Submission No 169

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Animal Liberation

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INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NSW

AN ANIMAL LIBERATION SUBMISSION
TO THE ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE

DOCUMENT DETAILS

Animal Liberation. 2024. A submission by Animal Liberation in response to the Animal Welfare Committee Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in New South Wales. Prepared by Alex Vince and Lisa J Ryan.

ABOUT ANIMAL LIBERATION

Animal Liberation has worked to permanently improve the lives of all animals for over four decades. We are proud to be Australia's longest serving animal rights organisation. During this time, we have accumulated considerable experience and knowledge relating to issues of animal welfare and animal protection in this country. We have witnessed the growing popular sentiment towards the welfare of animals, combined with a diminishing level of public confidence in current attempts, legislative or otherwise, to protect animals from egregious, undue, or unnecessary harm. Our mission is to permanently improve the lives of all animals through education, action, and outreach.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

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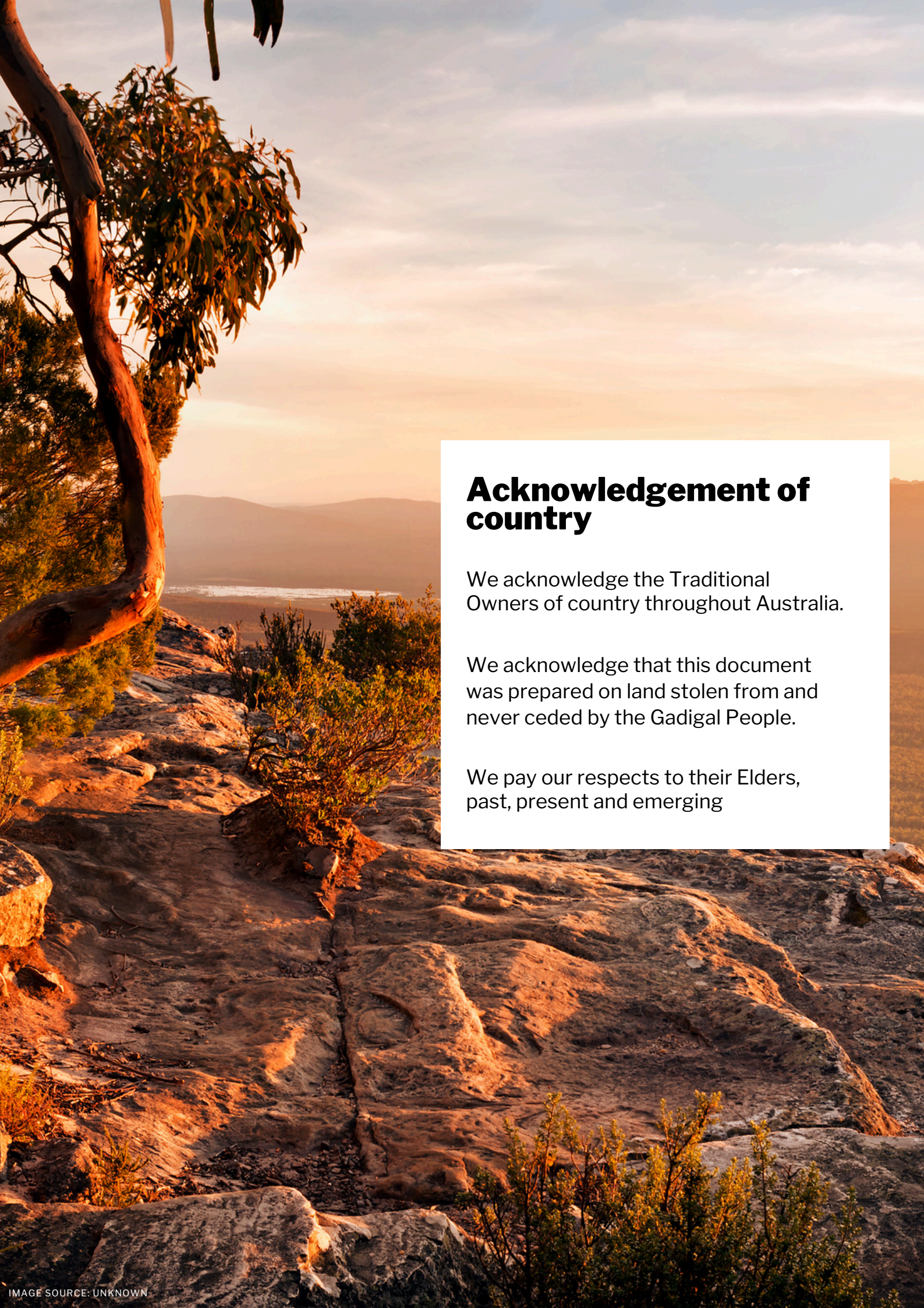

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia.

We acknowledge that this document was prepared on land stolen from and never ceded by the Gadigal People.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging

IMAGE SOURCE: UNKNOWN

Animal Liberation
Compassion without compromise

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6 December 2024

Animal Liberation welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Animal Welfare Committee's Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales. As an organisation dedicated to improving outcomes for all animals, we appreciate the Committee's examination of this complex issue and the invitation to provide the following response.

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference with particular focus on evidence-based approaches to cat management that prioritise both animal welfare and environmental protection.

Our response is informed by:

a. Contemporary peer-reviewed research;

b. Practical experience in companion animal welfare;

c. Significant experience in regard to cats and their outcomes in the pound and shelter system;

d. An in-depth understanding of the multifaceted risks, impacts and threats to native wildlife;

e. Recognition of the complex relationship between cats and Australian ecosystems and;

f. Understanding of the social and cultural significance of cats in Australian society.

Australia has one of the highest rates of companion animal guardianship globally, with approximately 69% of households including at least one companion animal. Cats play a significant role in this landscape, with an estimated 5.3 million domestic cats living in Australian households. These animals are frequently regarded as family members and are protected by various state-based statutes that prohibit cruelty while establishing varying duties of care.

While acknowledging concerns about the impact of cats on native wildlife, we emphasise the need for evidence-based, humane approaches to population management. Our submission critically examines current practices and policies, highlighting areas where improvements can be made to benefit both cats and native species.

The following submission provides detailed responses to the Terms of Reference ('TOR'), incorporating:

1. Analysis of current research and evidence;
2. Examination of existing policies and their effectiveness;
3. Consideration of welfare implications;
4. Practical recommendations for improvement and;
5. Discussion of systemic barriers and solutions.

We request that it be noted from the outset that while the following submission intends to provide a detailed and evidence-based commentary on the provided Terms of Reference, its contents do not contain an exhaustive commentary or assessment. Instead, our submission is intended to provide an examination of select areas of key concern. As such, the absence of discussion, consideration or analyses of any particular aspect or component of the inquiry must not be read as or considered indicative of consent or acceptance. Instead, our submission focuses on aspects that we believe warrant critical attention and response.

We trust this submission will assist the Committee in developing comprehensive, humane, and effective approaches to cat population management in NSW.

Alex Vince

Campaign Director

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia stands at a critical juncture in companion animal management, particularly regarding cat populations in New South Wales. This submission provides a comprehensive evidence-based examination and analysis of all the broad considerations and strategies that prioritise both animal welfare and environmental protection.

Key findings and recommendations include:

i. **Complex ecological context**

a. Domestic cats play a nuanced role in urban ecosystems;

b. 93% of prey caught are introduced species;

c. Urban cats catch a median of three native animals over six months and;

d. Cats may play a beneficial role in controlling introduced species.

ii. **Containment policy challenges**

a. Current approaches often fail to address underlying socio-economic factors;

b. 31% of local government councils have implemented movement restrictions;

c. Significant barriers exist, including structural and financial limitations and constraints;

d. Cultural and social norms about cat roaming remain deeply ingrained.

iii. **Welfare considerations**

a. Containment policies must prioritise cats' welfare, including their physical and mental needs;

b. Environmental enrichment is crucial for confined cats and must be incorporated into any policy on cat containment;

c. Welfare implications of containment must be carefully and transparently evaluated.

iv.

Recommended approaches

Successful containment policies require three key elements:

a. Legislative structure: State-wide legislation must maintain consistent definitions and requirements. This framework should include appropriate exemptions for medical and behavioural needs, ensuring flexibility in implementation;

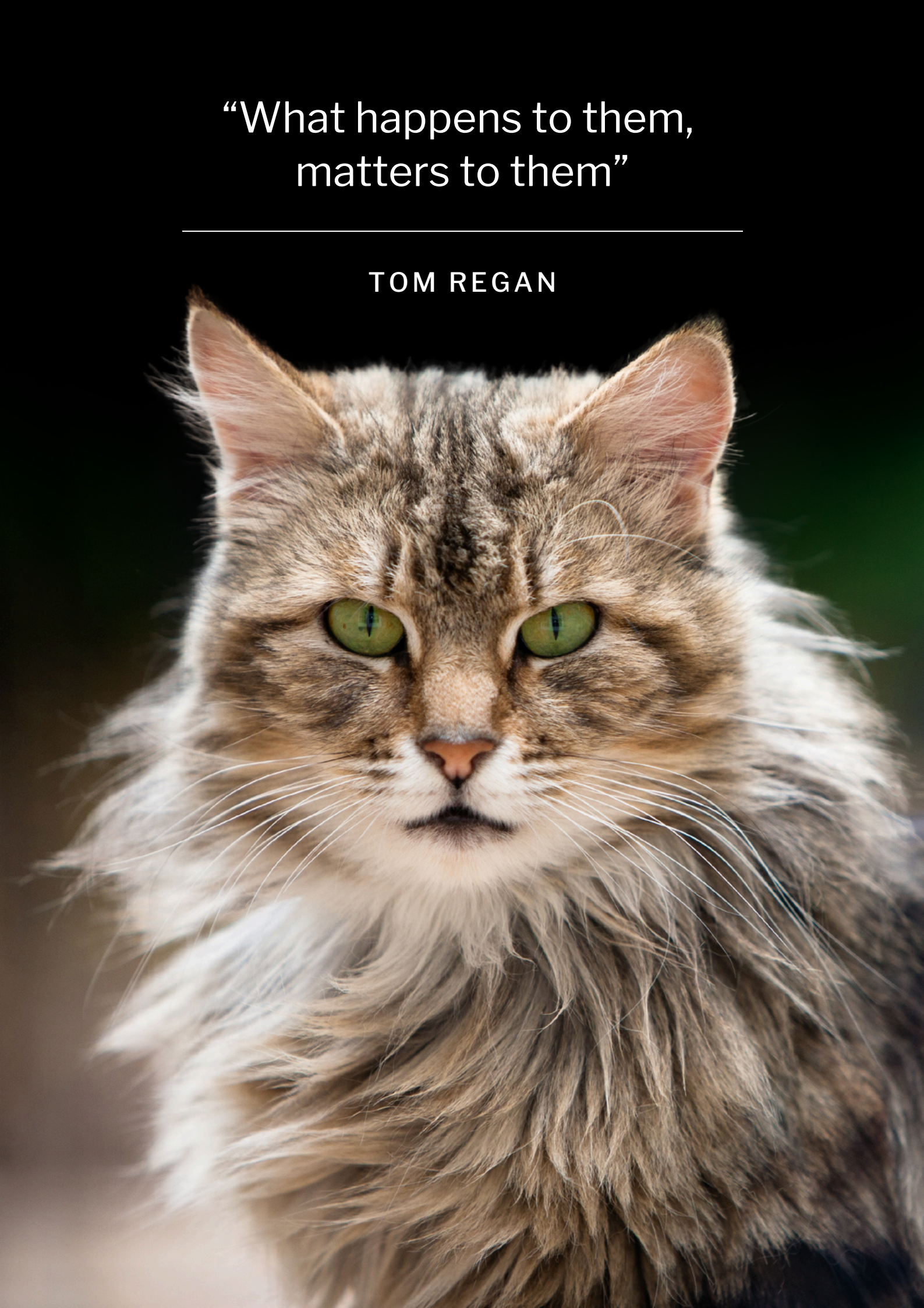
b. Support systems: Effective policies incorporate comprehensive support mechanisms, including community education, financial assistance for containment infrastructure, and access to behavioural support services. These systems help address barriers to implementation and ensure equitable access to containment solutions;

c. Staged implementation: A phased approach allows for appropriate transition periods and focuses initially on new cat registrations. This strategy enables communities to adapt gradually while maintaining progress toward containment goals.

This submission emphasises the need for balanced, evidence-based solutions that consider animal welfare, environmental protection, and broader social contexts. Our recommendations aim to assist the Committee in developing comprehensive, humane, and effective approaches to cat population management in NSW.

“What happens to them, matters to them”

TOM REGAN



INTRODUCTION

Australia is home to one of the highest rates of companion animal guardianship in the world (AMA 2019; NSW Government 2021), with approximately 69% of Australian households including at least one companion animal (RSPCA Australia 2023a). These relationships extend beyond guardianship: these animals are frequently woven into the fabric of contemporary Australian families, offering companionship, affection, and, in many instances, profound health benefits (Ma and McLeod 2023). This bond is further reinforced by state-based legislation that mandates humane treatment and establishes duties of care (Riley 2018).

POLICY CONTEXT

This inquiry comes at a critical time when transparent and evidence-based approaches to cat management are increasingly necessary. It serves as an opportunity to embed transparency and evidence-based strategies in emerging approaches to cat management. Animal Liberation is committed to enriching this discourse with insights grounded in:

a. **A nuanced understanding** of cats' welfare needs, advocating for humane solutions that safeguard and prioritise their well-being;

b. **Robust environmental protection** measures that conserve native wildlife populations;

c. **Recognition and integration** of community needs and expectations through collaborative engagement;

d. Reliance on **rigorous, impartial, and transparent scientific evidence** to guide policy directions and;

e. **Acknowledgement and proactive approach** towards resolving practical implementation challenges faced by guardians.

