

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

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Partially  
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# **Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations**

## **Submission November 2024**

In the current situation small unfunded rescues are trying their best to alleviate the suffering of cats and to make a difference to their fates. Good Samaritans who want to help cats/kittens on the street have an expectation that all cats belong in homes and that rescues and council pounds are there to take them all in. Others who need to surrender their cat because they can't keep them due to personal issues or moving in to properties that don't allow pets have nowhere to go. As a result rescues are under constant pressure to support both the cats and the people in the community. The mental and financial strain is immense and much of their time has to be spent raising money to treat, desex, vaccinate and microchip them.

Piecemeal plans here and there by different councils haven't worked. What we need is a fresh look at the situation, a realistic look at how to deal with these animals – a state-wide, humane, science based solution for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW.

There needs to be an integrated plan and leadership which has the welfare of cats at its heart. The solution is not to kill the cats. It has been proved time and time again that if a population is decimated, whether it be human after a war, or animal after a cull, the birth rate naturally rises to take up the space left behind. It's not the way forward. Neither is it an option to take cats into council pounds which euthanise according to some arbitrary health or numbers measure. Not only do the cats suffer but also the staff who have to kill them at these facilities. A NSW Government-commissioned report which supports large-scale desexing programs instead, has shown that killing programs are ineffective, as are imposing curfews which have not addressed cat population and related issues. The state needs to support those who are already making a difference. The state needs to take responsibility for this issue and not depend on the good hearts of those who run rescues. The beneficiaries will not only be the cats saved and those of us who love cats, but everyone – even those who complain about cats!

Cats are way down on the list of things that kill native animals and should not be victimised and used as scapegoats. Wildlife rescue data shows that cats aren't the primary risk to many threatened species. In fact, key threats include habitat loss, vehicle collisions and dog attacks. The situation must be looked at with compassion and strategic thinking not kneejerk reaction. Money put into desexing & Trap Neuter Vaccinate Return programs particularly those treating community cats, and getting vets on board to play a big part in this. The recent NSW Pound Inquiry has recommended a proactive solution: provide grants to councils and rescue organisations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing & microchipping in areas with large homeless cat populations, especially disadvantaged communities. These kinds of programs are a long-term, compassionate solution that reduces stray cat populations without demonising cats. These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved

We need to recognise that cats can live a healthy, happy life in communities – they don't all need to have a home. Support should be focused on making it easy for colony feeders to get the cats in colonies desexed. Cats can and do live successfully in colonies where they make relationships with each other. They can be fed there and live happy, healthy lives and not be seen as a burden. If we can stop cats reproducing as soon as they are sexually mature then this will be a big step forward. Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNVR and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations. Many shelters have cats who don't belong there, cats who don't want to be confined and are considered 'difficult to adopt'. They take up space that people who need to surrender their animals need. Not every cat needs to have a traditional home.

The knock-on effects will be seen over time with the number of kittens being born reduced, and euthanasia rates going down. Everyone needs to work together to a common goal, not struggle separately re-inventing the wheel and with no government support.