

Submission  
No 90

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

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

Submission to the Inquiry on: **Management of cat populations in New South Wales**

I am writing as a concerned community member in response to the cat management initiatives proposed for managing cat populations in NSW, and as announced in the media release [Action and funding on feral cats a priority to save native wildlife](#). While the call is, ostensibly, on ‘taking action’ against feral cats, it is clear from your website that all cats are considered potential hazards to native species.

I agree that native animals should be protected.

However, I do not believe in separating – so neatly – species of animals into those animals that deserve protection (‘native’ animals) and those that don’t (introduced ‘pests’). These are outdated values and largely opposed by contemporary Australians. All animals are sentient, and research shows that past programs using violent measures have not stemmed the numbers of cats. Setting aside the obvious reasons for wanting to protect cats that are pets, feral and stray cats are also sentient. What’s more, and as I pointed out in my letter to The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP in 2023, once cats were introduced into Australia, they too became ‘natives’. They did not invade the country, humans did that, and brought the cats with them.

We now have the responsibility to manage cat populations with the additional knowledge, *evolved values* and humane understanding of animals we have developed since introducing them to Australia.

I am a cat owner and a volunteer at a cat shelter in Sydney (Sydney Dox and Cats Home). My love and concern for the welfare of cats has led me to also enroll in a certificate course at TAFE which I am currently completing. Further to this, I keep myself informed through additional studies and research on the welfare of cats, including knowledge of the risks of harm to them by humans and other animals, and *by* them toward other species of animals.

I am also a sociologist, with a great interest in human wellbeing and community values. Over the past few years, I have spoken to many people, including pet store managers, animal activists, local council workers and colleagues about the many options available to local councils, NSW government and community members to protect native species while also considering the welfare of cats.

There is irrefutable good will in the community – as well as ample opportunity – for achieving the dual goals of protecting native species using humane methods for managing cat populations. What is needed is a multi-pronged approach, *humane* leadership, and good-will on the part of the stakeholders concerned. This includes various levels of government.

Specifically, more should and can be done in relation to:

**Education of the public on desexing cats:** In speaking (anecdotally) to some potential cat adoptees in shops, shelters and among my own neighbours, I have found that many people do not believe in desexing due to cultural values/conditioning; some don't even know about desexing (especially older Australians from non-English speaking countries); others find it too expensive. The community (pet owners and non-owners) must learn of the importance of desexing all cats. There are many benefits to desexing cats, as listed on your website.

**Education on the responsibility of owning a cat (or several) including benefits and risks/costs:** as a volunteer and neighbour, I have come across numerous cat owners who – for a variety of reasons – want to or need to surrender their animals. Shelters cannot accept them due to limits on capacity. Owners abandon the cats in the hope they will survive or someone else will take care of them. Education on what it takes to adopt a cat needs to be consistent and persistent. Pet shops and breeders are only too happy to sell as many as they can. But cats are not toys for children, or Christmas presents with a limited due date. They require long-term and sometimes expensive care. They require commitment. They require understanding their needs and how these can be adapted in urban living.

**Greater role of and funding by government:** no educational program can be fully achieved without government buy-in. Education needs funding and resources but social marketing can achieve a lot through the adoption of several types of media, educational modules in schools and community centres, etc. Your website is great (as are others); however, many people need organisations and governments *to reach out*

*to them.* While the providers of education can be many (shelters, volunteers, pet shops, breeders, vets, etc.), *the onus for ensuring there is education is on government* (local, state, federal).

**Stronger regulation on desexing cats:** including deterrence and heavy fines for unethical, non-compliant breeders (including ‘backyard breeders who NEVER desex cats prior to sales), pet shops and owners of cats. As a starting point, the onus of desexing should be on all parties who *sell or give cats to customers/adopting parents.* Currently in NSW, only shelters and breeders of ‘luxury cats’ registered with organisations such as the Cat Fanciers Association take this step (voluntarily and for industry benefit). However, this must be legislated and enforced as an obligation on *all* who sell/put up for adoption cats of any age, sex or breed.

**Supported/co-funded programs on desexing, vaccination and re-homing:**

Supporting low-income earners, pensioners and other vulnerable pet owners through affordable/free de-sexing programs, such as The Community Cat Program [Community Cat Program – Australian Pet Welfare Foundation](#). Local and NSW governments can participate through funding, advertising and education, as well as engaging vets, shelters, and pet store franchises (such as Pet Stock, Green Vets, etc.) to offer some level of affordable and/or free services.

**Government funding and public education on the availability and benefits of adopting feral/stray/rehabilitated cats:** many such cats can be found in shelters and adopted for a nominal cost. More advertising to help these cash-strapped shelters is required. But there are also neighbourhoods around Sydney where stray cats have been ‘adopted’ by residents who care for them and share rosters of healthy feeding for the strays who remain local, and whose colonies stay small and controlled. No need to destroy them. These sorts of community-run programs could be promoted to include co-funding of desexing and vaccines among residents, leading to further awareness of possible humane co-existence with animals. This stands in stark contrast to other neighbourhoods in Sydney in which no-one takes an interest, and misinformation around the benefits of desexing have led to thousand-strong cat colonies.

**Legislation to prohibit self-appointed vigilante-style trappers of cats**

**(particularly feral and stray cats):** including heavy fines and actual (rather than potential) punitive measures in line with legislation on animal cruelty [Prevention of](#)

*Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 (NSW)*. Countries such as Columbia have introduced mandatory desexing laws; we can do that, through co-funded programs and fine-tuned legislation. We can apply stringent laws and heavy fines, including potential closure of facilities, for retailers of intact cats. Aside from breeders who sell to other breeders, there is no justification for selling intact cats in the hope that adopting parents will ‘do it themselves’.

I know that change can be achieved with a multi-pronged approach. The widespread education on responsible pet ownership and the protection of wildlife through the use of multiple media platforms, including those more likely to be used by older or non-English speaking residents, as well as those used by young people; lobbying for more government funding and industry buy-in; drawing on the good will of the public who, increasingly turn to cat ownership in high-density urban living. We can educate regional and rural residents as well as provide more financial and labour assistance to animal rescue services in areas where more wildlife is at risk.

We don’t need to embrace the values of the past and use violence as the lowest common denominator: pitting one animal against another. By adopting a multi-pronged approach, we can work together to manage cat populations without resorting to bloody, inhumane methods.

Ultimately, our shared goal should be to protect native species, *while also prioritising cat welfare and support humane management practices, including desexing and education.*

Yours faithfully