Our submission aims to provide a balanced and holistic perspective, ensuring that any management approach does not solely focus on short-term goals but considers long-term welfare outcomes, environmental sustainability, community engagement, and ethical considerations.

SCOPE OF RESPONSE

This document is informed by contemporary research, practical experience in companion animal protection, and recognition of the complex relationship between cats and Australian ecosystems.

Our response to the TOR aims to:

a. Provide evidence-based analysis of current management approaches;

b. Examine welfare implications of various policy options;

c. Consider practical implementation challenges;

d. Offer constructive recommendations for improvement and;

e. Address systemic barriers to effective cat management.

Throughout this submission, we highlight the necessity for comprehensive policy development that recognises both the welfare of individual animals and broader socio-economic considerations. We provide an examination of current practices, draw attention to challenges encountered during implementation, and offer policy recommendations that prioritise both effective management and positive welfare outcomes. This response underscores the importance of tackling underlying structural barriers and systemic inequities that can impede the progress of well-designed policies. This revised introduction strengthens the submission by:

1. **Setting the scene**: Providing up-to-date statistics and emphasising the bonds between humans and companion animals;

2. **Detailing the policy context**: Clearly articulating the multifaceted objectives of the inquiry and how Animal Liberation aims to contribute to this discourse;

3. **Outlining the scope**: Stating the analytical approach, emphasis on welfare considerations, and the comprehensive nature of the response to the TOR;

4. **Balancing animal welfare and environmental protection**: Explicitly addressing the need for balanced, humane approaches;

5. **Acknowledging systemic issues**: Recognising broader socio-economic factors and the necessity to address structural barriers for effective policy implementation.


“Not responding is a response - we are equally responsible for what we don't do”
JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

SECTION ONE

RESPONSES TO TERMS

TERM 1: the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

TERM 1:

THE IMPACT OF CATS ON THREATENED NATIVE ANIMALS IN METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL SETTINGS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between domestic cats and Australian wildlife requires careful, transparent, and impartial consideration of the evidence. Prior to making claims or mandating policy requirements, this topic demands an evidence-based analysis that acknowledges both the complexity of urban ecosystems and the need for effective conservation measures.

While cats are among Australia's most popular companion animals (Crowley et al. 2020a), concerns about their impact on native wildlife have led to increasing debate about appropriate management approaches (Loss and Marra 2018; Lynn et al. 2019). In the section below, we respond to Term 1 by exploring the nuance of the impacts cats can have on native species, with a focus on evaluating both metropolitan and regional settings.

1.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The predecessors of today's domestic cats were imported and introduced to Australia by colonists aboard the First Fleet (Cushing 2017; Riley et al. 2021), primarily to control mice and rabbit populations (Smith 1999). Their value in doing so can be gauged by the legislative protection afforded to cats at the time, who were described as the "final solution" to Australia's burgeoning rabbit population (Rolls 1969; Smith 1999; Hillier and Byrne 2016; Riley 2018). In addition to the release of other introduced predators, such as mongoose (Peacock and Abbott 2010; Peacock et al. 2021; Kilvert 2023), large numbers of cats were deliberately released in attempts to combat the “rabbit plague” (O'Brien and Thomas 1998; Coman 1999; Abbott 2008; Abbott et al. 2014).

1.2.1 CONTEMPORARY ROLES AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Though cats are still regarded more as commensals than companions in some regions (Driscoll et al. 2007; Gray and Young 2011), with large numbers continuing to be released to act as biological rodent control agents elsewhere in the world (Oladipo 2021), their primary role has shifted to companionship in many societies (Spencer et al. 2016; Crowley et al. 2020). As companions, cats offer their guardians company, affection, and, in some cases, provide human health benefits (Qureshi et al. 2009; Amiot et al. 2016; Ogechi et al. 2016).

However, emerging awareness of their impact on native species and growing conservationist sentiments in the late 20th century saw attitudes towards cats take a particularly negative turn in Australia (Ginn et al. 2014). Ecologists have developed a heightened awareness of the ecological harm that can occur when

introduced species are released into or otherwise enter novel environments (Soulé 1990; Mooney 2001; Seebens et al. 2018; Smith et al. 2018; Hanley and Roberts 2019).

1.3 CURRENT EVIDENCE

1.3.1 URBAN PREDATION PATTERNS

Recent empirical research provides important context for understanding the actual impact of cats in urban environments:

Table 1: Metropolitan and regional predation patterns

SETTING	PREDATION PATTERN	PRIMARY PREY	IMPACT LEVEL
Metropolitan	93% introduced species, with the median number of three native animals caught over a six-month period	Introduced species, such as mice, rats, and rabbits	Lower impact on native species
Regional	Higher native prey ratio	Various native species	Higher conservation concern

1.3.2 POPULATION DISTRUBITION

Research indicates varying densities of free-roaming cats across NSW, influenced by:

a. Human population density (e.g., populations are higher in urban areas like Campbelltown);

b. Proximity to protected areas (i.e., populations are lower in areas like Blue Mountains) and;

c. Available habitat types (Davey et al. 2023).

1.4 METROPOLITAN IMPACTS

1.4.1 URBAN POPULATION DYNAMICS AND PREDATION PATTERNS

The primary argument made today against outdoor cats is that they prey on wildlife that humans value (Loss et al. 2013; Doherty et al. 2015). Although concerns about this date back to antiquity (Engels 1999), cats were traditionally valued more for controlling rodent populations than for any perceived threat to

other species (Blaisdell 1993). Recent empirical research provides important context for understanding the actual impact of cats in urban environments. Research demonstrates that domestic cats in urban areas predominantly catch introduced species:

a. 93% of mammals caught are introduced species (e.g., mice, rats, and rabbits);

b. The median number of native animals caught by individual cats is three (3) over a six-month period;

c. Dogs catch a higher proportion of native species (~62%) compared to cats (~47%) (Franklin et al. 2021).

As such, the relationship between cats and urban wildlife requires more nuanced understanding than simple mathematical extrapolations can provide. Several critical factors must be considered:

1. The ecological role of domestic cats in controlling introduced species, who can pose significant threats to native wildlife;

2. The varying hunting behaviours among individual cats, with many domestic cats engaging in minimal or no hunting;

3. The different dynamics of urban versus natural environments, including prey availability and type;

4. The influence of responsible guardianship practices on hunting behaviour.

1.4.2 POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Research indicates varying densities of free-roaming cats across NSW, with distribution patterns strongly influenced by several factors. Urban areas like Campbelltown show higher concentrations of cats, correlating with human population density. Conversely, areas proximate to protected lands, such as the Blue Mountains, demonstrate lower population densities (Davey et al., 2023). These patterns reflect the strong association between cat populations and available habitat types.

1.4.3 MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

Various approaches have been implemented in metropolitan areas, including:

a. Cat-free zones;

b. Bell requirements;

c. Dusk-to-dawn curfews and;

d. Indoor containment mandates (Baker 2001; Franklin et al. 2021).

In many countries outside of Australia, trap-neuter-return ('TNR') is used to manage urban cat populations (Franklin et al. 2021). This method involves desexing cats and returning them to where they were captured, ideally with an identified caregiver (Hughes and Slater 2002; Hughes et al. 2002; Levy et al. 2003; Levy et al. 2014; Winograd 2015). However, TNR is illegal in Australia, and public concerns about its impact on native wildlife have hindered trials of this approach (Rand et al. 2019b), despite evidence showing that it can reduce cat populations under certain conditions and with sufficient effort (Nutter 2006; Tan et al. 2017; Swarbrick and Rand 2018; Franklin et al. 2021). As a result, uncertainty about the effects of cats on native wildlife is currently influencing the development and implementation of strategies to control urban cat populations (Barratt 1997; Woods et al. 2003; van Heezik et al. 2010).

1.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The management of cats in Australia must be grounded in a comprehensive, regionally-adapted approach that balances ecological considerations with community values, ethical treatment of animals, and the latest scientific research. By doing so, we can work towards a sustainable and humane strategy that mitigates the impacts of cats on native wildlife while acknowledging their complex ecological roles.

The following recommendations are drawn from the contents of this section:

a. **Evidence-based policy development**: Effective management of cat populations requires a nuanced approach that prioritises evidence-based policy development. Rather than responding to perceived threats, strategies should reflect the real-world impacts of cats on ecosystems:

    i. Impact assessment: Management plans should be based on comprehensive and impartial, science-based assessments of actual predation patterns, distinguishing between the impacts on introduced and native species;

    ii. Holistic evaluation: A balanced view of cats' ecological role is essential, acknowledging both their detrimental impacts and their potential benefits in controlling other introduced species;

b. **Research priorities**: Continuous and transparent assessment is integral to refining management strategies:

    i. Monitoring programs: A robust foundation for research involves the establishment of systematic monitoring programs, which track cat populations, prey species, and environmental conditions to evaluate control method efficacy;

    ii. Urban ecology: Further research into urban ecology, with a focus on cats' interactions within these ecosystems, is required. This can inform policies that

ii. better manage cat populations in both urban and peri-urban areas;

iii. Environmental impact tracking: Both the negative and any positive environmental impacts of cats should be tracked, providing a comprehensive understanding of their ecological roles and informing sustainable control measures.

c. **Community engagement**: Community involvement is crucial for the success and sustainability of management measures:

i. Guardianship education: Public education campaigns should focus on fostering responsible guardianship, promoting behaviours that reduce stray cat populations, and encouraging voluntary compliance with containment policies;

ii. Transparency and communication: Providing communities with well-researched, evidence-based information is essential for garnering public support and ensuring that management strategies are understood and accepted;

iii. Local participation: Engaging local communities in the development and implementation of management strategies ensures that these reflect community values, needs, and input, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for local solutions.

TERM 2: the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

TERM 2:

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CAT CONTAINMENT POLICIES INCLUDING POTENTIAL BARRIERS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Policy tools or instruments are defined as “the techniques of governance that help define and achieve government goals" (Howlett 2017). Substantive policy tools, such as regulation and taxation, have a direct impact on production, consumption, and distribution (de Vries 2021). In contrast, procedural tools influence these areas indirectly and can include public participation and actions that shape the policy-making process without determining its outcome (Howlett 2017). As such, procedural policy tools “focus on altering political or policy behaviour in the process of articulation or implementation" (Howlett 2019).

Research on companion animals largely focuses on the positive behavioural dynamics between humans and domestic cats, particularly the attachment and affection that form through these interactions (Rochlitz 2007; Friedmann and Son 2009). This body of work often assumes, without much scrutiny, that it is both reasonable and humane for people to keep cats as domestic pets, confined to their homes to some extent (Broom and Fraser 2015). While there have been attempts to mandate cat containment in Australia, these have resulted in increased complaints and the ongoing trapping and impounding of cats (Cotterell et al. 2024). Such measures have historically also driven up kill rates in pounds and shelters, and the lack of clear regulation governing the hiring out of cat traps can lead to poor cat welfare outcomes. Moreover, containment measures often fail due to a lack of understanding of the root causes of the issue, particularly the socio-economic factors influencing cat guardianship and management (Dutton-Regester and Rand 2024).

2.2 CAT CONTAINMENT

The domestication of cats over millennia has been grounded in the understanding that they are not fully deprived of their natural behaviours while under human care (Korsgaard, 2018). Unlike exotic animals confined in captive settings (e.g., animals kept in zoos and other commercial operations), domestic cats can continue to express their autonomy to some extent (Collard 2020; Peng and Broom 2021). This perception of cat domestication informs the discussion on containment, highlighting both opportunities and challenges in implementing such policies.

2.2.1 GUARDIANS’ CONTAINMENT PRACTICES

Recent research provides context for considering the effectiveness and acceptance of containment by cat guardians:

a. **Practices**: Approximately 51% of cat guardians fully contain their cats, while 18% implement night containment, indicating a significant portion already recognises the benefits of containment (McLeod et al., 2019; Rand et al., 2023);

b. **Influencing factors**: The decision to contain cats is influenced by various factors, such as guardians' knowledge of cat behaviour, concern for the cats' safety, and community considerations (Crowley et al. 2020a). These factors should guide policy development, focusing on supporting existing positive practices;

c. **Demographic differences**: Urban environments and rental properties show higher rates of containment due to the constraints of living spaces and regulations (Tan et al. 2020).

2.2.2 CONTAINMENT PRACTICES BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments in Australia are implementing various approaches to restrict cat movements:

a. **Survey findings**: A national survey by the Threatened Species Recovery Hub ('TSRH') revealed that approximately 63% of 240 surveyed local government areas ('LGAs') have provisions addressing nuisance or roaming cats, with 31% implementing containment restrictions through curfews, 24-hour containment, or prohibition zones (Nou et al., 2021);

b. **Targeted vs. blanket restrictions**: Curfews tend to be widespread, while 24-hour containment and prohibition zones are often specific to areas near significant conservation sites (Nou et al., 2021). This targeted approach recognises the need for context-specific solutions;

c. **Challenges**: Implementing containment policies is not without obstacles. For example, complaints about cat management practices, particularly trapping, impounding and killing, indicate potential for public pushback (Hancock 2021). These challenges are reflected in other jurisdictions, such as South Australia, where the government recently reviewed its *Dog and Cat Management Act* to address operational issues while balancing stakeholder interests (Government of South Australia, 2024);

d. **Welfare considerations**: Comprehensive approaches should consider animal welfare, as outlined in the International Declaration of Responsibilities to Cats, which states that cats are sentient beings deserving humane treatment (International Cat Care 2019). Policies must incorporate:

    i. Recognition of all cats, including 'feral' cats, as part of the population that requires humane management;

    ii. Encouragement of responsible guardianship, including neutering, microchipping, and provision of preventative healthcare, tailored to

ii. accommodate socio-economic needs and the effective use of annual funding NSW councils' receive from animal registration fees;

iii. Identification of neutered cats and;

iv. Ethical and humane decision making in population management.

