helping to adjust conservation strategies and allocate resources effectively.

7. Complementary Measures

- **Holistic Approach**: Humane euthanasia can be part of a broader suite of control measures that may include habitat restoration, predator-proof fencing, reintroduction programs, and public education about responsible pet ownership. When combined with other strategies, humane euthanasia can be a more effective and sustainable long-term solution.

While the idea of humane euthanasia for feral cats remains a contentious issue, it is viewed by many conservationists as a necessary tool in the broader effort to protect Australia's unique and endangered wildlife. By reducing the number of feral cats, we can help safeguard native species from extinction and restore ecological balance, all while using humane methods to minimize suffering. Given the scale of the threat posed by feral cats and the challenges of managing their population by other means, humane euthanasia remains an important component of Australia's wildlife conservation strategy.

Community sentiment increasingly favours the protection of native wildlife. Ethical management of feral cat populations, including humane euthanasia where necessary, is essential to restore ecological balance and protect public health (Mason et al., 2018).

To address the issue of feral cat populations while balancing animal welfare concerns, controlled euthanasia of unowned and feral cats in critical habitats may be a necessary strategy to protect wildlife and public health. Policies must be crafted to ensure humane practices that align with conservation goals (Short et al., 2002).

Despite the escalating threat posed by free-roaming cats, state-level responses in NSW have been inadequate. Comprehensive strategies addressing wildlife conservation and public health risks have seen little progress. Reviews and public consultations have frequently highlighted the need for action but faced stagnation in legislative change (NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2019).

The threats posed by roaming cats in Australia, particularly in urbanized areas, have far-reaching implications for biodiversity and human health. The need for enforced cat containment laws and the humane management of unowned and feral cats is urgent. A multifaceted approach that addresses ecological impacts and public health risks, particularly concerning diseases like toxoplasmosis, is essential for the protection of native species and vulnerable populations in Australia.

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(j) **any other related matters.**

Zoonotic Diseases

Cats are also vectors for various zoonotic diseases, including toxoplasmosis, which poses health risks particularly to vulnerable populations such as pregnant women and children. Toxoplasmosis is caused by the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, often spread through contact with cat feces. Prenatal infections can result in severe fetal complications, including neurological disorders and miscarriage (Montoya & Liesenfeld, 2004).

In Australia, studies indicate a concerning prevalence of toxoplasmosis, with seroprevalence rates between 20-60% found in domestic cats (Weiss & Dubey, 2009). The potential for transmission in urban settings, especially where feral cat populations are uncontrolled, underscores the need for immediate policy interventions.

Introduction of offences relating to cats

In New South Wales (NSW), issues related to cats, such as attacks on other animals and uncontrolled roaming, have become increasingly important as the government and local councils address the impact of feral and domestic cats on wildlife and the community. The introduction of offences and fines specifically targeting these behaviours could help to better manage the problems. Below are some possible categories of offences and fines that could be considered for cats found roaming or involved in attacks:

1. Cat Attacks (on Other Animals or People)

- **Offence**: If a cat attacks or injures another animal (domestic or wildlife), or threatens to attack, this should be considered an offence.
- **Fines**:
  - Owners could be fined for failing to control their cat's behaviour or prevent attacks.
  - Fines could be tiered based on the severity of the attack, for example:
    - Minor injury to another animal: $250 - $500.
    - Serious injury or death of another animal: $1,000 - $2,500.
    - Attack on a person (e.g., scratching, biting): $500 - $1,000.
- **Enforcement**: Local councils could issue fines, or authorities could charge the cat owner with "failure to control an animal" under the Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW).

2. Roaming Cats

- **Offence**: Identified cats found wandering or roaming unsupervised outside their owner’s property without identification or registration.
- **Fines**:
  - A fine could be issued for any cat found wandering outside the owner's property (unless the cat is contained within a property boundary or leash).
  - A standard fine for roaming cats could range from $200 to $500.
- **Enforcement**: Council officers could seize and issue fines for cats found roaming, based on visual sightings and microchip checks could help ensure ownership and accountability.

3. Environmental Damage and Wildlife Protection

- **Offence**: Cats allowed to roam unsupervised that pose a risk to local wildlife, particularly native species and damage any property including defecating.
- **Fines**:
  - Owners could be fined for allowing their cats to roam, threaten or kill wildlife or another animal, or damage a person’s property, or defecate on another person’s property.
  - Fines for environmental damage could range from $500 to $2,000, depending on the severity of the incident and the species impacted.
- **Enforcement**: Local councils could take action based on the level of harm caused by a particular cat. Repeat offenders could face higher penalties.

4. Cat Containment (Leash Laws and Enclosures)

- **Offence**: Failing to contain a cat in a secure enclosure or on a leash if required by local laws.
- **Fines**:
  - Cats that are not securely contained could incur fines ranging from $150 to $500.
  - Repeated violations could lead to higher fines and potentially the removal of the cat from the household if the problem persists.

5. People responsible for illegal TNR activities

- **Offence**: Capturing unowned cats and then releasing them into the environment.
- **Fines**:
  - Fines could be imposed on individuals or businesses who are involved in this activity

- Fines could range from $1,000 to $5,000 depending on the level of the offence and the locations at which they occur.

Currently, local councils in NSW have severely limited powers to deal with cats under the **Companion Animals Act 1998** and the enforcement of these laws is inconsistent across the state. Strengthening the legislative requirements for cat owners, introducing penalties for breaches and providing powers for councils to humanely remove unowned cats from the environment without the need to lengthy holding periods may help ensure greater compliance and protect the environment, wildlife, and the safety of the community.