

Submission
No 131

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

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Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in New South Wales
Parliament of New South Wales – Legislative Council
Animal Welfare Committee

25 November 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission which responds to the Terms of Reference.

The submission will contain images created for a project, Multilingual CatEducational, that I manage on social media, and which respond or relate to some of the terms of reference.¹

(a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

There is a need for studies to assess if there is any actual significant impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings. To date the evidence appears to suggest that reports of the impact of cats on wildlife are exaggerated or cannot be substantiated.²

¹ See <https://www.facebook.com/MultilingualCatEducational/> and also <https://multilingualcateducational.weebly.com/> This project was motivated by experience within the cat rescue community in Sydney and began after discussion with a manager of a high kill Sydney pound who identified Arabic (re cat desexing) and Vietnamese (re dog microchipping) as languages for educational materials that could make a significant difference to the numbers of animals surrendered or brought into that pound. Another pound manager I spoke to also strongly endorsed, as likely to be very useful, the idea of creating resources to reach the varied cultural and linguistic groups within the Greater Sydney area. Since the project began nine years ago in 2015, cat rescuers, veterinary clinics and individuals working within communities in NSW and Victoria have downloaded and disseminated materials from the accompanying website, especially the bilingual brochures on why cats should be desexed. The social media platform statistics available in 2020 showed that more than 400,000 people viewed these materials on social media between August 2015 and July 2020.

² See the presentation by Emeritus Professor Jacqui Rand at <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Rand-Myth-cats-Wildlife-2023.pdf>.



**One million species face extinction!
And you are blaming me!**

Multilingual CatEducational

Inflated estimates of the numbers of cats in Australia and scare tactics about feline reproduction rates are relied upon to vilify cats as an alleged overarching threat to wildlife.

However, no one can quantify the number of cats in this country, or in NSW. Yet estimates, that can only be truthfully characterised as guesswork, are used to support policy and grant applications. Unfortunately such inflated figures are also used to incite hatred, ridicule and violence against cats. Cat advocates, rescuers and community cat carers who defend the rights of cats are also harassed on social media and sometimes in their homes.

Last time you went outside were you wading through cats?



Scare tactics about feline reproduction rates
can incite cruelty and hatred.

Be careful to check the authenticity of information you share.

Multilingual CatEducational

(b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Containment should ideally be voluntary not compulsory. However, in areas that are particularly wildlife sensitive e.g. near sanctuary areas for threatened species, arguably it is reasonable to contain any introduced domestic species, in immediately adjacent properties, that could pose a threat.

Potential barriers would appear to be financial and architectural. There are a range of options possible from economic DIY enclosures to more expensive professionally installed enclosure areas connected to a dwelling. However, cost of living pressures may make it harder for some people to create enclosures. Open plan dwellings being built today are also often not suitable for the safe containment of cats.

If councils want to encourage cat containment, they need to look at encouraging cat-adaptable buildings with air locks, enclosable/catnet-friendly courtyards and pergolas. Air locks incorporated in building design can help prevent door-dashing. This can be a foyer or entrance area that can be closed off to open plan areas. A laundry with an internal door and external door can be an air lock as well. An enclosed courtyard or pergola can be cat-netted to form a safe enclosure.

A night-time curfew for cats living in homes may be a better alternative to cat containment. However, “unowned” and “semi-owned” cats will be at risk as non-compliant or “illegal”, as will also occur if cat containment becomes mandatory.



(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Not all cats can be happily contained, and some may become extremely stressed if they are deprived of freedom. All animals should have a right to access fresh air and sunshine during the day.

The rights of cats to have their welfare needs met and rights respected should be clearly defined under the law whether in a Statute or in the form of a Code of Practice as occurs in the ACT which appears to be an Australian jurisdiction leading the way in this area.³ A well-

³ See *Animal Welfare (Welfare of Cats in the ACT) Code of Practice 2007*

<https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/View/di/2007-67/current/html/2007-67.html>

Scotland also has a Code of Practice specifically for the welfare of cats. See

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/code-practice-welfare-cats/>

publicised Code of Practice for the welfare of cats becomes even more imperative when cats are mandated to be contained.

(d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives

Community education needs to be proactive engagement and carried out by community members from within a specific language/cultural community. Resources should be available in all community languages as well as English. The preference of a significant number of Sydney residents to speak a language other than English in the home has been documented statistically in census data and should be respected. Some (i.e. not all) more recent migrants may not speak English fluently and may not have had access to migrant English classes due to the lack of government funding over recent years for language teaching to new arrivals

Materials in community languages have been used successfully by rescuers and veterinary clinics in several states to encourage people to have their cats desexed.