2.2.3 PROPOSED NSW LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

The NSW Companion Animals Amendment (Cats) Bill 2023 ('the Bill') proposes a comprehensive statewide approach to cat management, drawing on successful elements from other jurisdictions like the ACT where cats must be contained to the owner's property in certain suburbs. Key elements of the proposed legislation include:

a. **Registration and reunification**: Registration reform to improve cat identification and reunification with guardians, building on existing NSW Companion Animals Register requirements. This would help address current gaps in reuniting cats with guardians and assist in reducing unnecessary euthanasia rates in pounds;

b. **Standardised containment requirements**: Clear definition of cat containment requirements to provide consistency across the state, rather than the current patchwork of council-by-council approaches that can create confusion for guardians, and often leads to poor cat welfare outcomes. The Bill sets out specific containment obligations while acknowledging the need for appropriate exemptions;

c. **Implementation and enforcement resources**: Providing additional funding for local governments to effectively implement and enforce containment measures is critical. This addresses a key barrier identified in other jurisdictions, where lack of resources has undermined enforcement efforts (see section 2.3 below). For example, the ACT experience demonstrates that without adequate enforcement resources, even well-designed containment policies have limited effectiveness;

d. **Medical and behavioural exemptions**: The Bill provides provisions for exemptions where appropriate, recognising that some cats may be unable to cope with containment due to behavioural or other factors. This aligns with RSPCA recommendations that exemptions should be allowed for cats certified by qualified veterinarians or behaviourists as unable to cope with containment (RSPCA Australia 2023);

e. **Timely microchip scanning**; Requirements for pounds to scan for microchips within 24 hours will improve the chances of reuniting cats with their guardians. This addresses current issues where delays in scanning can result in unnecessary euthanasia of owned cats.

This comprehensive reform package aims to balance animal welfare considerations with environmental protection goals while providing clear, consistent requirements across NSW. The proposed transition period would allow time for community education and support programs to be implemented before enforcement begins.

2.3 BARRIERS TO CAT CONTAINMENT

Despite the increasing recognition of the benefits of cat containment, several significant barriers exist that impede its implementation. These barriers are multifaceted, ranging from structural constraints to community resistance. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive, supportive, and adaptable policy frameworks.

2.3.1 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

A number of structural barriers exist to effective cat containment. These include:

a. **Housing constraints**: The housing market in NSW poses a significant barrier, with only a small portion of rental properties allowing companion animals (Anon. 2020). This housing scarcity creates a cascading effect, making containment particularly difficult for low-income households to afford and implement. Compounding this issue is the general lack of support systems for transitioning cats to contained environments, further intensifying the problem (Puurunen et al. 2020);

b. **Tenancy laws**: Current tenancy laws in NSW often prevent effective cat containment, particularly in rental properties (Power 2008). Responsible guardianship involves adapting living spaces to accommodate animals, which necessitates both knowledge and the ability to implement it (Brown and Dilley 2012; Westgarth et al. 2019). Addressing this requires systemic reform in tenancy legislation, encompassing:

    i. Rental property modifications: Clear guidelines for pet-friendly modifications that also facilitate containment;

    ii. Support for guardians: Assistance in selecting suitable and mobile containment infrastructure, offering financial or implementation support.

2.3.2 FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

The financial burden associated with cat containment measures presents an obstacle for many guardians:

a. **High costs**: Cat-proof fencing or enclosures, essential for effective containment, can be prohibitively expensive for some cat guardians (APWF 2022);

b. **Limited access to veterinary care**: Financial constraints are just one barrier among many that prevent access to veterinary care (Kogan et al. 2021; Wiltzius et al. 2018). These include:

    i. Clinic hours and location restrictions;

    ii. Transportation availability and equipment;

    iii. Cultural and language differences and;

    iv. Communication issues between guardians and veterinarians.

    To address this, community-based veterinary programs have been established to improve access in underserved areas, helping reduce overpopulation, enhance animal welfare, and positively impact community health overall (Hodges 2012; Kogan et al. 2021).

2.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENRICHMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Effective containment must ensure the welfare of confined cats:

a. Habitat Requirements: Cats require adequate space, resources, and environmental enrichment to thrive when contained (Rochlitz, 2007). Policies should address these factors by ensuring:

    i. Vertical space for climbing;

    ii. Hiding places;

    iii. Scratching posts and;

    iv. Opportunities for play and exploration.

Without these provisions, confined cats may experience stress and behavioural issues, which undermines the very purpose of containment.

2.3.4 AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

Many guardians are uninformed about containment practices or may resist policies due to:

a. **Limited awareness**: The importance of containment and available containment options is not widely recognised;

b. **Resistance to change**: Guardians may view containment as unnatural, affecting their willingness to comply.

Educational initiatives and community engagement efforts can mitigate these gaps, informing guardians of both the benefits and methods of safe containment.

2.3.5 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS

Cultural practices and community attitudes often resist changes to traditional pet-keeping arrangements:

a. **Cultural resistance**: Allowing cats to roam freely is deeply ingrained in some communities, with roaming seen as a form of freedom and autonomy (MacDonald et al. 2015);

b. **Demographics and attitudes**: Guardianship demographics and attitudes influence cats' lifestyles, with some regions and groups more likely to support night-time or permanent indoor containment (Eyles and Mulvaney 2020; Foreman-Worsley et al. 2022).

Policy implementation must approach these cultural differences with sensitivity and engagement to foster acceptance of containment as responsible guardianship.

2.3.6 CONFLICTING VALUES AND PERSPECTIVES

Effective cat management policies need to reconcile diverse interests:

a. **Stakeholder conflict**: Animal control agencies, rescue groups, conservation organisations, and local governments often have differing priorities regarding cat management strategies (Hadidian 2021);

b. **Balancing interests**: Policies must seek common ground, balancing wildlife protection with animal welfare and community needs;

c. **Compliance issues**: Enforcement and compliance are critical. Local governments often face resource constraints that limit their ability to effectively enforce containment regulations (RSPCA Australia 2018a).

By addressing these barriers, cat containment policies can be more equitably and effectively implemented, ensuring both the welfare of cats and the protection of native wildlife. The path forward involves a holistic approach, including tenancy law reforms, educational support, adaptable enforcement

strategies, and a keen focus on community engagement and scientific communication. Success requires clear definitions, improved public awareness through targeted education programs, and stakeholder consultation to incorporate diverse community values into policy decisions. This comprehensive strategy must be supported by effective science communication to build public understanding and acceptance of management approaches.

2.3.7 CHALLENGES IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The practical implementation of cat containment policies presents significant challenges, primarily due to resource constraints faced by local councils:

a. **Resource limitations**: Local councils often lack the necessary personnel, funding, expertise, and equipment to enforce containment requirements. Enforcement officers are tasked with numerous responsibilities, which dilutes their focus and capacity to ensure containment compliance (Zeppel 2011);

b. **Capacity**: As noted, local governments often lack both the resources and capacity for comprehensive enforcement (RSPCA Australia 2018a; Legge et al. 2020; NESP 2021), leading to inconsistencies in policy implementation and enforcement. This gap can result in widespread non-compliance, undermining the effectiveness of containment policies;

c. **Jurisdictional discrepancies**: Variations in containment policies between neighbouring council areas can cause confusion among guardians, as residents may encounter differing regulations when moving within or between LGAs (Nou et al. 2021). This inconsistency leads to enforcement difficulties and potential disparities in regulation adherence;

d. **Monitoring compliance**: The practical challenges of monitoring compliance are substantial. Traditional approaches like patrols, community complaints, and random checks have limitations, including:

    i. Limited reach and visibility in all parts of the community, particularly in low-density or rural areas;

    ii. Difficulties in distinguishing between compliant and non-compliant cats without diligent inspection.

2.4 OUTCOMES OF CAT CONTAINMENT

Cat containment policies aim to mitigate the environmental impact of cats, balancing wildlife conservation with animal welfare. However, improper implementation of such mandates can lead to several adverse outcomes:

2.4.1 INCREASED ABANDONMENT AND SURRENDERS

a. **Community cat programs**: Evidence demonstrates that well-managed community cat programs can enhance both cat and community welfare. Participants in these programs have reported reduced stress, improved cat welfare, and a sense of empowerment. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives largely depends on guardian compliance with containment rules (Crawford et al. 2023);

b. **Surrender and abandonment**: If cat guardians encounter difficulties transitioning their cats to a contained lifestyle or complying with containment regulations, there may be a significant rise in cat abandonment or surrenders. This scenario could lead to an increase in homeless cats and place additional strain on already overcrowded shelters (RSPCA Australia 2023).

2.4.2 STRAIN ON SHELTERS AND RESCUE GROUPS

a. **Capacity limitations**: The influx of surrendered or abandoned cats could overwhelm animal shelters and rescue organisations, many of which are already operating at or beyond capacity. These organisations play a critical role in rehoming animals, helping to alleviate the financial burden on local councils by managing surrendered companion animals and reducing unnecessary euthanasia rates (Bowring 2022).

2.4.3 ADVERSE IMPACTS ON ANIMAL WELFARE

a. **Confinement stress**: The confinement of cats, whether for containment or sheltering, can cause significant stress if not managed correctly. Numerous studies emphasise the importance of providing an enriched environment for cats in confinement, with appropriate noise control, olfactory stimulation, and consistent lighting to mitigate stress-related behaviours (Rochlitz 2007; Stella et al. 2014; Stella et al. 2015);

b. **Humane implementation**: Policies must prioritise animal welfare by ensuring that containment measures align with best practices. Cats should be provided with environments that cater to their physical and psychological needs, enabling them to express natural behaviours while minimising stress (RSPCA Australia 2023);

c. **Cat-guardian relationships**: Studies on relationships between cats and their guardians during COVID-19 lockdowns highlight the potential for containment to alter behaviour and dynamics. While some cats adapt well, others may experience increased stress or behaviour changes (Rand et al. 2023).

2.4.4 DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS ON DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS

a. **Economic challenges**: The financial implications of containment, particularly for low-income families, can result in higher rates of cat surrender. Veterinary care, identification, desexing, and the installation of cat-proof barriers present significant financial hurdles (Dutton-Regester and Rand, 2024);

b. **Housing limitations**: Tenants in the rental market face additional challenges, as obtaining 'pet-friendly' properties or landlord permission to make containment-friendly modifications is often difficult (RSPCA Australia 2023).

2.4.5 INFLUENCE ON CAT BEHAVIOUR AND ADOPTABILITY

a. **Containment and behaviour**: Effective containment, when paired with positive handling practices, can enhance cat welfare and adoptability. Cats housed in enriched environments exhibit more desirable traits that prospective adopters seek, such as friendliness and playfulness (Gourkow and Fraser 2006);

b. **Societal norms**: Guardian attitudes towards containment are influenced by concerns for cat quality of life and the societal norms surrounding cat guardianship. Effective policies must address these concerns through education and evidence-based communication (Rand et al., 2023).

2.4.6 THE NEED FOR A BALANCED APPROACH

a. **Gradual shifts**: Implementing containment policies requires a nuanced approach recognising that immediate change in guardian behaviour may not be feasible. Gradual engagement with cat guardians, focusing on voluntary compliance, can lead to incremental reductions in cat depredation (Linklater et al. 2023);

b. **Conservation vs. welfare**: Balancing wildlife conservation with cat welfare requires moving beyond false dichotomies. Both objectives support animal welfare - protecting sentient native wildlife while ensuring the wellbeing of equally sentient contained cats. This integrated approach recognises the intrinsic value and capacity for suffering in all animals, whether domestic or wild (Ramp and Bekoff 2015; Farnworth et al. 2018). Evidence of sentience across species reinforces that wildlife conservation and cat welfare are complementary rather than competing priorities (Soriano et al. 2017; Yashphe and Kubotera 2017);

c. **Context-specific solutions**: Management strategies should be tailored to local contexts. Stricter containment might be appropriate in biodiverse areas, while community engagement and TNR programs could be better suited for urban environments (Hadidian 2021).

