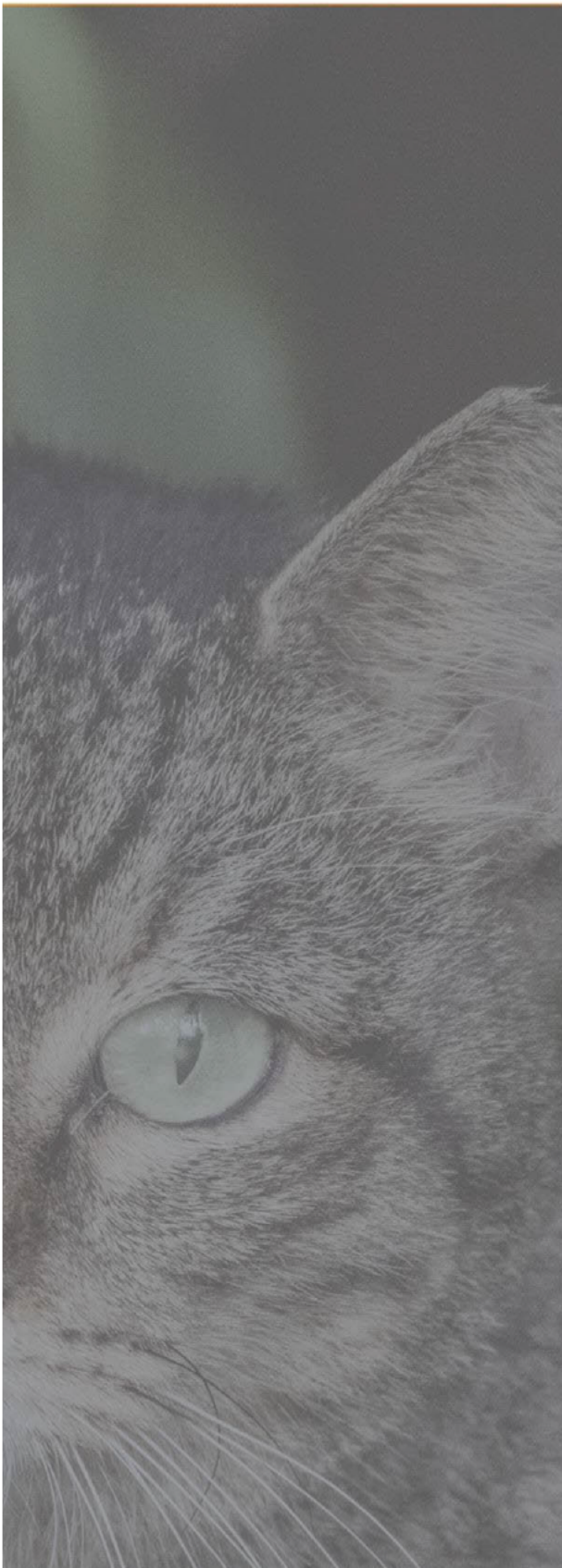


**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Animal Services Australasia

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

NSW GOVERNMENT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE

ANIMAL SERVICES AUSTRALASIA
SUBMISSION
NOVEMBER 2024



INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission addresses the issue of managing cat populations in New South Wales (NSW) and provides recommendations for policies aimed at reducing the environmental and welfare impacts caused by domestic and feral cats. Drawing on experiences from similar Australian settings, the report discusses strategies for containment, desexing, community education, and humane feral management. It includes a proposed pilot program for cat management in high-biodiversity zones, with the aim of protecting native wildlife, reducing the feral cat population, and promoting responsible pet ownership. The submission advocates for comprehensive and humane management practices, providing benefits to animal welfare, biodiversity, and public health.



4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

THE ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE IS TASKED WITH INQUIRING INTO AND REPORTING ON THE MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NSW, ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- A. THE IMPACT OF CATS ON THREATENED NATIVE ANIMALS IN METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL SETTINGS.**
- B. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CAT CONTAINMENT POLICIES INCLUDING POTENTIAL BARRIERS.**
- C. WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR CATS UNDER CONTAINED CONDITIONS.**
- D. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP INITIATIVES.**
- E. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL COUNCILS IN IMPLEMENTING AND ENFORCING CAT CONTAINMENT POLICIES.**
- F. THE EFFECTIVENESS AND BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING LARGE-SCALE CAT DESEXING PROGRAMS.**
- G. THE IMPACT OF POTENTIAL CAT CONTAINMENT MEASURES ON THE POUND SYSTEM.**
- H. THE OUTCOMES OF SIMILAR POLICIES ON CAT CONTAINMENT IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES OR TERRITORIES.**
- I. OPTIONS FOR REDUCING THE FERAL CAT POPULATION.**
- J. ANY OTHER RELATED MATTERS.**



5. INTRODUCTION

Animal Services Australasia appreciates the opportunity to submit to the inquiry on the management of cat populations in New South Wales. Drawing from my experience as Director of Programs at Odonata, responsible for numerous sites of sanctuaries and species recovery across Australia, particularly Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary in Canberra and Mount Rothwell in Victoria. My current role as Director at Hills Wildlife Sanctuary in Dural Sydney. And my previous role as CEO of the Animal Welfare League (AWL) NSW, this submission provides insights on strategies to responsibly manage cat populations, protect biodiversity, and promote animal welfare. These recommendations reflect practices proven effective in similar Australian settings and address the critical challenges of managing both domestic and feral cats in NSW.

