

**Submission
No 83**

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

Name: Mr Steve Garthwin

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From:

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To:

- [Redacted]
- Chair and Members of the Animal Welfare Committee

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Submission to: The Inquiry into Management of Cat Populations in NSW Oct/Nov 2024

I am a long-time resident of the Blue Mountains and care deeply for the natural wonders of our World Heritage environment. I also treasure our community, and the care generally shown to each other. Pet cats are one of the few issues which cause friction in our neighbourhood, which I would like to see addressed by this Inquiry.

Back in the early eighties pet dogs would roam our streets and enter properties uninvited. The results of their defecations, and occasional dismembering of a Ringtail possum or Blue-tongue lizard, were once excused as collateral outcomes of a dog's 'right to roam' by irresponsible owners. Not any more. We are a safer and more harmonious community because rules were changed, and the consequences for letting a pet dog roam are now well-known and accepted. Yet forty years later my garden is still invaded daily, by roaming pet cats who destroy wildlife and leave their calling cards in garden borders. I love the wild creatures who visit us, and mourn the losses of birds, reptiles, and small animals to the predations of well-fed pet cats. I have wildlife cameras installed and see evidence of the damage done, by day and night. Only yesterday I rescued an Antichinus from the jaws of my best mate's cat.

I would like to see the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 and Codes of Practice amended to allow local Councils the flexibility to introduce cat containment policies, in consultation with their local community, to meet the specific needs of their area and to protect local wildlife. I note that the Local Government Association of NSW supports "Amendments to legislation to enable Councils to more effectively manage the nuisance effects of cats on residents and wildlife, including streamlining the

process of animal registration and limiting the roaming of cats beyond their owner's property."

I understand that 24/7 cat containment is also good for the welfare of companion cats, so 'keeping cats safe at home' will ultimately benefit everyone. I have friends who built an enclosure for their pet cat many years ago, that pet is now old and happy. Another neighbour has recently spent nearly a thousand dollars in vet bills after a cat fight. I understand that there are nearly four million companion cats in Australia. Most will have a close relationship with a human guardian and are socialised to enjoy the company of people, so they deserve consideration and respect. However, I think that pet owners carry a responsibility to protect all animals and should show consideration for the impact their choice has on neighbours and the environment.

I would like to see a grants program from NSW State Government to support Local Councils to implement domestic cat containment policies. The State Government should, in my view, also develop a central on-line platform of information to make responsible pet ownership more readily accessible. In urban and semi-urban environments, subsidised microchipping and de-sexing of pet cats should begin immediately, in advance of any other measures, such as cat-containment rules. I note that the RSPCA 'advocates the mandatory de-sexing of all domestic dogs and cats who are kept as companion animals' to prevent unwanted breeding and reduce the number of animals in shelters. Of course, mandatory de-sexing of pet cats wouldn't account for the impact of semi-owned, stray and feral animals in cat overpopulation, but it will help enormously.

The cat over-population is partly a result of commercial breeders with 'kitten factories' breeding new animals for profit - many with harmful genetic defects. I would favour targetting commercial breeders with tough restrictions via nationally-consistent Registration, Permits and Inspections. The retail pet industry also bears responsibility for the oversaturated market which leads to unwanted pets in shelters or on the streets. There should be legislation to mandate that they must de-sex and vaccinate all kittens before sale, and provide evidence at the time of purchase.

I live on the edge of the National Park, where unwanted cats have been abandoned over many decades to suffer starvation and/or plague the locality. Some go on to breed in the wild, where in a few generations they become bigger, bulkier and more efficient at destroying wildlife. We have seen these ferals captured in our valley - where they have decimated the lyrebirds, bandicoots, possums, etc. that were once more common.

I would support a State-wide program for the progressive eradication of feral cats using the best possible means (with evidence-based data made publically available in a timely manner). This should include trapping and euthanising. I do not support the trap-microchip-release or trap-desex-release proposals offered by some animal welfare organisations, as they don't account for the destruction of native wildlife that releasing these unwanted predators will lead to, in rural and urban environments. We need to take responsibility and eliminate these pests, however distasteful euthanasia is to some. The greater good of all animal life demands this response.

Reforming the law in NSW to require pet cats to be kept in their owner's premises - indoors, or in an outside enclosure 24 hours a day - is the aim of my submission. This would require a phase-in period to educate pet owners and allow time for adjustments. During this period, there should be a State-subsidised push for compulsory registration of all pet cats, de-sexing and vaccination of those pets, and a licensing/permit requirement for anyone wishing to own more than four cats. A nationally-consistent Breeder Permit (with regular inspections) would tighten controls of the 'kitten factories'.

This will require financial support/funding from our State government for Pounds and Shelters who deal with the unwanted and abandoned pets, and for Councils whose local government officers are charged with implementing the policy. The State-wide cat crisis is costing us hundreds of millions of Australian native animals each year and needs an urgent response from our State Government.

Please consider my submission during your Inquiry. I would make myself available for further discussions if required. My email is [REDACTED]

07/11/24