2.5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

A comprehensive statewide approach, rather than a council-by-council system, would provide more consistent and effective outcomes. The NSW Greens have proposed a model similar to that implemented in the ACT, featuring:

a. **Delayed implementation** of at least 12 months after passing legislation;

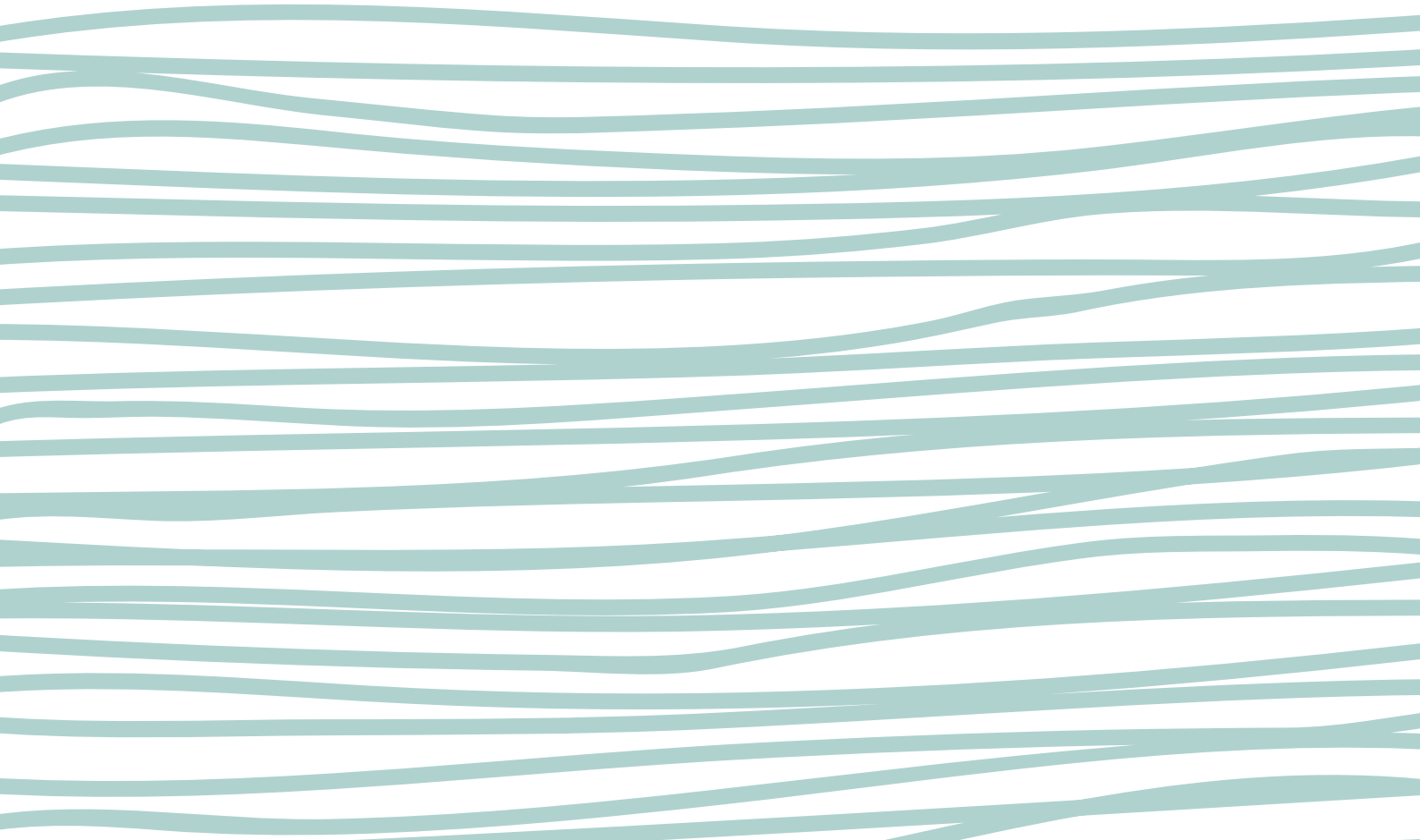
b. **Phased compliance approach** to maximise positive welfare outcomes;

c. **State government responsibility** for implementation and enforcement and;

d. **Different approaches** for owned, semi-owned and unowned cats (Boyd 2024).

In conclusion, Animal Liberation recognises several challenges in implementing measures to contain cats in NSW. Financial constraints, lack of awareness and education, cultural and social norms, and enforcement and compliance issues all contribute to the complexity of cat containment efforts (RSPCA Australia 2023a). Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between government agencies, community organisations, and stakeholders to develop holistic and effective solutions that prioritise the welfare of both cats and communities.

TERM 3: welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions



TERM 3:

WELFARE OUTCOMES FOR CATS UNDER CONTAINED CONDITIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The welfare implications of cat containment policies require careful consideration within the broader context of companion animal management. While containment measures are often proposed as solutions to wildlife protection concerns, their impact on feline welfare must be thoroughly evaluated using evidence-based approaches that consider both physical and behavioural needs (van Eeden et al. 2021). Such policies must also be assessed in the context of difficulties with compliance (McLeod et al. 2015) and implementing enforcement (Toukhsati et al. 2012).

Recent research demonstrates that successful containment outcomes depend on multiple factors, including:

a. physical environment design;

b. individual cat temperament;

c. guardian resources and;

d. implementation methods (Crowley et al. 2020; Chamberlain et al. 2023).

While 51% of participating guardians already fully contain their cats and an additional 18% implement night containment (Rand et al. 2024), ensuring positive welfare outcomes requires careful consideration of both physical and psychological needs.

3.2 CAT CONTAINMENT IN AUSTRALIA

While an intention to perform a behaviour arises from a positive evaluation that fuels desire and impulse, whether the behaviour is carried out depends on competing plans, motives, and impulses (McLeod et al. 2020). As a result, cat containment practices differ widely across cultures and regions (Chamberlain et al. 2024). A recent national review of studies in Australia found containment rates around 29% (Legge et al. 2020), though it is unclear if the definition of containment in this study includes the various ways cat roaming is managed (van Eeden et al. 2021). In Australia, containment rates are higher than in comparable countries; for example, fewer than 10% of New Zealanders restrict their cats to their properties (Bruce et al. 2019; Linklater et al. 2019). Over half of the respondents to a recent Australian survey fully contain their cats, with an additional third containing them at night (van Eeden et al. 2021). Australians also report greater concern for cats' impact on wildlife and more support for

restrictions on free-roaming cats (Hall et al. 2016).

Cat containment in Australia seems to have risen since advocacy campaigns began in the late 1990s (Hall et al. 2016; Lilith et al. 2006; McLeod et al. 2015; Linklater et al. 2019), potentially indicating a shift in social norms around containment among cat owners and suggesting this behaviour may continue to grow. Additionally, both cat owners and non-owners generally agreed that cat owners bear responsibility for managing their cats' behaviours, though views may differ on what "management" involves (van Eeden et al. 2021). Previous studies have also shown that non-owners tend to be more supportive of keeping cats contained (Grayson et al. 2002; Elliott et al. 2019).

3.3 ANIMAL WELFARE

3.3.1 DEFINING ANIMAL WELFARE

Defining animal welfare is complex due to diverse interpretations (Hemsworth et al. 2015). Frameworks like Five Freedoms and others have been developed to describe and define it (Brambell et al. 1965; Mellor and Reid 1994; Green and Mellor 2011). Broom (1986, 2016) defines it as animals' adaptation to their environment, including physiological, behavioural, and emotional responses. Research on animal sentience explores their awareness and capacity for pleasurable and aversive states (Broom 2007; Broom 2009; Broom 2014), influencing ethical debates and our responsibility towards animals (Broom 2016; Fernandes et al. 2019).

3.3.2 ANIMAL WELFARE OUTCOMES AND CONTAINED CONDITIONS

Advocates for cat containment present a range of supporting arguments, including:

a. health and welfare benefits for cats, such as lower risk of injury from traffic (O'Neill et al. 2014; Wilson et al. 2017);

b. community benefits through fewer disturbances and neighbour disputes (McLeod et al. 2015) and;

c. public health benefits (McLeod et al. 2015).

3.3.3 PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Research demonstrates that successful containment policies must consider multiple environmental factors to ensure positive welfare outcomes (Ma and McLeod 2023). Evidence indicates that confined cats require specific environmental conditions to maintain both physical and psychological well-being (Ellis 2009).

3.3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL PARAMETERS

Research demonstrates that successful containment environments must address several critical environmental factors to ensure feline welfare (Ellis 2009):

a. **Temperature control** represents a fundamental requirement, with contained environments needing to maintain consistent temperatures between 18-29°C. This requires both adequate heating and cooling systems to protect cats from extreme temperature variations throughout seasonal changes;

b. **Ventilation systems** play an equally crucial role in maintaining feline health. Proper air circulation prevents respiratory issues through regular air exchange, while simultaneously managing moisture levels and reducing airborne contaminants. The quality of air circulation directly impacts both physical health and comfort levels of contained cats;

c. **Lighting conditions** significantly influence feline well-being, particularly through their effect on circadian rhythms. Contained environments must provide access to natural light cycles while protecting from excessive artificial lighting. This requires careful consideration of seasonal variations and the balance between natural and artificial light sources;

d. **The acoustic environment** requires careful management to prevent stress. This involves protecting cats from excessive or disturbing sounds through appropriate sound-dampening measures. Quiet spaces and buffer zones from high-noise areas are essential components of a well-designed containment space;

e. **Behavioural enrichment** tools play a crucial role in containment environments;

f. **Spatial requirements** encompass both horizontal and vertical dimensions. Contained environments must provide adequate room for movement and exercise, with multiple levels for vertical exploration. Space allocation should consider both the number of cats present and their individual activity levels (Ellis 2009; Broom and Fraser 2015).

3.3.3 SPACE AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

The organisation of space and resources within contained environments significantly impacts feline welfare. Vertical space utilisation represents a critical aspect of environmental design, requiring multiple elevated platforms and perches at varying heights. These structures must provide secure climbing opportunities and safe access to elevated areas, allowing cats to express natural behaviours and maintain territorial preferences.

Resource allocation requires strategic planning to ensure optimal access and reduce potential stress. This includes the provision of multiple feeding stations and water sources throughout the space. Litter box provision should follow the

n+1 rule (where 'n' equals the number of cats), with separate elimination areas to accommodate natural elimination behaviours and preferences.

Privacy considerations form an essential component of spatial design. Contained environments must incorporate multiple retreat options and safe hiding places. These quiet resting areas and stress-free zones allow cats to withdraw when needed, supporting their natural behavioural needs and reducing potential anxiety (Ellis 2009; Broom and Fraser 2015).

3.4 ANIMAL WELFARE

The successful implementation of cat containment faces multiple practical, financial, and social barriers that must be addressed to ensure positive welfare outcomes.

3.4.1 HOUSING DESIGN AND LEGISLATIVE LIMITATIONS

Cat containment is often stymied by the physical infrastructure and associated regulations:

a. **Rental properties**: As outlined above, modifying rental homes to accommodate safe containment is fraught with challenges:

    i. Landlords typically resist permanent installations that can affect property value or appeal to future tenants (Power 2008; Takeda 2020);

    ii. Tenancy agreements frequently prohibit modifications, creating a significant barrier for tenants who care for companion animals (Anon. 2020);

    iii. Body corporate or strata regulations further restrict changes to common areas, complicating containment efforts (Instone and Sweeney 2014).

b. **Urban constraints**: In urban and metropolitan settings, the physical environment poses unique challenges:

    i. Limited space in apartments and small dwellings restricts essential vertical enrichment and outdoor access (Ellis et al. 2009; McLeod et al. 2019);

    ii. Common areas in shared buildings can compromise containment efforts due to accessibility and shared use regulations.

3.4.2 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE BARRIERS

The financial implications of containment are substantial:

a. **Financial costs**: Cat-proofing a property can be an expensive endeavour -

   i. Commercial enclosures, while effective, are costly to purchase and install, as well as require ongoing maintenance (Rock et al. 2017; Westgarth et al. 2019);

   ii. Low-income guardians face additional financial strain, particularly when financial assistance programs for pet-related expenses are limited (RSPCA Australia 2023).

b. **Resource access**: Obtaining appropriate and suitable materials and services for containment can be challenging. Professional installation services may not be readily available in remote areas, further exacerbating the inequality in access to containment solutions (Instone and Sweeney, 2014).

3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT GAPS

Lack of guidance and support undermines effective implementation:

a. **Education**: Many guardians are unaware of proper containment methods -

   i. Complex regulations and insufficient DIY resources add to the difficulty of addressing containment (Crowley et al. 2020);

   ii. Misconceptions about cats' natural behaviours persist, particularly the idea that outdoor access is essential for their well-being (McLeod et al. 2019).

b. **Professional assistance**: The availability of experts is limited, with access to behavioral experts and containment consultants is restricted, particularly outside major urban centres (McLeod et al. 2019).

3.5 MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

Effective containment requires systematic monitoring and assessment of cat welfare outcomes. Research indicates that comprehensive evaluation should incorporate multiple indicators across physical, behavioural, and psychological domains (Ellis et al. 2009; Broom and Fraser 2015). These are discussed further in the subsections below.

3.5.1 PHYSICAL HEALTH INDICATORS

Regular monitoring of physical health markers is essential for contained cats (Vojtkovská et al. 2020). Primary physical condition monitoring should include consistent assessment of body condition, weight fluctuations, coat quality, and muscle tone. Activity level tracking provides crucial insights into overall physical health and adaptation to containment.

Clinical indicators require careful observation of daily patterns. Food and water intake should be monitored consistently, along with other daily habits and patterns. Changes in appetite or unusual variations in these patterns may indicate welfare concerns requiring attention or intervention. Regular veterinary assessment remains crucial for maintaining optimal health in contained conditions.

3.5.2 BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Behavioural monitoring provides crucial insights into adaptation to containment. These activity patterns provide important details about companion animal welfare, including how cats utilise vertical space, engage in exploration, and participate in play activities. Social interactions and rest patterns should also be observed regularly to ensure normal expression. Environmental interaction assessment also includes monitoring how cats utilise available resources and express natural behaviours.

3.5.3 STRESS LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

Identifying and monitoring stress indicators is crucial for cat welfare, particularly in contained conditions. Physical signs of stress can manifest through changes in eating habits, altered grooming patterns, or sleep disturbances. These physical manifestations of anxiety require prompt attention and intervention.

Behavioural indicators of stress include over-grooming, excessive hiding, unusual aggression, social withdrawal, and changes in vocalisation patterns (Amat et al. 2016). Regular observation and documentation of these behaviours helps identify potential welfare concerns early, allowing for timely intervention.

3.5.4 QUALITY OF LIFE ('QoL') MEASURES

Comprehensive Quality of Life ('QoL') assessment considers multiple environmental factors (Fulmer et al. 2022). Access to resources, environmental enrichment opportunities, and social interaction possibilities all contribute to overall welfare (Rehnberg et al. 2015). Privacy options and territorial control remain essential components of psychological well-being in contained environments (Foreman-Worsley and Farnworth 2019).

3.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence presented regarding welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions leads to several key recommendations that acknowledge both the benefits of containment and the importance of ensuring positive welfare outcomes.

These recommendations are provided below:

3.6.1 **POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

The development of effective containment policies requires comprehensive environmental standards based on current research (Ellis et al. 2009). These standards should establish clear guidelines for both vertical and horizontal space requirements, while setting specific parameters for environmental enrichment and resource provision (Rochlitz 2016). Additionally, detailed standards for temperature control, ventilation, and lighting should be established to ensure optimal living conditions (RSPCA Australia 2023).

Implementation support represents another crucial component of successful policy development (van Eeden et al. 2021). This should include financial assistance programs for necessary property modifications (Anon. 2023), alongside clear guidelines for rental properties that support containment measures (McCarthy and Simcock 2024). The development of resources for low-cost enrichment solutions and establishment of support services will be essential for guardians transitioning their cats to containment.

