

**Submission
No 120**

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

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To the Committee

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Following progress in other states, it is imperative that domestic cats are fully confined and not permitted to roam, day or night. This needs to be a Statewide implementation, or at an absolute minimum, enact enabling legislation to allow Local Councils to implement and enforce containment.

There is surely consensus that cats are a major threat to Australia's wildlife. Cats have played a leading role in most of Australia's 34 mammal extinctions since 1788 and are playing a major role in the on-going decline of over 230 threatened native species, and many non-threatened species. The loss of this biodiversity degrades our ecosystems and diminishes both the character of the places we live and the natural places we value.

Both feral and pet cats contribute to the problem.

Domestic cats are concentrated in very high densities in our cities and towns. In suburbs that do not require containment, there are up to 100 roaming and hunting cats per square kilometre.

In the bush there is only one feral cat for every three to four square kilometres, so even though each individual feral cat kills about four times more animals per year than a domestic cat, cats inflict a much higher toll per square kilometre in suburbs than in the bush. Roaming and hunting domestic cats kill 30 – 50 times more native animals per square kilometre in suburbs than feral cats kill per square kilometre in the bush:

- Total domestic cat population (Australia): 4.9 to 5.3 million
- Percentage of domestic cats that roam away from home: 71 to 78%
- Kill rate per roaming and hunting domestic cat: 186 animals per year (reptiles, birds and mammals – the majority native).

In a Media Release (2nd June 2022) the former State Environment Minister James Griffin, confirmed these statistics and that nationally, domestic cats kill approximately 390 million animals every year. Other research quotes 546 million animals in total of which 323 million animals are native species. Either number is horrific in terms of biodiversity loss and the impact on local and national extinctions.

For the benefit of our environment and it seems the health of the cats themselves, there must be greater focus on containment and if that is best managed by empowering Local Government it is imperative that happens without further delay.

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) has also consistently identified the need for stronger legislation. Their policy platform advocates for "amendments to legislation to enable

councils to more effectively manage the nuisance effects of cats on residents and wildlife, including...limiting the roaming of cats beyond their owner's property".

Containment is the only way to stop domestic cats from hunting and killing native species. The best the previous government could do was to provide a small grant and to work with the RSPCA and selected Councils to "educate and help people contain their cats". Whether or not that initiative is achieving results in the Councils selected, we would maintain that the situation is well past the education and encouragement stage, and it is time for a stronger government response and a decisive initiative.

While the current legislation does provide some onus on owners in relation to registration, microchipping and desexing of domestic cats, enforcement of those controls appears very problematic and could only be partially effective without containment.

If we are serious about a "Keeping Cats Safe at Home" project as proposed by the previous government, then it must be noted that NSW and WA are the only states in Australia that do not enable local government to consider cat containment through the state legislation. For example, the respective companion animal management legislation in Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia supports local government in creating locally specific laws for pet cat containment.

There is currently no equivalent capacity in NSW legislation to enforce cat containment. Minor amendments to the current Act could equip local governments with the necessary powers to consider and enforce cat containment at a local council level. Clearly statewide legislation would be preferred. Neither cats nor wildlife understand Local Government boundaries.

We urge you to recommend the government acts without delay and finally provides the necessary guardianship of the environment through the Act, while empowering local government and simultaneously protecting the welfare of valued companion animals. This amendment to the Act may also have far reaching impacts in relation to the Government's commitment on the extinction crisis.

We strongly encourage your support to this specific initiative and await the recommendations from the Inquiry.

Sincerely

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