The Cat Protection Society has produced a very useful and varied range of community education materials having been funded by the NSW Government to do this.⁴ They also have a list of Sydney vet practices where community languages are spoken on their website.⁵

The following images are examples of bilingual social media posters about cat desexing circulated by Multilingual CatEducational:

⁴ See <https://catprotection.org.au/community-languages/>

⁵ See <https://catprotection.org.au/vets-where-languages-other-than-english-are-spoken/>

ما الداعي للتعميم؟
قطط آمنة متمتع بالصحة
جيران سعداء ودودون
عدد أقل من القطط المشردة في الشوارع

عدد أقل من القطط التي تقتل في مرافق احتجاز الحيوانات

WHY DESEX?

Safe, healthy cats

Happy, friendly neighbours

Less homeless cats on the streets

Less cats euthanased in pounds

English/Arabic العربية/الانجليزية
Multilingual CatEducational



絕育能讓貓兒生活得安全和健康

A SPAYED OR NEUTERED CAT IS A SAFE, HEALTHY CAT

貓兒安全又健康
Safe, healthy cats

鄰居快樂又和諧
Happy, friendly
neighbours



減少無家貓兒受虐待
Less homeless cats
persecuted on the streets

減少庇護所內安樂死
Less cats euthanased in
shelters

繁體中文 Traditional Chinese/English

Multilingual CatEducational

绝育能让猫儿生活得安全和健康 A SPAYED OR NEUTERED CAT IS A SAFE, HEALTHY CAT

猫儿安全又健康
Safe, healthy cats

邻居快乐又和谐
Happy, friendly neighbours



减少无家猫儿受虐待
Less homeless cats
persecuted on the streets

减少庇护所内安乐死
Less cats euthanased in
shelters

简体中文 Simplified Chinese/English

Multilingual CatEducational

WHY DESEX?

ZAŠTO VRŠITI STERILIZACIJU/KASTRACIJU?



Safe, healthy cats!

Happy friendly neighbours!

Less homeless cats
persecuted on the streets!

Less cats euthanased in
shelters!

Sigurne, zdrave mačke i mačori!

Zadovoljni, prijateljski susjedi!

Manje mačaka beskućnika na
ulicama!

Manje mačaka eutanazirano u
prihvatilištima!

English/Croatian
Multilingual CatEducational

©magcated

**UN GATO ESTERILIZADO O CASTRADO
ES UN GATO SANO Y SALVO**

**A SPAYED OR NEUTERED CAT
IS A SAFE, HEALTHY CAT**



©MAGcateducational

Inglés/Español
English/Spanish
Multilingual CatEducational

MÈO THIÊN HAY TRIỆT SẴN LÀ MÈO KHOẺ VÀ AN TOÀN!

A SPAYED OR NEUTERED CAT IS A SAFE, HEALTHY CAT!

**MÈO KHOẺ AN TOÀN
Safe, healthy cats**

**GIẢM BỚT CHẾT CHÓC CHO MÈO
LANG THANG NGOÀI PHỐ VÀ CHẾT
Less persecution of homeless
cats on the street**



**HÀNG XÔM VUI THÂN THIÊN
Happy, friendly neighbours**

**TRONG CÁC NƠI TẠM NÚÔI
GIỮ CHỨNG
Less cats euthanased in
shelters**

Vietnamese/English

Multilingual CatEducational



**ANG SPAYED O NEUTERED NA PUSA AY
LIGTAS AT MALUSOG NA PUSA**

A SPAYED OR NEUTERED CAT IS A SAFE, HEALTHY CAT

Tagalog/English

Multilingual CatEducational

(e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

Councils need to closely liaise with community groups and animal welfare organisations in implementing new policies.

Training of council employees when there is a change in the law is also crucial.

When the amendment to the Companion Animals Act, regarding the imposition of a new annual permit fee for keeping an entire cat, was introduced and came into force on 1 July 2020, it was clear the new amendment was being misinterpreted by some council officers and some cat rescuers as a punitive measure imposing a new ongoing penalty. In fact, it was a measure designed to encourage desexing of cats, otherwise an annual permit would need to be obtained for keeping an entire cat for which a fee would be payable. Once a cat was desexed, they fee would no longer be payable as a new annual permit for keeping an entire cat would not be needed. However, people were incorrectly believing the fee was a penalty that would be payable for life if a cat were not desexed by the age of 4 months. This episode illustrated the need to train council officers and clearly inform the community of any new obligations regarding animals in their care.

(f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs

The way to go – most effective and humane strategy – also proven as a means of improving cat welfare. Reliable ongoing funding is needed for such programs and, ideally, they need to be well publicised in community languages and through community-based print, radio and TV media as well as social media. Humour is one way to engage a target audience.