The regulatory framework should implement containment requirements gradually, allowing for appropriate exemptions where necessary (Boyd 2024). Clear compliance guidelines must be established, incorporating comprehensive welfare monitoring requirements to ensure positive outcomes. In this regard, Animal Liberation supports and endorses the Greens NSW Cat Containment Plan as developed and published by Abigail Boyd MLC.

3.6.2 **RESOURCE PROVISION**

Educational resources form a fundamental component of successful containment implementation (RSPCA Australia 2018). Comprehensive guides for creating enriched environments should be developed, incorporating detailed information about behavioural needs and stress recognition (Herron 2010). These resources must be made available in multiple languages to serve diverse communities, supported by accessible online networks for ongoing support.

Similarly, financial support mechanisms should include subsidy programs for containment infrastructure, with particular attention to assisting low-income households (Boyd 2024). Support for rental property modifications and funding for community education initiatives will ensure broader accessibility and implementation success.

3.6.3 **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

Successful implementation will require robust guardian support systems, including mentoring programs for those transitioning cats to containment (RSPCA NSW 2022). Behavioural consultation services should be readily available, complemented by support networks that facilitate experience sharing and problem-solving among guardians.

Professional development initiatives should focus on training veterinary professionals in containment requirements while developing certification programs for consultants. The creation of specialist welfare monitoring roles

and establishment of professional support networks will ensure ongoing expertise and guidance.

3.6.4 **RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

Ongoing research should focus on building a strong evidence base through investigation of optimal containment environments and long-term welfare impacts. Studies should examine effective enrichment strategies and psychological adaptation mechanisms to inform best practices. Similarly, research should evaluate the effectiveness of support programs while studying barriers to successful containment.

These comprehensive recommendations aim to ensure that cat containment policies achieve their objectives while maintaining high welfare standards and providing necessary support for successful implementation.

TERM 4: the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives

TERM 4:

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP INITIATIVES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

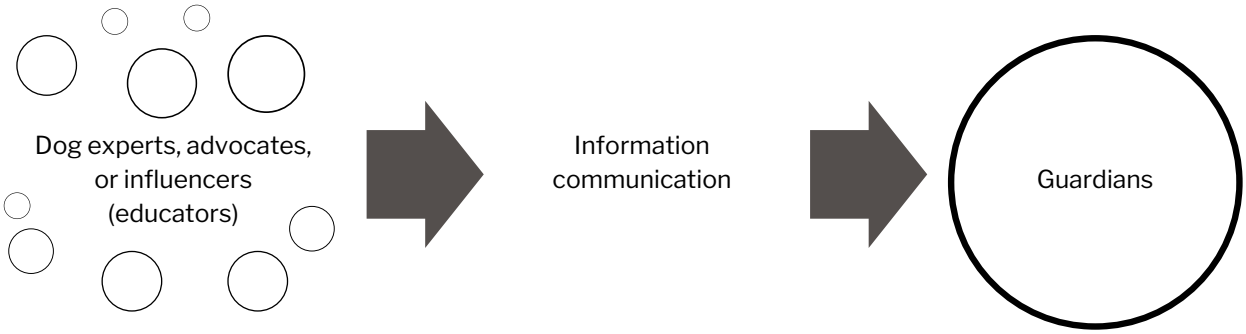
Though community education and responsible guardianship play a crucial role in companion animal management, government leadership and institutional practices are equally important. While programs must address individual behaviour change and systemic barriers, their effectiveness is undermined when government facilities fail to model best practices, particularly in pound management. Research indicates that successful programs require a multi-level approach: addressing individual behaviours, removing systemic barriers to responsible guardianship, and ensuring government facilities demonstrate the high standards they promote (Jarvis 2018; Westgarth et al. 2019). Program evaluation must consider these institutional practices alongside traditional metrics of program design, implementation methods, and measurable outcomes.

The impact of guardians on their companion animals' welfare is undeniable (Philpotts et al. 2019). Education has been identified as "one of the most useful approaches for enhancing animal welfare" (Iqbal et al. 2024), with the promotion of "responsible pet ownership" being regarded as "one of the most important strategies for effective population management and relinquishment prevention of companion animals" (Cunha et al. 2016).

Companion animal guardians may encounter educational opportunities in a wide range of contexts. These may include formal settings, such as veterinary appointments or structured training programs, but more commonly occur through informal or indirect channels, such as television, online forums, or video content. The physical settings for such education also vary, including clinics, dog parks, pet stores, and training classes. However, many educational experiences happen at home, often influenced by media and marketing sources, which can be unregulated and sometimes inaccurate, potentially impacting the welfare of companion animals in households (Philpotts et al. 2019).

Research has shown that children’s ability to recognise animal emotions, their beliefs about animal sentience, understanding of animal welfare needs, attitudes toward cruelty, and attachment to pets all influence their interactions with animals (Hawkins et al. 2019; Williams et al. 2022). Consequently, animal welfare education focusing on these areas is essential to promote positive behaviour toward animals in children (Hawkins et al. 2019; Williams et al. 2022; Iqbal et al. 2024). The process of education, as seen by the practice of cat guardianship, can be visualised in three (3) components. These are outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Process of companion animal education (see Philpotts et al. 2019)



Community education and responsible pet ownership initiatives play a crucial role in companion animal management. However, the absence of systematic scientific evaluations of existing programmes means there is limited evidence to demonstrate how these impact knowledge and attitudes (Ascione 1997; Baatz et al. 2020). Moreover, evaluating their effectiveness requires consideration of multiple factors including program design, implementation methods, and measurable outcomes (Jarvis 2018). Research indicates that successful programs must address both individual behaviour change and systemic barriers to responsible pet ownership (Westgarth et al. 2019).

4.2 CURRENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NSW

Community cat programs that take a 'One Welfare' approach, considering human and animal welfare together, show promise for improving outcomes. A study found such programs increased trust between cat carers and authorities, with one participant stating: “I trust them [the Community Cat Program] heaps more, oh, yes. I have no problems. Because I know they're going to do what's best for the cat and what's best for me” (Crawford et al. 2023).

However, the mismanagement of companion animals in Australia is often considered to be the result of ignorance (RSPCA VIC 2016). In attempting to improve this, many organisations adopt educational programmes and campaigns which aim to equip guardians with the knowledge to adequately care for their companion animals. These typically focus on management practices, such as desexing and microchipping (Glanville et al. 2020). In Australia, Animal Management Officers (‘AMOs’) are responsible not only for reducing public disturbances caused by pet and companion animals but also for encouraging responsible and considerate companion animal guardianship (Bennett and Howell 2013).

4.2.1 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

The NSW Government currently operates three (3) primary education programs targeting responsible guardianship:

a. **‘We Are Family’**: a program that targets children and their relationships with companion animals from pregnancy through to preschool;

b. **'Living Safely with Dogs'**: a program targeting 4-5 year old pre-school children and;

c. **'Living Safely with Pets'** - a program targeting 5-8 year old primary school children (OLG 2024).

4.2.2 LOCAL COUNCIL PROGRAMS

Several NSW councils have implemented education initiatives, including:

a. **City of Sydney**: Responsible Pet Ownership Program, free microchipping days, and community education events;

b. **Campbelltown City Counci**l: Cat containment education initiatives and school-based education programs.

4.2.3 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Organisations such as RSPCA NSW and Animal Welfare League NSW ('AWL NSW') offer various education programs, including:

a. **RSPCA NSW**: School education programs, community workshops, and online resources;

b. **AWL NSW**: Community outreach programs, pet care workshops, and educational materials.

4.3 EFFICACY ANALYSIS

Animal welfare education programs differ significantly in their content, methods of delivery, frequency, and duration (Muldoon and Williams 2021a; Muldoon and Williams; 2021b). Many campaigns aim to elicit cognitive or emotional responses on an individual level, influencing decision-making and promoting behaviour change (Montaño and Kasprzyk 2015). Behaviour change can also occur indirectly, such as through discussions within social or professional networks (Philpotts et al. 2019). Campaigns with broad reach can shift norms and expectations within groups through social contagion, allowing individuals who haven't directly encountered the campaign to be influenced by changes in their peers' attitudes and behaviours (Wakefield et al. 2010). Ultimately, some campaigns may even drive societal change by influencing public policy (Wakefield et al. 2010; Philpotts et al. 2024).

Developing such a campaign is a complex process that considers various factors, such as the target audience, marketing strategies, communication methods, and distribution channels. Each of these elements can affect a campaign's success, whether measured by public awareness of the issue or, more critically, by long-term behavioural changes (Pinto et al. 2021). Additionally, it's essential to plan for a robust evaluation process, with clear

performance indicators and an effective assessment strategy established from the beginning (Klingemann and Roemmele 2002; Rice and Atkin 2013).

4.3.1 PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Evidence-based programs typically incorporate a range of elements to promote responsible cat ownership. These include providing information about animal welfare needs, as outlined by Broom and Fraser (2015), and offering practical guidance on containment and environmental enrichment (Herron and Buffington 2010). Education about wildlife protection is also a key component, as highlighted by Crowley et al. (2020). Many programs emphasise the importance of registration and microchipping (Franklin 2006), advocate for desexing (Getting 2 Zero n.d.-a), and provide information on responsible breeding practices (RSPCA Australia 2023b).

4.3.2 SUCCESS INDICATORS

The effectiveness of these programs is commonly evaluated through various metrics. Studies often measure changes in registration rates (Borthwick 2009) and reductions in pound intake numbers (Hazel et al. 2018). Increased desexing rates are another important indicator of success (Getting 2 Zero n.d.-b), as are improvements in containment practices (McLeod et al. 2019). Lower euthanasia rates in animal shelters can also reflect the positive impact of these programs (Chua et al. 2023). Finally, assessing community awareness levels provides insight into the reach and effectiveness of educational efforts (Animal Welfare League NSW 2024).

4.4 CRITIQUE OF 'RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP' RHETORIC

The concept of responsible animal guardianship, often framed as 'responsible ownership', is frequently promoted as a solution to companion animal management challenges (Legge and Parsons 2021). While this approach emphasises awareness of practices that produce optimal outcomes for companion animals (Barni et al. 2021), it often fails to account for the complex socio-economic realities faced by many guardians.

4.4.1 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO 'RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP'

The emphasis on 'responsible ownership' in NSW policy and local council messaging reveals a fundamental disconnect between policy objectives and market realities (Westgarth et al. 2019). This approach ignores significant structural barriers that impede even the most well-intentioned guardians:

a. **Housing crisis**: with only a small percentage of rental properties allowing pets, many individuals face impossible choices between housing security and animal guardianship;

b. **Economic constraints**: Veterinary care, quality food, and containment solutions can be prohibitively expensive for low-income households (Instone and Sweeney 2014);

c. **Time poverty**: Long working hours and precarious employment can limit guardians' ability to provide adequate care and supervision (Westgarth et al. 2019);

d. **Limited access to resources**: Unequal distribution of veterinary services, supplies, and educational resources across communities create disparities in guardianship capacity (Rock et al. 2017).

To address these complex challenges, a more holistic and collaborative approach is needed. As outlined in the *International Declaration of Responsibilities to Cats*, effective cat management requires cooperation between central and local governments, non-governmental organisations ('NGOs'), including animal protection organisations ('APOs'), as well as veterinary professionals and individual cat guardians (International Cat Care, n.d.). This approach emphasises the need for balanced policies that consider both cat welfare and environmental protection, while also addressing systemic barriers to responsible guardianship. By shifting from a punitive, individual-focused model to one that provides support, education, and resources at a community level, policymakers can create more equitable and effective solutions for both cats and wildlife.

4.4.1 LIMITATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL-FOCUSED APPROACHES

While based on the sensible notion that integrating animals into households crates particular responsibilities (Haraway 2008; Hens 2009), the 'responsible ownership' framework has several limitations:

a. **Oversimplification**: The current approach reduces complex social and economic issues to matters of individual choice and morality (Howell 2012);

b. **Blame shifting**: By focusing on individual behaviour, the current approach deflects attention from systemic issues and governmental responsibilities (Fox and Gee 2019);

c. **Inequity**: The current approach disproportionately burdens marginalised communities who may lack the resources to meet standards of care (Rock et al. 2017);

d. **Ineffectiveness**: Blaming individuals without addressing root causes is unlikely to produce sustainable change in companion animal management (Westgarth et al. 2019).

In sum, the responsible ownership framework tends to focus narrowly on direct care practices, overlooking the broader ethical considerations of keeping companion animals. As the *International Declaration of Responsibilities to Cats* highlights, a more comprehensive approach should address issues like breeding practices, environmental impacts, and the societal structures that shape human-animal relationships (International Cat Care 2019). By expanding the

scope beyond individual owner behaviours, we can develop more holistic and effective policies for companion animal welfare and management.

4.4.3 TOWARDS A MORE HOLISTIC AND WHOLE-OF-STATE APPROACH

To effectively address companion animal management challenges in this context, policies must move beyond the rhetoric of 'responsible ownership' to:

a. **Address systemic barriers**: Implement policies that increase access to animal-friendly housing, affordable veterinary care, and support services, particularly for low-income guardians;

b. **Community-based solutions**: Develop programmes that leverage community resources and social networks to support animal guardianship;

c. **Education with empowerment**: Provide education on animal care alongside practical support and resources to enable implementation;

d. **Policy integration**: Ensure animal welfare considerations are integrated into broader social and economic policies, recognising the interconnected nature of these issues.

By shifting focus from individual blame to collective responsibility and systemic solutions, NSW can develop more effective, equitable and compassionate approaches to companion animal management.