6. IMPACT OF CATS ON THREATENED NATIVE ANIMALS AND BIOSECURITY (TERM (A))

Domestic and feral cats in NSW pose significant threats to biodiversity, contributing to the decline of native animals such as birds, small mammals, and reptiles. Cats also represent a biosecurity concern due to their potential to transmit diseases like toxoplasmosis, which can impact wildlife, livestock, and human health. Cats are instinctive hunters, and even well-fed domestic cats will hunt, creating direct risks for wildlife in suburban and rural areas. Feral cats are especially impactful, as they are often found in high densities in ecologically sensitive regions where they prey on native fauna.

In my role at Mulligans Flat, we implemented containment and biosecurity-focused practices to safeguard vulnerable species from both predation and disease. This approach has proven successful, enabling the reintroduction of endangered species such as the Eastern Bettong. Implementing similar containment and biosecurity strategies in NSW would help mitigate these impacts, particularly in biodiversity-rich areas. Establishing targeted containment zones and educating the public on the biosecurity risks posed by free-roaming cats could help reduce the environmental and public health threats associated with cat populations.



7 EFFECTIVENESS OF CAT CONTAINMENT POLICIES (TERM (B))

Containment policies have been highly effective in the ACT, particularly in areas surrounding Mulligans Flat, where cats are kept out of critical habitats. These policies reduce cat-related predation on native species and minimize disease transmission. Canberra's approach to containment, supported by community education and enforcement, offers a practical model for NSW to adapt. Policies should prioritise containment in high-biodiversity areas where vulnerable species are most at risk, creating "cat-free" zones to protect these populations.

In NSW, containment zones could be established around identified conservation areas and sensitive habitats, such as national parks and nature reserves. Effective containment policies require robust community engagement, providing cat owners with clear guidelines on the boundaries, benefits, and welfare aspects of containment. In the ACT, we found that when cat owners understood the ecological significance of containment and were provided with resources, they were more likely to support and comply with the policy

8. WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR CATS UNDER CONTAINED CONDITIONS (TERM (C))

Cats confined to contained environments are safer, healthier, and experience fewer risks of injury and disease – as long as enrichment is included in the cat enclosures. As noted during my time at AWL NSW, contained cats face reduced risks of road accidents, fights with other animals, and exposure to parasites and infectious diseases. At Mulligans Flat, we encouraged cat owners to create secure outdoor spaces, such as "catios," or to walk their cats on leashes. These options provide enrichment and exercise, ensuring that cats remain physically and mentally healthy while protecting native wildlife.

For NSW, promoting containment policies as a welfare measure would likely increase public support and compliance. Education campaigns could emphasise the health and longevity benefits of containment, reassuring cat owners that contained cats often live longer and more content lives. Offering resources on building secure outdoor spaces and enrichment strategies would further support responsible pet ownership, aligning containment policies with welfare goals.



9. EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP INITIATIVES (TERM (D))

Community education is essential to the success of containment, desexing, and other cat management policies. In my roles at AWL NSW and Odonata, I have overseen initiatives focused on informing the public about responsible pet ownership, including the importance of desexing, microchipping, and containment. At Mulligans Flat, we implemented education programs that raised awareness about the benefits of cat containment for both wildlife and the cats themselves. These programs have fostered a sense of community responsibility, encouraging cat owners to support conservation efforts by containing their pets.

For NSW, we recommend a multi-channel education approach that leverages partnerships with schools, councils, and community organisations to disseminate key messages. Campaigns should emphasize the ecological and welfare benefits of responsible cat ownership, supported by practical guidance on implementing containment practices at home. Such initiatives should include information on how containment reduces wildlife predation and the biosecurity benefits of responsible pet ownership. Educational resources, such as guides on building “catios” and leash-training, will help empower cat owners to take proactive steps that align with the state’s broader management objectives.

10. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL COUNCILS IN IMPLEMENTING AND ENFORCING CONTAINMENT POLICIES (TERM (E))

Local councils play a critical role in implementing and enforcing containment policies. During my tenure at AWL NSW, we collaborated with councils to provide resources and training for pet management policy enforcement, which helped to build consistency and public support. For NSW, empowering councils with enforcement tools, funding, and community engagement resources would support successful policy implementation.

Incentives such as reduced registration fees for desexed and contained cats could encourage responsible ownership. Councils would benefit from having standardised training for staff involved in enforcement and access to public awareness materials to facilitate community engagement. Collaboration with animal welfare organisations and conservation agencies can also bolster council efforts, enhancing enforcement while strengthening local support for containment.