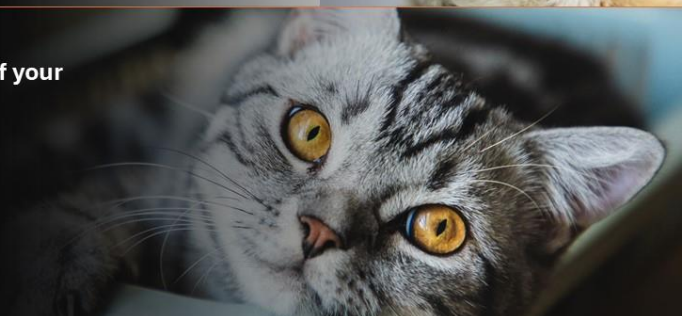
(g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system

No one should be required to kill healthy or treatable cats as part of their job. There has been a recent push to recognise the mental health risks to those who work in pounds and shelters. Mass killing of cats has long been condemned by rescuers and animal advocates and the toll on pound workers must be considered. A normal person does not want to kill trusting or fearful animals and will be severely stressed if required to do so in the workplace. An escalation in the numbers of cats arriving in pounds will have a devastating effect on pound workers and vets as well as already over-burdened cat rescuers who will not be able to keep up with a larger number of cats needing homing or re-homing.

A no-kill system protects shelter worker mental health.

Talk to your union if killing healthy or treatable companion animals is one of your job requirements. It shouldn't be.

MLCE



Mandatory cat containment is likely to lead to an escalation of convenience killing in pounds. Cats who are unowned” or “semi-owned” will be at risk of being classified as “illegal” and even more at risk of being impounded and killed. The toll is likely to be extreme on cats who will lose their lives, on shelter workers and veterinarians whose mental health will suffer, on animal guardians (whether caring for cats in the home or on the streets) who will be grief-stricken, and on animal rescuers who try to save cats from convenience killing in pounds who already have to deal with PTSD.

(h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories

In the ACT cat containment does not address the welfare of strays and “unowned” or “semi-owned” cats.

Street cat rescuers and colony carers risk being criminalised if they desex and release street cats which is a proven way to humanely manage street cat numbers. In other words, Good Samaritans risk being criminalised for assisting with the welfare of cats who do not live in homes and already have people who look out for them.

In the ACT, on “lost pets” social media pages, people are “dobbing in” cats seen out roaming even if they are not in a containment area. This identifies where roaming cats are located and enables animal abusers to seek them out to harm them. Not a welfare friendly situation at all. However, it is encouraging that, in reaction to this, caring people have been taking in lost cats temporarily to keep them safe while they try to find their guardians by taking them to a vet for a microchip check.

In Victoria a Draft Cat Management Strategy has been open for consultation in 2023 and community feedback in 2024. The final Cat Management Strategy is due for release in December 2024.⁶ The expansion of cat containment has been considered in the draft strategy and several useful proposals to assist councils and their communities are discussed.

(i) options for reducing the feral cat population

See the Stockton breakwater massacre aftermath article. Please read it. The cats were much loved community cats, incorrectly classed as feral and pests. Lethal culling of cats, however they are classified, is inhumane.⁷

Some interesting and thought-provoking reading that encourages us to consider kinder approaches to unowned, wild or "feral" cats is the talk given by Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsley who discusses five propositions about feral animals in Australia:

“Australian feral animals live and die between categories (neither wild, pet, nor livestock), in an ethical vacuum bordered by extraordinary violence AND a romance of the escapee.

The word feral means “killable” and “ungrievable.”

Ferals do not recognize themselves by that name.

The “feral” should remind us that the language of species is entangled with the language of race.

Ferals are a big distraction from the violence of animal agriculture.”⁸

(j) any other related matters

A final note about language:

Engagement with and education of community needs to be respectful and encouraging rather than punitive and judgemental.

The use of the word “responsible” has been critiqued as a potentially punitive term. It has a meaning that can shift across a spectrum between “accountable/in charge” to “culpable”/guilty”.

⁶ See <https://engage.vic.gov.au/cat-management-strategy>

⁷ See Scotney, R., Rand, J., Rohlf, V., Hayward, A., & Bennett, P. (2023). The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle. *Animals*, 13(2), 271. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13020271>.

⁸ The full text is available at the following link: <https://feralfeminisms.com/five-propositions-on-ferals/>

The use of the word “owner” in relation to someone who is responsible for the primary care of an animal has also been critiqued as reinforcing the problematic legal notion of animals as “property” or “possessions” with no rights as persons under the law.

Guardian is a term that can serve to encapsulate the more positive aspects of both accountability and care and arguably would be a better way of describing people with cats in their care in either the home or in a cat colony on the streets.

There is a need to move away from the difficulties that arise from the concept of “ownership” as it relates to cats. Defining cats as “unowned” or “semi-owned” can have dire consequences for the cats thus defined and ignores the fact that cats currently defined as “unowned” or “semi-unowned” may in fact have guardians who are committed to their care although this is not occurring inside a home.

Arguably **Guardianship** of cats needs to be defined in law. Language needs to reflect shifting community values regarding animals.

Further discussion and references:

For more detailed discussion and more exhaustive references that may be pertinent to this present NSW inquiry please refer to the submission I made to the 2020 Federal “Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia”.⁹

Thank you for considering my views

Mary Ann Gourlay

⁹ See submission 150 at the following link:
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Environment_and_Energy/Feralanddomesticcats/Submissions