TERM 5: implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

TERM 5:

IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL COUNCILS IN IMPLEMENTING AND ENFORCING CAT CONTAINMENT POLICIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, domestic cats (*Felis catus*) are more likely to be euthanased in animal shelters than dogs (*Canis familiaris*) (Clark et al. 2012; Stavisky et al. 2012; Crawford et al. 2017; Večerek et al. 2017). In Australia, approximately 57% of cats entering Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ('RSPCA') centres over the past decade have been euthanased (RSPCA 2018; Crawford and Calver 2019). The majority of these cats are less than 1 year old and originate from disadvantaged areas (Dutton-Regester and Rand 2024).

5.2 ROLE OF LOCAL COUNCILS

5.2.1 BACKGROUND

Local councils in Australia were among the first to take steps toward regulating cat ownership (Anderson 1994; Pergl 1994). Since then, several state legislatures have introduced laws aimed at regulating cat ownership, including South Australia's *Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*, Victoria's *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act 1994*, New South Wales' *Companion Animals Act 1998*, and the Australian Capital Territory's *Domestic Animals Act 2000* (Penson 1995; Kelly 1999). In no particular order, these acts address issues such as the impact of cat predation on wildlife, the risk of disease transmission to both wildlife and humans, cat welfare, nuisances caused by roaming cats, and the cultural and economic value of cats as pets. They include provisions for cat identification, action against 'nuisance' animals, and, except for the legislation in South Australia and the ACT, mandatory registration with incentives for neutered cats.

However, Western Australia and New South Wales are currently the only states in Australia where local councils are not able to introduce local cat laws to prevent cats from roaming. This has led to frustration among Western Australian councils, with some attempting to use outdated legislation to implement cat containment measures. The lack of clear authority for councils to enact containment policies has resulted in inconsistent approaches across the state, with some local governments having containment laws approved while others have had similar policies disallowed by the Joint Standing Committee for Delegated Legislation ('JSCDL') (WAFCWG 2024).

The RSPCA (2023) recommends that if mandatory 24/7 cat containment is introduced, it should include a transition period that exempts existing companion cats from the requirements, implementing them only for new cats acquired after a determined date (i.e., a 'grandfathering' clause). Additionally, exemptions to the 24/7 containment requirement must be allowed for cats who

are certified by a qualified veterinarian or animal behaviourist to be unable to cope with containment (RSPCA Australia 2023). Thus, while local councils currently bear much of the burden for companion animal management, a statewide approach with state government resourcing would be more effective (Boyd 2024). This would prevent cost-shifting to local governments and ensure consistent implementation across NSW.

5.2.2 **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

Currently, the total annual cost of companion animal management across all local government areas in NSW is estimated at around $43 million. This amount covers only council expenses, including those for pounds, animal management officers, and related programs. Additional costs are also incurred by volunteer and often cash-strapped rehoming and animal welfare organisations (CIE 2022). Councils may elect to operate their own pound, engage a contractor, or enlist the services of another LGA.

According to a recent national survey, most local governments have a budget of less than $20,000 annually for managing companion cats. Across Australia, local governments spend an estimated $76 million annually on cat management (excluding large island eradication programs). This indicates that many councils face significant resource constraints in implementing comprehensive cat management strategies (Nou et al. 2021).

5.3 **EXISTING LEGISLATION**: THE *COMPANION ANIMALS ACT 1998*

5.3.1 **THE ACT**

Currently, NSW councils face significant legal barriers to implementing cat containment policies. The *Companion Animals Act 1998* ('CAA') is the overarching state law that dictates what actions councils can take regarding cat management. Currently, the Act does not provide NSW councils with the authority to restrict cats indoors or enforce curfews (Petrovic 2022; Vale 2022). Local by-laws cannot override or contradict state legislation.

While some argue that this puts NSW councils at a disadvantage compared to other states like Victoria and South Australia, where local governments have more power to enact cat containment bylaws (Legge et al. 2023), maintaining control at the state level ensures a uniform approach to cat management across all local government areas ('LGAs').

5.3.2 **LEGAL AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES**

Allowing each of the 128 local governments in NSW to create their own by-laws could create a patchwork of regulations across the state (LGNSW 2022; Dielenberg 2024). Such inconsistency could cause confusion for cat guardians, especially those who move between different LGAs. Local governments may also face difficulties in effectively enforcing cat containment policies, particularly if they lack the necessary resources or expertise. This could lead to

inconsistent application of the regulations, further complicating enforcement, and creating wide variation with animal welfare outcomes.

Moreover, implementing cat containment policies could create financial impacts for councils, including:

a. **Initial costs** for policy development, community outreach, and enforcement training;

b. **Ongoing costs** for enforcement and compliance monitoring;

c. **Funding** for education programs, enforcement personnel, and potentially subsidies for cat enclosures or other containment solutions.

While cat containment policies could potentially produce revenue from fines or registration fees for non-compliant owners, the absence of state-level guidance could lead some councils to implement overly strict policies that negatively impact responsible cat owners and cat welfare. As a result, the effectiveness of containment policies could vary widely between councils depending on their approach, resources, and local conditions, potentially leading to uneven outcomes for wildlife protection across the state.

Furthermore, if some guardians find it difficult to comply with new containment rules, there could be an increase in cat abandonment or surrenders to shelters. The RSPCA notes that one of the potential risks of mandatory cat containment is an "increased incidence of cats being surrendered or abandoned due to owner inability or unwillingness to transition currently roaming cats to a contained lifestyle and provide an appropriate contained environment" (RSPCA Australia 2023). Owners unable to comply with the by-law may relinquish or abandon their cat rather than facing a fine, especially if they lack the financial resources to install appropriate containment measures like cat-proof fencing or enclosures. This could lead to a surge in the number of homeless cats on the streets and in shelters.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Animal Liberation supports sensible and transparent calls for a comprehensive, evidence-based statewide cat containment plan that includes:

a. Progressive implementation timeframes;

b. Adequate resourcing for implementation;

c. Support for low-income households;

d. Reform of related systems and structural obstacles, including rental laws and the NSW pound and shelter system;

e. Different approaches for different cat populations and;

f. State government responsibility for implementation and enforcement (Boyd 2024).

Providing councils with the power to create cat containment by-laws is not an effective approach without accompanying measures. While this is noted by LGNSW (2022), the NSW Greens argue that devastating consequences could occur for cats and humans unless containment policies are supported by a comprehensive plan involving education, ending irresponsible breeding, subsidised desexing and microchipping, reforms to rental laws, and updates to animal welfare codes (Boyd 2024). A piecemeal council-by-council approach will not adequately address these broader issues.

TERM 6: the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs

TERM 6:

THE EFFECTIVENESS AND BENEFITS TO IMPLEMENTING LARGE SCALE CAT DESEXING PROGRAMS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As taking proactive steps to control breeding among domestic cats is vital to prevent unwanted litters (Mazeau et al. 2021), animal shelters have used desexing of dogs and cats as a strategy to address overpopulation since the 1980s (Orr and Jones 2019). Desexing, conducted by registered veterinarians with support from veterinary nurses, is generally performed at one of three stages: on animals older than six months (Mature Age Desexing or 'MAD'), at 4–6 months (Traditional Age Desexing or 'TAD'), or younger than four months (Early Age Desexing or 'EAD') (Makin et al. 2004). While TAD and MAD are common in private veterinary practices, EAD is primarily used in shelters to prevent future breeding and facilitate quicker adoption (Crawford and Calver 2018).

Female cats can produce 1 to 3 litters per year, each containing between 1-6 kittens (Nutter et al. 2004). Puberty often begins at 5 to 9 months of age (Tsutsui and Stabenfeldt 1993), though it can occur as early as 3.5 months in some females (Joyce and Yates 2011), catching many owners by surprise (Murray et al. 2009; Welsh et al. 2014; Crawford and Calver 2018). Unplanned litters are common and are a major reason for cats being surrendered to shelters (Joyce and Yates 2011; Zito et al. 2016; Miller et al. 2019), where cats under 6 months old consistently make up the majority of surrenders (Marston and Bennett 2009; Alberthsen et al. 2013; Casey et al. 2009; Fatjó et al. 2015). These unwanted kittens add to stray cat populations (Natoli et al. 2006), posing welfare challenges for the kittens themselves and further stressing wildlife populations already threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and other predators (Lilith et al. 2006; Dickman and Newsome 2015).

However, difficulties in achieving best practices for cat care often result in high numbers of free-roaming cats and kittens due to unplanned breeding (LaVallee et al. 2017; Ma et al. 2023).

6.1.1 DE-SEXING RATES IN AUSTRALIA

With a desexing prevalence of ~83.6%, Australia ranks among the highest internationally for cat desexing rates (Mazeau et al. 2021). Survey-based studies indicate that around 90% of cats in Australia are desexed, compared to 80% in the USA and 43% in Italy (Toukhsati et al. 2007; Slater et al. 2008; Chu et al. 2009; AMA 2019;). A recent study in the UK, based on electronic pet records, reported a feline desexing rate of 77% (Sánchez-Vizcaíno et al. 2017).

6.2 EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Several studies and real-world examples demonstrate the effectiveness of large-scale cat desexing programs in reducing cat overpopulation and related issues:

a. In Australia, a reduction in urban 'stray' cat numbers through desexing has been demonstrated. Recent research of existing cat colonies demonstrated that colony sizes decreased by a median of 31% over 2 years, and by 50% over 5 years (Rand et al. 2019);

b. A comparison of two councils in Victoria, Yarra Valley and Banyule, showed that Banyule's free desexing program led to a 64% decrease in cat complaints, a 61% decrease in cats impounded, and a 74% decrease in cats euthanased (Cotterell et al. 2024). In contrast, Yarra Valley's mandatory containment policy led to increases in all these metrics;

c. Overseas, community cat programs involving desexing have significantly reduced the intake and euthanasia of stray cats in shelters and pounds (Rand and Morton 2023).

6.2.1 COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

While large-scale desexing programs require upfront investment, they can lead to significant long-term savings:

a. Large-scale desexing programs can reduce the number of free-roaming cats responsible for less predation on wildlife, lower intake and euthanasia at pounds and shelters, and produce less cost for effective management (Rand et al. 2019);

b. Councils can save a considerable amount of money and reduce psychological impacts on personnel by not engaging in the repetitive cycle of trapping and killing cats, which does not effectively reduce cat populations (Miller et al. 2014);

c. Desexing has an immediate positive impact on nuisance complaints, as it reduces roaming, yowling, fighting, and marking behaviour in cats (Cafazzo et al. 2019; OLG 2024; RSPCA Australia 2024).

TERM 7: the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system

TERM 7:

THE IMPACT OF POTENTIAL CAT CONTAINMENT MEASURES ON THE POUND SYSTEM

7.1 BACKGROUND

7.1.1 OVERVIEW

Cats remain one of the most challenging management issues for NSW pounds. Unlike with dogs, the intake of cats across NSW has stayed relatively stable over the past decade, yet euthanasia rates for cats are significantly higher: 9% of dogs versus 32% of cats and kittens are euthanased on average in NSW pounds (CIE 2022). Most of these euthanased cats and kittens are healthy and young (Alberthsen et al. 2016; Chua et al. 2023). Alarmingly, one in every three cats entering NSW pounds is euthanased, a high and preventable rate (Costin 2023; Rand 2023).

A recent study found that councils in the worst-performing quartile, with intakes of over fifty (50) cats, reported euthanasia rates ranging from 67% to 100% (Chua et al. 2023). NSW councils that run their own pounds euthanase an average of 46% of impounded cats and kittens (Rand 2023). The practice of euthanasing healthy animals has severe mental health consequences for staff (Andrukonis et al. 2020; Cooney and Kipperman 2023), including depression (Schiweck et al. 2019), trauma (Pierce 2013), and heightened suicide risk (Stoewen 2015; Morgan 2023; Varallo et al. 2024). Additionally, community members experience significant distress when stray cats they care for are euthanased by authorities (Rand et al. 2019; Scotney et al. 2023; Wakatama et al. 2023; Rand et al. 2024).

7.1.2 THE NSW POUND SYSTEM AND 'STRAY' CATS

Under the *Impounding Act 1993*, local councils may set up public or private pounds to hold companion animals that have been surrendered to the council or seized by an authorised council officer (CIE 2022). The approach currently used by most council pounds to manage 'stray' cats does not effectively reduce their population over time. This is due to low-level, ad-hoc culling (Rand 2023), which is insufficient to counter the high reproductive rate of cats, the migration of new cats into the area, and increased survival of young cats (Miller et al. 2014; Lazenby et al. 2015; Tan et al. 2017; RSPCA Australia 2018; Boone et al. 2019). As a result, a repetitive cycle of trapping, impounding, and euthanasing healthy cats and kittens continues, only to have new cats quickly take their place, leading to no real reduction in the 'stray' cat population (Boone et al. 2019; Rand 2023).

7.3 IMPACTS OF CAT CONTAINMENT ON THE POUND SYSTEM

7.3.1 THE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS ('CIE') REPORT

In 2022, the Office of Local Government ('OLG') undertook a limited and selective review of rehoming practices in NSW. Part of the review included the publication of a draft report, titled Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW, by the Centre for International Economics ('CIE'). Regarding the impact on cat impounding, euthanasia, and rehoming, the following outcomes were identified in the CIE report:

a. **Cat containment policies may not effectively reduce intake**: The CIE report found that the types of cats entering pounds are unlikely to be controlled through containment policies. As most cats in pounds are unregistered and unidentified, the CIE report maintains that "it is very hard to see that someone would comply with cat containment when they haven't complied with much more basic regulations". Furthermore, it notes that many of these cats are unowned, so containment measures would not prevent them from roaming (CIE 2020: 43);

b. **Cat containment could increase pound intake**: According to the CIE report, containment policies could justify the collection of roaming cats more strongly than current regulations, likely leading to a temporary increase in cats entering pounds. Over time, however, it could reduce intake if it supports better control of the 'stray' cat population. Critically, the report notes that "it is difficult to envisage councils being able to maintain high intensity culling with acceptance from their communities, given the sorts of cats that generate animals into pounds have connections and are being fed by people in the community" (CIE 2020: 43);

c. **Impact on rehoming and euthanasia rates**: Cats entering pounds typically face two options—rehoming or euthanasia. Given the limited capacity for rehoming an increased intake, the likelihood of euthanasia would almost certainly rise in the short term (CIE 2020: 43);

d. **Potential decline in demand for rehomed cats**: As discussed elsewhere in this response, the requirement to invest in containment measures may discourage some people from adopting cats, thereby decreasing demand from rehoming organisations (CIE 2020: 43).