11 EFFECTIVENESS AND MONETISED BENEFITS OF LARGE-SCALE CAT DESEXING PROGRAMS (TERM (F))

Large-scale desexing programs are among the most cost-effective strategies for managing cat populations, reducing the number of stray and feral cats, and alleviating pressure on local shelters in the long term. In my role at AWL NSW, we implemented desexing initiatives that significantly decreased intake rates in shelters, launched the Mobile Vet Truck within the pound network lowering operational costs and reducing the need for euthanasia. Desexing prevents unplanned breeding, which can reduce the population of both domestic and stray cats over time.

Monetarily, large-scale desexing programs yield substantial returns on investment. By preventing unwanted litters, these programs reduce shelter admissions, disease control costs, and public health risks, as well as reduce the strain on the already under resourced veterinary industry. For every dollar spent on desexing, councils and shelters save several dollars in reduced intake, medical treatments, and animal control expenses. Implementing a subsidised or incentive-based desexing initiative across NSW would encourage widespread participation, helping to manage the cat population while offsetting public costs associated with unregulated breeding and stray cat populations.

12. IMPACT ON THE POUND SYSTEM (TERM (G))

Containment and desexing policies together ease the strain on NSW's pound system. In the ACT, containment policies, along with desexing initiatives, have resulted in fewer stray and surrendered cats, enabling shelters to reallocate resources to care, rehabilitation, and rehoming services. Similarly, at AWL NSW, a combined approach of containment and desexing reduced intake rates, allowing us to focus on better outcomes for shelter animals.

In NSW, reducing shelter admissions through containment and desexing would create a more sustainable pound system. Pounds and shelters would have greater capacity to focus on rehoming efforts, education programs, and animal welfare services. Additionally, improved pound systems would enhance public perception of animal welfare facilities, further supporting community engagement with shelters.



It should be noted that a thorough review of The Companion Animals Act, as well as the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Biosecurity Act should be undertaken to ensure the most up to date legislation supports and protects and supports cat population management.

13. OUTCOMES OF SIMILAR POLICIES IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES (TERM (H))

The ACT's containment and desexing policies provide a valuable case study for NSW, showing that structured cat management can benefit biodiversity, animal welfare, and public health. At Mulligans Flat, the containment zones have effectively reduced cat-related wildlife deaths, and desexing initiatives have helped control stray and feral populations.

Drawing on the ACT's model, NSW can implement containment and desexing policies that prioritise local needs. Establishing containment zones around conservation areas and ecologically sensitive regions, supported by desexing and education programs, will allow NSW to protect native species, manage cat populations, and enhance community welfare.

14. OPTIONS FOR REDUCING THE FERAL CAT POPULATION (TERM (I))

Reducing the feral cat population requires humane, multi-faceted strategies to balance ecological needs with animal welfare. Options for feral management include trapping, desexing, rehoming, and selective, targeted culling in areas where feral cats pose high risks to biodiversity. My experience with feral management at Odonata has shown that humane trapping and targeted approaches can effectively reduce feral populations while prioritizing ethical treatment.

1. Humane Trapping Programs:

Humane trapping programs are essential for managing feral populations in a way that aligns with animal welfare principles. At Mulligans Flat and Mount Rothwell humane traps were used to capture feral cats. This approach allows for controlled population reduction and prevents new litters. NSW could implement humane trapping programs in high-risk biodiversity areas, working closely with animal welfare organisations to prioritise humane treatment and potential rehoming.



2. Strategic Population Control in Sensitive Ecological Areas:

In regions where feral cats threaten endangered species, selective culling may be necessary to protect critical populations. These efforts should be limited to high-risk ecological zones and conducted under strict ethical guidelines. Collaboration with conservation agencies will ensure that population control measures are both effective and humane. This targeted approach could safeguard biodiversity while reducing broader feral populations in NSW's most vulnerable habitats.

3. Community-Supported Monitoring and Reporting Systems:

Engaging communities in monitoring and reporting feral cat sightings can strengthen feral management programs. Public reporting systems, where residents can log feral sightings, would allow councils to deploy rapid-response trapping. Offering educational resources on humane trapping and information on the impact of feral cats on wildlife could encourage community participation, fostering a culture of responsible feral cat management.

4. Partnerships with Conservation and Animal Welfare Organisations:

Collaborating with conservation organisations, animal shelters, and welfare groups would enhance NSW's capacity to manage feral populations humanely. Organisations such as Odonata and Animal Services Australasia, bring expertise in population control strategies and can support feral reduction initiatives with ecological knowledge, volunteer networks, and specialised resources. These partnerships would enable a coordinated, well-resourced approach to feral cat management across the state.



15. CONCLUSION

On behalf of Animal Services Australasia, I support a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to cat population management in NSW. Effective strategies should integrate containment policies, large-scale desexing, community education, and humane options for reducing feral populations. My experience at Odonata, Hills Wildlife Sanctuary and AWL NSW underscores the benefits of these policies for protecting biodiversity, mitigating biosecurity risks, and promoting responsible pet ownership. Implementing these recommendations in NSW would create a sustainable approach to cat management, providing ecological, welfare, and economic benefits for the state.

With regard,

Mark Slater
Director, Animal Services Australasia