

Submission
No 24

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Land Conservation Alliance

Date Received: 21 November 2024

Animal Welfare Committee
Legislative Council
Parliament of New South Wales
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
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ABN 80 637 680 310

21 November 2024

Dear Animal Welfare Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the Management of cat populations in New South Wales

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into the *Management of cat populations in New South Wales*.

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

The land conservation efforts of ALCA's nineteen member organisations have influenced over 9.3% of Australia with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$370 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding, and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Please note that ALCA is happy for this submission to be published in full.

ALCA's submission focuses on parts (a) [the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings] and (i) [options for reducing the feral cat population] of the Terms of Reference.

Summary

The scale and accelerating consequences of the nature crisis facing Australia and the world has been well-documented, having been set out by ALCA and Australia's private land conservation sector, the Commonwealth's 2021 State of Environment Report¹, the UK Government's Dasgupta Report², various World Economic Forum reports³, and by many others across the national and international community more broadly. **Together, we know that the nature crisis is an existential threat for humanity, and it is gathering pace.**

¹ <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>

³ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/nature-risk-rising-why-the-crisis-engulfing-nature-matters-for-business-and-the-economy/>; <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/>

Invasive species are the biggest cause of the decline of Australian nature, and cats are one of largest vertebrate pest species responsible for that decline – indeed, cats affect 123 EPBC Act (i.e. Commonwealth environment law) -listed threatened species – putting it behind only feral rabbits and feral pigs as invasive vertebrate species pressuring threatened species.

The full impact upon Australian nature from cats – as detailed in the Commonwealth’s 2021 *State of Environment Report* – is alarming:

“Since cats arrived in Australia in the early 1800s, the combined population of feral and domestic cats has grown to more than 6.5 million and they are now present across 99.9% of the Australian landmass.

Both feral and pet cats continue to have an extensive and harmful impact on Australian fauna. Cats are known to eat over half of Australian mammal species, including 50 threatened species. Nearly half of all Australian bird species have been recorded as being eaten by cats, including 71 threatened species.

Feral cats in the bush kill an estimated 2,414 million animals annually – mostly native species – including:

- 769 million invertebrates
- 815 million mammals
- 466 million reptiles
- 272 million birds
- 92 million frogs.

In built environments, cats that roam kill an estimated 714 million vertebrates annually, including:

- 338 million mammals
- 162 million birds
- 213 million reptiles
- at least 1 million frogs.

Most of these kills are made by pet cats.⁴

The animal welfare and relationship between humans and cats is socially and culturally important. However, the impact of cats on native animals, as outlined above must also be considered – **an annual death toll of 2.359 billion vertebrate animals in Australia** – and most of these native Australian animals.

Community support for action on feral cats is strong.

The Biodiversity Council’s second annual Biodiversity Concerns Survey⁵ discovered that “*only 8% of people (less than 1 in 12) are opposed to policy requiring cat owners to keep their cat contained to their property*”.

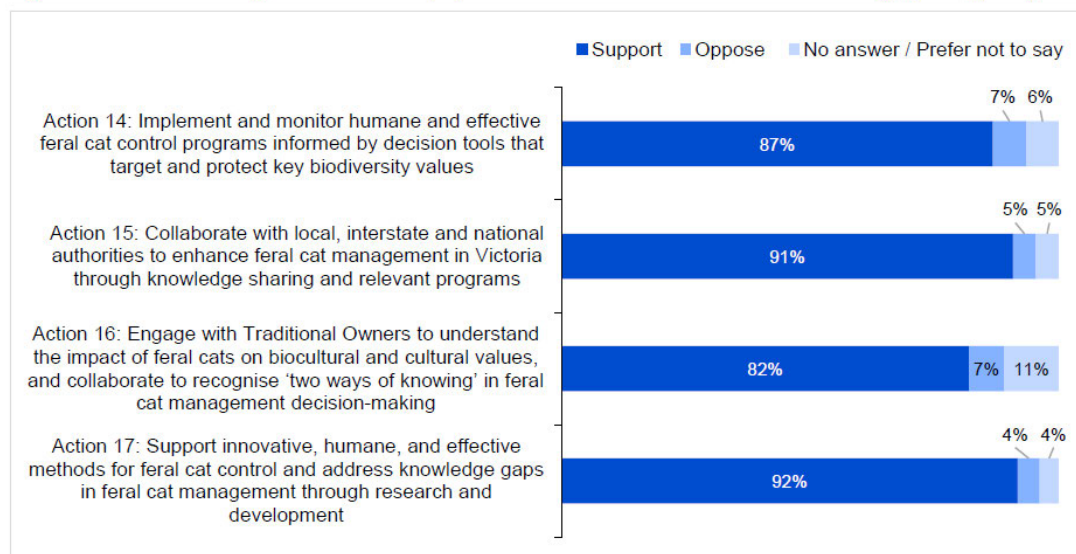
⁴ <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/biodiversity/pressures/invasive-species-problematic-native-species-and-diseases>

