

**Submission
No 130**

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

Organisation: Willoughby City Council

Date Received: 29 November 2024



COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND LEISURE

Safe City Unit

29 November 2024

Dear Committee Members,

RE: SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NSW

Willoughby City Council is committed to wildlife conservation and advocates for strengthened measures to manage cat populations. In 2004 Council established 11 Wildlife Protection Areas. These areas help to improve the management of cats on native species, and allow for a focused enforcement of cat controls available under the *Companion Animals Act*. However, there are some limitations and risks with the current situation regarding cats, and there is a need for legislative reforms to balance pet welfare with biodiversity protection.

The following is Council's response to the questions from the Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in NSW;

1. Impact of Cats on Threatened Native Animals

Cats are well-documented as significant predators, killing large numbers of native reptiles, birds, and mammals annually. Fragmented areas and the already stressed native fauna that use them are at particular risk.

Unrestricted roaming increases; predation, irresponsible pet ownership, cat abandonment, disease transmission, and ecological impact.

Local studies demonstrate the presence of many native species, such as ringtail possums, long-nosed bandicoots, golden-crowned snakes, red-crowned toadlets, and other ground-dwelling fauna that are highly vulnerable to cat predation.

2. Effectiveness of Cat Containment Policies

Current laws inadequately regulate cat roaming, cat breeding control and ownership responsibilities.

Policies for the containment of cats within the boundaries of a private property are important, particularly in high-biodiversity zones.

Effective enforcement will require legislative reform and increased Council resources.

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3. Welfare Outcomes for Contained Cats

Containment enhances cats' health and safety by reducing injury, disease, and accidents. Organisations including the RSPCA and the Australian Veterinary Association support enrichment-based containment practices to meet cats physical and mental needs.

4. Effectiveness of Community Education Programs

Education is essential to encourage responsible pet ownership and mitigate roaming cats impacts on wildlife.

Funding for public awareness campaigns would be required to promote desexing, registration, and responsible containment.

5. Implications for Local Councils

Councils face challenges in enforcing containment and managing abandoned cats, including resource and facility limitations.

Legislative clarity on enforcement powers and financial support are critical to support councils in managing cat populations effectively.

6. Effectiveness of Large-Scale Desexing Programs

Mandatory desexing can curb unowned and stray cat populations, reducing ecological and community impacts.

Subsidized programs and statewide initiatives are essential to address population growth and stray cat management.

7. Impact of Cat Containment on the Pound System

Enforcement of the *Companion Animals Act* is likely to decrease the demand for pounds, with less impounded and euthanised cats.

Adequate funding for expanded access to pounds and reducing impoundment costs is necessary to address the increased intake.

8. Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Other Australian states have demonstrated the ecological benefits of containment policies and widespread desexing.

Experiences from jurisdictions like Victoria can guide effective implementation in NSW.

9. Reducing the Feral Cat Population

Improved feral cat control, supported by smart technologies and clear distinctions between feral and domestic cats, is essential for biodiversity conservation.

Legislative reforms should address roaming domestic cats and stray cats to prevent their transition to feral populations.

10. Additional Matters

Cats contribute significantly to wildlife predation in urban and suburban areas, exacerbating the ecological damage caused by feral populations.

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Recommendations

1. Strengthen cat ownership definitions and accountability for semi-owned (stray) cats.
2. Mandate enforceable containment policies at local levels.
3. Require desexing and microchipping for all owned and adoptable cats.
4. Provide financial support for councils to enforce containment, desexing, and public education initiatives.

Willoughby City Council appreciates the Committee's consideration of these matters. We look forward to collaborative efforts to improve the welfare of cats and protect NSW's native wildlife.

Yours sincerely,

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