As a result, the CIE report concluded that cat containment policies do not present a viable solution to issues associated with cat impounding and rehoming (CIE 2020: 43).

TERM 8: the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories

TERM 8:

THE OUTCOMES OF SIMILAR POLICIES ON CAT CONTAINMENT IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN STATES OR TERRITORIES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Cat containment policies across Australian jurisdictions demonstrate varying levels of implementation, effectiveness, and community support. The evidence from different states and territories provides valuable insights for developing comprehensive and effective approaches to cat management.

8.1.1 CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION LANDSCAPE

While NSW is considering various approaches to cat management, other states have already implemented comprehensive legislation. Victoria leads the nation in cat containment implementation, with three-quarters of local government areas maintaining movement restrictions (Nou et al. 2021). These range from overnight curfews (Bayside City Council 2024) to full 24-hour containment requirements (Wellington Shire Council 2024).

In Tasmania, the Cat Management Amendment Bill 2019 introduced mandatory desexing, limits on cat ownership, and measures to protect private land from roaming cats (Barnett 2020). Meanwhile, the Australian Capital Territory's territory-wide containment legislation, implemented in 2022, offers a model for comprehensive state-level approaches (Dielenberg 2024). The current status of cat containment policies in Australian states and territories are outlined in Table 2 below.

STATE/TERRITORY	POLICY STATUS
ACT	Mandatory
NSW	Not enforced
VIC	Regulated with mandatory curfews adopted by some councils
QLD	Mandatory or encouraged but varies by council
SA	Varies by council and individual by-laws
WA	Not enforced
TAS	Mandatory
NT	Not enforced

8.2 EVIDENCE OF POLICY OUTCOMES

8.2.1 POLICY BENEFITS

Well-implemented containment policies can produce significant environmental and welfare benefits. Research demonstrates that contained cats can experience better health outcomes and reduced veterinary costs (RSPCA Australia 2023), while also preventing impacts on native animals (Dielenberg 2024). The growing voluntary containment rate, currently at over half of Australia's companion cats, suggests increasing recognition of these benefits among guardians (Ma and McLeod 2023).

8.2.2 COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE

Public attitudes toward cat containment vary significantly across regions and between guardians and non-guardians, reflecting complex cultural and demographic patterns (see subsection 2.3). Support for mandatory cat containment is relatively high in Australia, where non-guardians show particularly strong support (95%) (Hall et al. 2016). However, among the broader Australian public, overall support sits at 66%, demonstrating a gap between general public and specific stakeholder views (Borg et al. 2024). This pattern mirrors other environmental policy debates where stakeholder views often diverge based on direct involvement and perceived impact (Kujala et al. 2022).

8.3 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

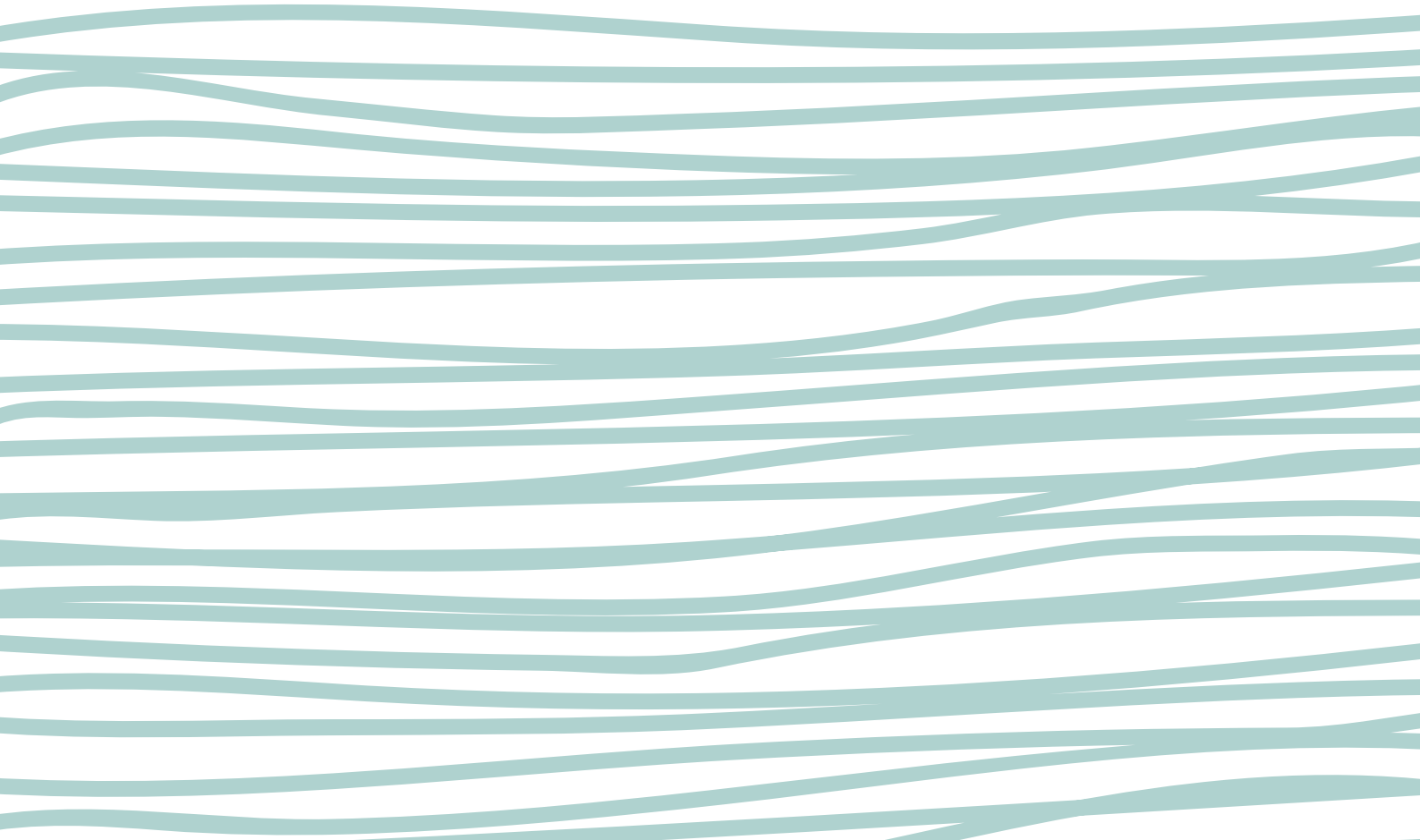
Successful containment policies require three key elements:

a. **Legislative structure**: State-wide legislation must provide clear authority for local council action while maintaining consistent definitions and requirements. This framework should include appropriate exemptions for medical and behavioral needs, ensuring flexibility in implementation;

b. **Support systems**: Effective policies incorporate comprehensive support mechanisms, including community education, financial assistance for containment infrastructure, and access to behavioural support services. These systems help address barriers to implementation and ensure equitable access to containment solutions;

c. **Staged implementation**: A phased approach allows for appropriate transition periods and focuses initially on new cat registrations. This strategy enables communities to adapt gradually while maintaining progress toward containment goals.

TERM 9: options for reducing the feral cat population



TERM 9:

OPTIONS FOR REDUCING THE FERAL CAT POPULATION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The history of Australia's colonial past is rich with the introduction of various species (Low 1999). Over time, some of these animals escaped captivity, giving rise to 'feral' populations and prompting management strategies that frequently involve the use of lethal methods (Choquenot et al. 1996; Henderson and Bomford 2011). This approach, however, has provoked significant debate, as attitudes toward the management of 'pest' species have evolved (Riley 2023). Though controversy surrounding wildlife management methods persists, with conflicting perspectives from conservationists, producers, and animal protection advocates (Garcia-Llorente et al. 2008; Gosling et al. 2013; Deak et al. 2021), lethal control measures are often defended for their perceived environmental benefits. Despite this, concerns about animal welfare remain (Riley 2023).

9.2 'FERAL' CATS

9.2.1 DEFINING ' FERAL' CATS

When applied to cats, the term 'feral' lacks a universally accepted definition, leading to a diversity of interpretations that complicate effective management strategies (Levy 2012; Gosling et al. 2013). This ambiguity arises from differing perceptions of the threat that 'feral' cats are thought to pose (Deak et al. 2019). Despite this, clear and consistent definitions are crucial for formulating effective management approaches (Deak et al. 2019). Yet, the term 'feral' is often used interchangeably with 'free-roaming', 'street', or 'community' cat (Gosling et al. 2013; Deak et al. 2019).

Various working definitions have been proposed, each attempting to capture the essence of what makes a cat 'feral'. Key factors include:

a. **Socialisation status**: Whether or not a cat has had positive interactions with humans during their socialisation period, or has reverted to an unsocialised state after initial human contact (Slater 2001; Centonze and Levy 2002; Slater 2004; Wallace and Levy 2006; Slater 2007; Slater et al. 2008; Farnworth et al. 2010a). Critically, such cats require adequate time to 'cool off' before an accurate evaluation can be undertaken, and in a neutral and non-threatening environment. Cats previously owned may initially appear unsocialised, but revert to their former state when provided ample time to adjust (Slater and Shain 2005);

b. **Ownership status**: Whether or not the cat has a guardian, or if they were abandoned or lost (Natoli et al. 2006; Wallace and Levy 2006). The origins of 'feral' cats often

b. stem from abandoned or lost companion animals, contributing to cat 'overpopulation' due to delayed sterilisation and unrestricted breeding (Robertson 2008; Perdomo et al. 2021; Bergin 2024);

c. **Freedom to roam and ability to be confined**: The extent to which cats are permitted or choose to live independently of human habitation (Robertson 2008) and the ease with which a cat can be contained in a domestic setting (Gosling et al. 2013);

d. **Interaction with or dependence on humans**: The level of interaction or dependency on humans for sustenance or shelter (Natoli 1994; Bradshaw et al. 1999; Farnworth et al. 2010a). This can vary significantly depending on the location (Spencer et al. 2015; Riley 2018).

Most of the existing definitions imply that a 'feral' cat is one who lives independently of human contact, surviving 'in the wild' without human-provided resources or assistance (Farnworth et al. 2011; Garrard et al. 2020). This conceptualisation of 'feral' cats underscores the variability in human-animal interactions and the fluidity of cat categories, as their status can change depending on the situation (Gosling et al. 2013; Waller 2016). Abandoned domestic cats may become 'stray' or transition to a 'feral' state, with their offspring classified as 'stray' and/or 'feral' (Farnworth et al. 2010b). Given these nuances, it is critical to explore the impact of cat categories and shed light on the practical implications of these definitions.

9.2.2 COMPARING CATEGORIES

The distinction between 'stray' and 'feral' cats frequently causes the most confusion, primarily because these terms are often used interchangeably, despite representing different conditions and relationships with humans (Gosling et al. 2013; Deak et al. 2019). This lack of clarity has significant implications for how cats are perceived and managed in various contexts.

In parts of Europe, 'feral' cats are considered domestic cats that have been abandoned or returned to the wild (Millan et al. 2009; Rodriguez 2016). Here, the distinction is often based on historical interaction rather than current behaviour or socialisation status. Estonia categorises five (5) types of cats, including 'feral' and 'semi-feral', which further reflects the complexity of these definitions (Jaroš 2018). In contrast, the UK provides no official definition, contributing to varied public understanding and management practices (Gosling et al. 2013).

In Australia and New Zealand, where native felids are absent, the threat from 'feral' cats is more pronounced due to their impact on native species (Trouwborst et al. 2020). Here, the distinction between categories is more explicit:

a. **Australia**: Differentiates between 'stray' or 'semi-feral' cats (once owned but now abandoned) and 'feral' cats (never owned and inhabiting remote bushland) (Abbott 2002; AVA 2022). The Australian Government has declared 'feral' cats as a 'pest'

a. species requiring management, reflecting an aggressive and lethal management approach (DCCEEW 2023a);

b. **New Zealand**: Research aims to define cats as 'companion', 'stray', or 'feral', with 'feral' cats living independently of human care away from settlements (Farnworth et al. 2010; Walker et al. 2017).

This comparative analysis underscores the need for clear, universally understood definitions to support effective and humane cat population management plans, while acknowledging regional variations in terminology and management strategies. However, labels and categories often determine critical welfare outcomes regarding containment, adoption, or euthanasia decisions. Terms with historically negative connotations, such as ‘feral’ or ‘pest’, can prejudice management decisions and lead to poor welfare outcomes (Kopnina and Coghlan 2022). A more nuanced, evidence-based approach to classification that moves beyond such harmful labels to focus on individual circumstances and appropriate management responses is needed.

9.3 CRITICAL FACTORS

The domestication of cats began as hunting companions in agricultural societies where their predatory behaviour was valued for the control of ‘vermin’ (Driscoll et al. 2009a). Unlike dogs, selective breeding was less prevalent for cats, leading to a strong retention of their hunting instincts among domestic populations (Driscoll et al. 2009b; Ottoni et al. 2017; Bradshaw 2018; Crowley et al. 2020). With the exception of pedigree breeds (Montague et al. 2014), the majority of cats still reproduce through unregulated breeding (Crowley et al. 2020).