⁵ <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/resources/2024-biodiversity-concerns-report-a-survey-of-community-attitudes-to-nature-conservation>

The recent consultation findings report on the Victorian Draft Cat Management Strategy⁶, a process which was led by Animal Welfare Victoria with their Government’s Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action (DEECA).

That consultation report indicates extremely strong support for feral cat management in Victoria, including for protecting the environment from the negative impact of feral cats (93% of respondents). The below table from the report is particularly enlightening on the views of Victorians regarding feral cat management – which one might suspect would be broadly similar to those in New South Wales:

Figure 17 Level of support for actions proposed under Theme 5 of the draft Strategy (% support*)



Survey questions: Q49-52. Base: All survey respondents (n = 1,858). *Support includes 'strongly support' and 'support'.

An opportunity to leverage the private land conservation sector

The private land conservation sector significantly contributes to the management of feral cats, both on private land under direct management, and in partnership with other landholders. Collectively, ALCA’s member organisations are a key repository of Australia’s invasive species expertise, especially in the effective implementation of practical, on-ground feral cat management activities.

However, the private land conservation sector is generally under-resourced and underfunded to undertake feral cat management and suppression at the scale needed. The positive contribution of the private land conservation sector – and potential for scaling our impact if appropriately resourced – should be elevated in the New South Wales Government’s approach to feral cat management.

⁶ <https://engage.vic.gov.au/download/document/36356> [hosted at: <https://engage.vic.gov.au/cat-management-strategy>]

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the New South Wales Government approach to feral cat management be revised to further reflect the urgent, pressing, and existential challenge posed by cats to native Australian wildlife.

Recommendation 2: The New South Wales Government should explicitly seek to partner with the private land conservation sector to help scale the management and suppression of feral cats on private property. Noting that Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW programs provide some funding support for landholders to manage pest animals, we would urge a recommendation from the Committee that:

“The Government should scale up collaboration with the private land conservation sector to enhance feral cat management in New South Wales through increasing funding, knowledge-sharing and relevant programs.” (or similar)

Recommendation 3: The New South Wales Government encourage landholders to align, where possible, with regional strategic pest animal management plans (i.e. such that property-scale management is aligned with what is happening across the broader landscape).

Recommendation 4: Help scale and strengthen the effectiveness of private land conservation sector in supporting management of threatened species (NSW Saving Our Species) priorities and key threatening processes, such as predation by feral cats.

Recommendation 5: Feral cats should be declared as pest animals across all land tenures as a matter of priority.

Recommendation 6: Amend the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) to enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats at a local level.

Recommendation 7: The New South Wales Government should explicitly align with the Commonwealth approach to classifying cats, namely, ‘pet cats’ and ‘feral cats’. Using this approach, feral cats are cats which *“are not formally owned, or cared for, by people. They survive by hunting or scavenging for themselves and live in diverse habitats.”*⁷

Recommendation 8: Give regard to the recommendations from submissions from the Biodiversity Council, Invasive Species Council and Birdlife Australia, with reference to their useful fact-sheet on *The impact of roaming pet cats on Australian wildlife*⁸.

⁷ <https://consult.dcceew.gov.au/draft-updated-threat-abatement-plan-for-predation-by-feral-cats>

⁸

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry into the *Management of cat populations in New South Wales*. If you have questions regarding the submission, please do not hesitate to contact ALCA via (Mr Michael Cornish, Policy Lead).

Yours sincerely,

Mr Michael Cornish

Policy Lead

Australian Land Conservation Alliance

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

Our nineteen members are:

- Arid Recovery
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW
- Bush Heritage Australia
- EcoGipps
- GreenCollar
- Greening Australia
- Landcare Australia
- Nari Nari Tribal Council
- Nature Foundation
- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance
- NRM Regions Australia
- Odonata
- Queensland Trust for Nature
- South Endeavour Trust
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy Australia
- Trust for Nature (Victoria)
- World Wildlife Fund - Australia

ALCA member land conservation efforts have influenced over 9.3% of Australia with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$370 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in rural communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spill-over effects for community, wellbeing, and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.