

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 8 November 2024

Partially
Confidential

Submission to Protect Cats and Wildlife in NSW

Thank you for considering this submission as part of NSW's approach to cat welfare and wildlife protection. I am deeply committed to the humane treatment of animals and believe we can adopt compassionate, science-based solutions to manage stray and feral cat populations without resorting to ineffective, harmful methods. Cats are increasingly demonised, but the real issue is people who own, breed and dump their cats. That is where the problem lies, which is what the NSW government should tackle, **not adopt a killing solution.**

My Background

I have three rescue cats, each with a heartbreaking past. One was a former breeder cat, confined to a cage for six years in terrible conditions. The other two were rescued by volunteers, one from a hoarder's home with over 90 cats, arriving severely malnourished, and the other from a litter abandoned with their mother. I make sure my cats are safely contained and never roam freely, going as far as installing cat netting in my backyard to protect them, which was costly.

In addition, I support several cat charities that witness firsthand the harsh realities facing so many cats today. While cats are often blamed for problems with wildlife, the true issues are rooted in human neglect and irresponsibility. We must adopt compassionate, responsible measures to address these problems, focusing on animal welfare and community education, rather than blaming the animals themselves.

Evidence Against Killing as a Solution

Research and real-world results indicate that killing cats does not effectively reduce stray populations or protect wildlife. Programs focused on rehoming, targeted desexing, and Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) have a proven record of success. For example, large-scale desexing initiatives reduce stray populations without the cruelty associated with euthanasia, which, as studies show, does not solve the underlying population issue.

The NSW Government's report underscores that these desexing programs work better than lethal measures. I support the NSW Pound Inquiry's recommendation for proactive grants to councils and rescue organisations. Funding such programs empowers communities to implement compassionate, long-term solutions, especially in areas with high populations of stray cats, often in disadvantaged areas.

Vacuum Effect and Inefficiency of Removal

The "Vacuum Effect," an ecological principle, shows that removing cats from an area without addressing root causes only allows new cats to occupy the empty space. This makes lethal measures both unsustainable and ineffective. Addressing root causes is crucial to ensure that stray populations decrease over time and remain manageable.

Concerns with Mandatory 24-Hour Cat Curfews

Mandatory cat curfews might seem like a straightforward solution, but they often cause unintended harm. In Yarra Ranges, Victoria, where a cat curfew was implemented, cat-related complaints increased significantly, along with impoundments and euthanasia rates. Curfews may target semi-

owned or stray cats, often resulting in abandonment due to fear of fines. Increased trapping without proper oversight can also expose cats to inhumane treatment. Instead of curfews, outreach and resources for owners would be far more effective in reducing wandering cats while protecting their welfare.

Educating and Supporting Pet Owners

Community education is essential in promoting responsible pet ownership. Initiatives encouraging safe indoor or contained environments for cats, such as cat patios, benefit both cats and wildlife. Media campaigns and school programs can be instrumental in spreading awareness about responsible pet care, the importance of desexing, and the benefits of containing cats. Supporting rehoming programs and targeted desexing is essential to managing populations humanely and sustainably.

Addressing Broader Causes of Wildlife Decline

Cats are often blamed for endangering native species, but the larger and more significant threat to wildlife comes from human activities. Habitat loss from deforestation and urban sprawl poses a far greater danger to wildlife than cats, as shown by NSW's Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard data. Factors such as vehicle collisions, habitat destruction, and dog attacks are more severe threats to vulnerable species than cat attacks.

In my community of Campbelltown, Camden and Appin, for example, habitat destruction has reached a crisis point. Developers continue to clear critical koala habitats without sufficient oversight or intervention, and wildlife corridors are unprotected. Appin Road, a significant threat to the local koala population, has tragically claimed the lives of more than 40 koalas, trapping them in fenced areas with no overpasses. Despite this urgent issue, the NSW government has yet to take adequate action to protect koalas and other native species but instead shifts focus to cat euthanasia as a solution. Protecting our precious wildlife means addressing the primary causes of their decline, not targeting cats.

Conclusion

A humane, comprehensive approach that prioritises habitat restoration enforces mandatory desexing for all cats sold, and requires cat registration will help protect both cats and wildlife in NSW. Additionally, imposing higher penalties for abandoning cats, cracking down on unlicensed breeders, and strengthening education on responsible pet ownership will foster a compassionate, sustainable solution. This strategy addresses the root causes of cat overpopulation and wildlife threats, offering long-term benefits for the welfare of animals and the environment.