

Submission
No 105

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

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One of the most heartless laws in the country forces people to abandon their animal companions. Grown men, women and children can be seen weeping as they surrender their dog or cat to the Pound. Pensioners who have to move into homes or care facilities are brutally deprived of their long-time companions. Young people too, seeking rental accommodation, are told they have to 'get rid' of their dog or cat. It is, to many, a soul-destroying decision, causing grief, anger, depression, and sometimes bringing on illness like stroke or heart attack. There is even a theory amongst some doctors that an emotional separation or loss in one's life can cause cancer. It would benefit the government to change this cruel, antiquated and uncivilised edict as it would save a great deal of money in the country's health budget. One study found that Australian ownership of cats and dogs saved approximately \$3.86 billion in health expenditure over one year. Landlords and real estate agents too must bring about change. Animals can lift our spirits and help us relax, enjoy cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure, and help increase our physical and social activity. Growing up with a pet during infancy may help to strengthen the immune system and may reduce the risk of allergies. Research has shown that owning a pet can have a number of psychological benefits. Animal companions provided a distraction from distressing symptoms, facilitated daily routine and exercise and offered acceptance and unconditional love. A study of school children showed that pet owners were more popular but also seemed more empathetic. Those who have pets, including children or adolescents, have been shown to have higher self-esteem. Teenagers who own pets have a more positive outlook on life and report less loneliness, restlessness, despair and boredom. Pet owners report less depression and appear to cope with grief, stress and loss better than nonpet owners. Our creatures are also great caregivers. They keep us company when we're sick or feeling down. They can make us feel safe while we're home alone and they keep an eye on the house while we're out. Scientists say that the health benefits of a companion dog or a cat are greatest for those who live alone, lowering the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by 36%. In family violence situations, beloved pets who are part of a household can, like adults and children, be vulnerable to abuse, and even killed by a violent partner. Abuse of the family pet can have a deeply traumatic effect, especially on children. Pets can be an issue if a person with or without children wants to leave the family space because of abuse— 80 finding alternative accommodation may be difficult. Over 50% of women experiencing domestic violence report that their companion animals were also harmed, and 33% say they delayed leaving their abuser due to concern about the safety of an animal. This is a great concern to the AJP (Animal Justice Party) in Australia and they organised an event in Parliament to find a solution to this, for some, agonising problem. The event was attended by key domestic and family violence organisations, domestic violence survivors, legal experts, the RSPCA, Lucy's Project and Safe Pets Safe Families.