

Submission
No 32

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Tamworth Birdwatchers Inc

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Tamworth Birdwatchers Incorporated

Observing, Recording and Conserving Birds in
the Tamworth Region of NSW since 1998

Tamworth NSW 2340

www.tamworthbirdwatchers.com

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

About Tamworth Birdwatchers Inc (TBW)

We are a community organisation which plays an active role in monitoring the diversity and abundance of local birdlife. We submit bird survey records to Birdlife Australia's database and actively promote the conservation of birds and their habitats.

The impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings (i.e., Terms of Reference part (a))

It is widely accepted that cats are one of the most significant threats to Australian native birds¹.

TAMWORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (LGA) - Regional Setting

- We have 27 native bird species at risk of extinction in the immediate, near, or medium-term future, including 1 Critically Endangered species, 3 Endangered species and 23 Vulnerable species².
- Based on statistical averages published by the Australian scientific community³, we have calculated that approximately 876,920 **native** birds, small mammals and reptiles are killed by domestic cats, each year, *just in the Tamworth LGA*. Our calculations of this figure are provided on the following page.

¹ The "Action Plan for Australian Birds, 2020" (Garnett, Baker et al) and "Atlas of the Birds of NSW & the ACT Vol. 3" (Cooper, McAllan et al)

² NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee, Schedule 1 Threatened species.

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2016-063#sch.1>

³ Threatened Species Recovery Hub. National Environmental Science Programme – University of Queensland, Australian National University, Charles Darwin University, The University of Sydney, Murdoch University. Science for Saving Species. The impact of pet cats on Australian wildlife.

What is the size of the cat problem in the Tamworth LGA?

27,727 dwellings⁴ (households) in Tamworth Regional Council Area

27% of households have at least one pet cat⁵

This is equivalent to 7,486 'cat owning households'

Of these households, about half have two or more pet cats

Therefore, the cat population in the local area is likely to be at least...

$3743 + 7486 = 11,229$ domestic (pet) cats

71% of 'cat households' allow their cats to freely roam all/part of the day⁶

For Tamworth, that is 5,315 households (or about 7,972 cats which are likely 'hunting')

If 110 **native** animals⁷ are killed each year PER free-roaming pet cat then

we are losing **876,920 native birds, mammals and reptiles every year,**

in the Tamworth LGA

(7,972 roaming cats x 110 native animals = 876,920)

N.B. This figure does *not* include the impact of feral cats.

The effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives (i.e., Terms of Reference part (d))

- The negative impact of cats on threatened native animals cannot be solved without targeted, proactive control of domestic cats (as well as feral cats). Fundamentally, this requires mandatory containment of domestic cats 24hours a day/7days a week.
- Recent Australian research recommends the introduction of a night curfew as the first step towards 24hr containment, with community education focused around the practical actions which cat owners can take to reduce their pet cat's impacts⁸.
- NSW currently has no legislation which prevents cat owners from allowing their pet cats to freely roam.
- In late 2023, at their annual conference, NSW Councils resolved to advocate for an amendment to the *Companion Animals Act 1998* as a means of introducing mandatory cat containment as part of a 'safe cat and safe wildlife' approach.

⁴ Census Usual resident population (2021) [Population and dwellings | Tamworth Regional Council | Community profile \(id.com.au\)](#)

⁵ Threatened Species Recovery Hub. Science for Saving Species. The impact of pet cats on Australian wildlife. Available at: https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/dehnttbf/7-4-the-impact-of-pet-cat-impacts_f.pdf

⁶ As above

⁷ As above

⁸ Ma, Gemma C and McLeod, Lynette J. (2023) Understanding the Factors Influencing Cat Containment: Identifying Opportunities for Behaviour Change. *Animals* 2023, 13, 1630.

Recommendations

That the NSW Parliament, Legislative Council Animal Welfare Committee:

1. Examine the 'Safe cat, safe wildlife' resolution from the 2023 Local Government Conference⁹. Councils are on the front line of domestic cat control and should be listened to.
2. Recommend that compulsory 24hr cat containment and desexing be embedded into legislation e.g. via amendment of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*;
3. Act urgently; any delay will facilitate the continued demise of all threatened native animals;
4. Consider that humane euthanasia will be cheaper¹⁰ and potentially kinder than rehoming to a home that does not care for the cat appropriately; and
5. Consider that 'catch, desex and release' (rather than euthanasia) of stray or unwanted cats is more expensive and appears counterproductive; all cats will hunt and kill if not confined, regardless of whether they are desexed or not.

In Summary

The immense impact of domestic cats on native birds and local biodiversity (as demonstrated by the calculations above) is deeply concerning and unacceptable. Stray and roaming cats are preying on birds, small marsupials, frogs, skinks et al; damaging ecosystems and driving vulnerable species towards extinction. We believe strongly that NSW must act urgently and decisively to 'educate and legislate'.

'Best Practice' cat management should include: -

- Legislative change and support for Councils to implement mandatory desexing & containment;
- Mandatory microchipping and registration;
- Maximum of 2 cats per property;
- Community education re cat containment options: inside the home; cat run or 'catio'; and
- Humane euthanasia for feral, stray or unwanted cats which have been trapped



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10 November 2024

⁹ [2023 Home - Past Conference Papers | LGNSW](#). See Past Conferences; 2023 Rosehill Gardens; Resolutions – Resolution Tweed Shire Council – Safe cat, safe wildlife; page 23.

¹⁰ Desexing a female cat - \$260 - \$280; euthanasia of a cat \$160 (quote from Tamworth Vet Hospital; July 2024)