

**Submission
No 91**

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

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Date Received: 8 November 2024

My name is Rachel Sussman. I am an ordinary citizen who simply cares for life - all life, including the life of the animals who share this planet with us.

I believe that we humans have been - and still are - very selfish. We want the planet for ourselves, for our comfort and delight and we fail to see that our desires do not leave much room for other life, be it mother nature, be it the animals. As we seek comfort, we destroy much around us, never considering that we are damaging the source for life for someone else. Likewise, we take animals from the wild to delight us, then we abandon them when it becomes 'too hard'. We transfer them from their natural environment to another either to please us or serve us or because we destroyed their original environment - then we blame them for trying to survive and 'damaging' the environment. We forget that they 'damage' it because we left them no other option to survive... And so it is with cats.

It is said that God created cats so that man can caress the lion... These beautiful majestic beings have been used and abused. We love them then abandon them, then blame them...

I understand that cats, abandoned and left to themselves, will do what they need to survive, and truthfully, since we created the problem, we need to solve it. Attempting to solve the problem simply by killing many cats is not only callous, and cruel, it also is a short term 'solution', that has not worked in the past and will not work in the future to really solve the problem on ongoing basis.

It is well to bear in mind the Vacuum Effect - an ecological principle demonstrating that removing animals from an area only results in new animals filling the space. As per the Rand myth of domestic cats & urban wildlife, and even the NSW Government-commissioned report, we must not fall into common misconceptions that killing programs are effective, but rather expand on effective solutions such as desexing for managing cats and reducing the number of homeless cats, and what works is community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted ongoing desexing by TNR, community responsibility to look after the cats, and community education. All these have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations, and keeping them content and therefore in no need to hunt for food.

These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

It is well for this inquiry to follow the recent NSW Pound Inquiry that recommendations of pro-active solutions. These include: providing grants to councils and rescue organizations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing 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 demonizing cats.

As part of these solutions, it is important to support semi-owners and owners in disadvantaged areas by providing free desexing and microchipping through programs like the Community Cat Program. Likewise, it is important to support many in the community that are voluntarily caring for stray cats, trapping, desexing, microchipping, feeding etc - they use their own funds and times, and their tireless actions, have been scientifically proven to reduce stray cat populations, decrease nuisance complaints, and prevent wildlife predation, and still they often have to face hostility rather than support.

I would also like to point to the issue of cat containment. Most cat owners already keep their cats confined, but some face barriers like housing restrictions, high costs to modify properties, or lack of information.

Enforcing mandatory 24-hour cat curfews, often target semi-owned or stray cats, which have no owners to enforce confinement. These curfews can backfire, with some people abandoning cats to avoid fines, adding to the stray population. It also increases demonizing cats and can encourage

harmful actions, unchecked trapping and cruelty. Indeed, mandated 24/7 cat containment have shown to increase impoundments and lead to higher euthanasia rates without actually solving issues like roaming nor reducing complaints about roaming cats. As per the RSPCA's 2018, councils with containment laws have not seen reductions in cat-related complaints or wandering. Similar outcome were shown by other sources.

I would like to conclude by going to the beginning: It is easy to blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, but the truth is, human actions have a much bigger role in creating these issues. Things like deforestation, clearing land for farming and urban sprawl are wiping out habitats for native wildlife, while making it easier for introduced species like cats to thrive. Unlike native animals, cats don't rely on specific ecosystems to survive, which means they can adapt and thrive in these altered environments. Instead of just pointing fingers at cats, we need to focus on fixing the root causes, like projects to restore habitats and bring back biodiversity.

We act responsibly, with care and compassion now and find ways to protect wildlife while balancing cats' welfare and support humane management practices, including desexing and education.

Sincerely

Rachel Sussman