9.3.1 ANIMAL WELFARE

The ethical treatment of ‘feral’ cats in population management is crucial. While the goal of management strategies is often to significantly reduce the population (DOE 2015), methods that aim to achieve eradication are resource-intensive (Doherty et al. 2022), time-critical (Dorph and Ballard 2023), and expensive (Venning et al. 2021), particularly when conducted over extensive territories where monitoring progress and success pose challenges (Liu and Cook 2016).

a. **Sentience and suffering**: As sentient beings, 'feral' cats deserve to be treated with compassion and respect (RSPCA Australia 2023b). Cats, like all animals, are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain and suffering, which introduces a moral dimension to management strategies (Riley 2023). This fundamental aspect underpins animal welfare concerns, which have been recognised as legitimate since at least 2002 under the Convention on Biological Diversity (‘CBD’) (CBD 2002). Therefore, any actions taken to control 'feral' cat populations must prioritise humane methods that minimise suffering and prioritise animal welfare outcomes;

b. **Lethal control**: Methods like shooting and poisoning attempt to mitigate environmental harm, but public support for such measures often stems from categorising cats as 'pests', leading to self-sustaining cycles of cruel practices (Walker et al. 2017);

c. **Public perception**: Public narratives frequently focus on the presence of cats rather than their impact, neglecting animal welfare considerations (Riley 2023). Despite this, conventional narratives often frame the issue solely within agricultural or environmental contexts, focusing on the presence and eliminating it rather than addressing underlying causes or complications (DOE 2015). Such an approach is contrary to the recommendations of the scientific community (García-Díaz et al. 2020).

In addition to animal welfare concerns, the effectiveness of lethal control methods is highly questionable, with doubts often raised about their necessity and their ability to provide clear environmental benefits (Lynn 2015). For example, the Threatened Species Strategy ('TSS') aimed to eliminate 2 million cats with a goal of aiding the recovery of 40 threatened species, without clearly demonstrating how this would be achieved (DCCEEW 2015). This oversight is frequently compounded by a lack of clarity regarding how killing animals will lead to quantifiable environmental benefits (Lynn 2015).

9.3.1 LONG-TERM EFFICACY

The long-term sustainability of current 'feral' cat management strategies in Australia has been called into question, highlighting the inefficacy of traditional methods:

a. **Historical inefficacy of culling**: During the 1990s, Olsen (1998) established that 'culling' as a means of controlling wild populations, including 'feral' cats, often led to rebound increases in numbers, particularly when the underlying factors were not addressed. This pattern has been observed across various species, suggesting a broader flaw in such management approaches (Garrick 2023);

b. **Unsustainable responses**: Researchers have concluded that while killing may provide an immediate reduction in population numbers, it is not a sustainable long-term solution for managing 'feral' cats (Zeng and Gerritsen 2013). This default approach to animal management often leads to a cycle of repeated mass killing, followed by inevitable population rebounds (Riley 2023);

c. **Community perception and acceptance**: There has been growing community opposition to conventional control methods, with public sentiment increasingly favouring more humane and effective alternatives. Evidence suggests that the use of lethal methods, particularly poisoning, is becoming less acceptable to the community (Jacoblinnert et al. 2022);

d. **Specific challenges**: While management strategies for other predators, such as foxes

d. (*Vulpes vulpes*), have been well-developed, 'feral' cat control has not seen the same level of efficacy. The development of targeted control methods specifically tailored to 'feral' cats has become a point of increasing discussion and scrutiny (Loyd and Miller 2010; Deak et al. 2019).

9.3.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The management of 'feral' cat populations must consider a broader ecological context that extends beyond the welfare of the cats themselves. This requires evaluating the potential impacts of control methods on non-target species, ecosystems, and associated environmental dynamics:

a. **Non-target impacts**: Indiscriminate control measures, particularly the use of poisons, can have significant and unintended consequences (Singleton et al. 2008; Kirk et al. 2020; Mateo-Tomás et al. 2020). These methods may not only harm cats, but also impact a wide range of native species, including predators, scavengers, and other ecosystem participants (Huang et al. 2015; IFAW, 2024);

b. **Ecosystem balance**: Ensuring ecosystem integrity is crucial (OEH 2019; Kormos et al. 2023). Ensuring that control methods do not disrupt ecological processes is vital, as any imbalance can have far-reaching consequences:

   i. Direct impact on species: Cats prey on native species and also compete with other predators in the ecosystem (Lazenby et al. 2015). Indiscriminate lethal control methods, such as widespread poisoning, can inadvertently affect non-target species, potentially skewing the balance of predators and prey (Edwards et al. 2021). This disruption could lead to population increases of species cats typically prey upon, who may themselves become problematic if left unchecked (Nogales et al. 2004). For example, research shows that the removal of 'feral' cats can lead to competitive release among other predators, such as foxes. In areas where 'feral' cats are eradicated, foxes may increase in numbers, targeting species that wouldn't normally prey upon, thereby exacerbating declines in vulnerable species Woinarski et al. 2019);

   ii. Habitat and resource availability: 'Feral' cats play a role in shaping ecosystems through their impacts on both flora and fauna. They control other introduced species, which can influence plant regeneration and species diversity (Risbey et al. 2000). However, if cats are removed without consideration for these roles, the ecosystem might suffer from overgrazing. With fewer cats to control other introduced species, like rabbits, the problem of overgrazing could worsen, affecting grasslands and even woodland structure (Nogales et al. 2004);

   iii. Predation patterns: The hunting behaviour of 'feral' cats can influence the behaviour and distribution of native species, potentially affecting their habitat and food availability. Species under predation pressure from cats may

iii. become more nocturnal or alter their behaviour to avoid predation, which can cascade through food webs, affecting other species' interactions and survival rates (Chen et al. 2023).

c. **Long-term consequences**: Disrupting ecosystem balance through 'feral' cat control methods can impact biodiversity and causes unexpected ‘rebound’ effects:

i. Impact on biodiversity: While the removal of cats could benefit some species, particularly those most vulnerable to predation, the knock-on effects on other predators, prey, and plant life must be thoroughly evaluated to ensure biodiversity is protected, not harmed;

ii. Unexpected rebound effects: As discussed in subsection 9.3.2, removing cats can lead to population rebounds in both the target species and other predators, disrupting the intended goals of conservation efforts.

In summary, effective 'feral' cat management must be grounded in an understanding of ecosystem dynamics, with incorporation of the universal acceptance of animal sentience for both the cats and the native species. An integrated approach that considers direct predator-prey relationships, the broader ecological impacts, and the long-term sustainability of native species populations is essential. By emphasising methods that minimise disruption and promote harmonious ecosystem function, we can ensure that conservation efforts yield positive environmental outcomes while minimising unintended consequences.

9.4 CONTROL TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES: OVERIEW

Australia's commitment to managing ‘feral’ cat populations is unparalleled among continents (Woinarski et al. 2019). This commitment necessitates a strategic approach to control techniques and strategies, considering both their efficacy and welfare implications.

9.4.1 EXTENT OF MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

‘Feral’ cat management in Australia is multifaceted, with significant resources allocated annually to research, development, and the implementation of various control methods (Reddiex et al. 2007; Geary et al. 2022). According to Woinarski et al. (2019), a comprehensive review of control methods includes:

a. **Exclusion**: Physical barriers to prevent cats from entering specific areas;

b. **Poison baiting**: Using poisoned baits like 1080 and PAPP, which act through different mechanisms but have significant adverse animal welfare implications;

c. **Trapping, shooting and hunting**: Techniques involving immediate or near-immediate death, though the stress leading up to death is a major welfare concern;

d. **Habitat management**: Modifying ecosystems to make them less hospitable to cats, including vegetation management and predator-proof fencing;

e. **Trap-Neuter-Return ('TNR')**: A non-lethal control method aimed at stabilising cat populations without causing immediate harm;

f. **Biological control**: Exploring future possibilities like gene drives to alter cats' reproduction or predatory behaviour and;

g. **Guardian dogs**: An emerging strategy to deter cats from entering protected areas.

9.4.2 ETHICAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF LETHAL METHODS

While a significant portion of the management budget (approximately 98%) is spent on lethal control methods (Australian Government 2015), these efforts face considerable ethical scrutiny (Reddiex et al. 2007; Geary et al. 2022). As a result, killing has become the "mainstay" of cat control programs, often relying on methods such as shooting, purportedly due to claimed environmental advantages that outweigh the harm inflicted on targeted animals (Riley 2023). While it is often stipulated that lethal methods should adhere to principles of minimising cruelty (Sharp 2012), this perspective fails to critically examine whether the chosen methods are inherently cruel or if killing is necessary (Scholtz 2005).

9.5 SHOOTING AND TRAPPING

9.5.1 BACKGROUND

While trapping is recognised as a labor-intensive and largely ineffective method for 'feral' cat control, shooting remains the primary approach in Australia, accounting for roughly 83% of the cats being killed (Garrard et al. 2019; Read et al. 2018). Both trapping and shooting involve significant welfare concerns:

a. **Trapping**: While soft-jaw traps are considered more humane than cage traps due to reduced risk of injury (McGregor et al. 2016), several challenges persist. Capturing unintended wildlife is a common issue, raising ethical concerns about the welfare of these animals. For example, native species, companion animals, and endangered species may end up in traps, leading to distress, injury, or death (Jessup 2004). Ongoing efforts can lead to trap-shy behaviours among cats, which further undermines their efficacy (DCCEEW 2023b);

b. **Shooting**: Typically conducted nocturnally from vehicles using spotlights, shooting involves immediate or near-immediate death with minimal suffering when performed correctly (Sharp 2018). However, shooting can result in cats being maimed or injured, leading to prolonged suffering (Jessup 2004). Finally, shooting alone has minimal

b. impact on population size unless an extremely high proportion of cats (over 82%) are removed annually (McCarthy et al. 2013).

9.4.2 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SHOOTING

Shooting as a control method for 'feral' cats presents several notable challenges:

a. **Controversy**: The practice of shooting cats is highly controversial, with opposition rooted in conservation, animal welfare, and rights issues (Finch and Baxter 2007; Miller 2009). Despite hunters' reported motivations of 'pest' control or conservation (Finch et al. 2014; RSPCA Australia 2020b), evidence suggests that hunting can actually impede conservation objectives (Kretz 2010; Adams 2013);

b. **Efficacy**: Although shooting can reduce cat populations in closed or isolated areas, the overall impact is limited by factors such as:

   i. Population influx from surrounding unmanaged areas (Doherty et al. 2019);

   ii. High rates of net immigration and compensatory breeding (Short and Turner 2005; Lazenby et al. 2014; Marlow et al. 2016) and;

   iii. The dispersed nature of shooting activities, which are insufficient to match intrinsic growth rates of cat populations (Doherty et al. 2019).

c. **Animal welfare and public opposition**: The success of shooting as a humane method for control depends on the skill and experience of the shooter. Non-fatal injuries cause significant suffering (Sharp and Saunders 2004; Riley et al. 2021). As public awareness of these impacts grows, shooting cats has faced increasing opposition. Recent events, such as the New Zealand 'feral' cat shooting contest (Graham-McLay 2023; Ng 2023; Treisman 2023) and the shooting incident at Newcastle (Alley Cat Allies 2021), garnered international condemnation. Local reports highlighted the resulting maiming and blinding of cats, with protests and academic reviews condemning the practice (Wakatama et al. 2020; Scotney et al. 2023).

In summary, while shooting and trapping remain common practices in 'feral' cat control in Australia, they face significant ethical, welfare, and efficacy challenges. Public sentiment and evolving management strategies will continue to shape the future of these methodologies, highlighting the need for more humane, effective, and sustainable alternatives.

9.6 POISON BAITING

9.6.1 BACKGROUND

As obligate carnivores, cats primarily derive their water needs from their food (Duffy and Capece 2011). Consequently, they exhibit a strong preference for live prey, including European rabbits, small mammals, or lizards (MacDonald et al. 1984; Holden and Mutze 2002; Robley et al. 2022), which impacts the efficacy of baiting strategies.

Baiting involves dispersing meat or meat-based products laced with toxins to control introduced species on a landscape scale. Though it is regarded as a cost-effective and efficient option on a landscape scale to control introduced species, baiting is less effective on 'feral' cats due to their preference for live prey and scavenging tendencies when food is scarce (Christensen 2012; DOE 2015a). The Australian approach often includes the use of two primary poisons:

a. **Sodium monofluoroacetate ('1080 poison')**: An odourless, tasteless, and colourless toxin with acute mammalian toxicity, disrupting cellular energy production (Eisler 1995; Zeven et al. 2023);

b. **Para-aminopropiophenone ('PAPP')**: Regarded as a potentially more humane alternative, PAPP causes methaemoglobinaemia, leading to rapid unconsciousness and death (DCCEEW 2023b; Sharp and Saunders 2016).

Despite these toxins being widely used for other species, their effectiveness in controlling 'feral' cats is debated, particularly given cats' aversion to scavenging unless food scarce conditions are present (Fancourt et al. 2021).

9.6.2 KEY CHALLENGES

There are a number of challenges associated with the use of poison baiting for the control of 'feral' cats. These include:

a. **Efficacy**: Assessing the efficacy of baiting programs is challenging due to cats' preference for live prey and their reluctance to consume baits. Studies have shown variable success, with some indicating significant reductions in activity or occupancy while others report minimal or no change (Algar et al. 2012; Johnston et al. 2011; McDonald et al. 2017; Short et al. 1997);

b. **Humaneness and non-target species**: Ethical concerns about baiting include the welfare implications for both 'feral' cats and unintended species. There is a substantial risk of non-target animals, including native wildlife and domestic pets, being poisoned (Buckmaster et al. 2014; Glen et al. 2007; Sherley 2007):

    i. 1080 poison: There is no known antidote to 1080 poisoning, raising significant ethical questions about the humaneness of its use (Sherley 2007; Zeven et al. 2023);

    ii. PAPP: Although PAPP has an antidote, its fast-acting nature and the need for immediate veterinary care significantly impede its usefulness in preventing non-target species poisoning (Fleming et al. 2006; Johnston et al. 2014).

c. **Environmental considerations**: Baits, especially when laid on the surface, increase the likelihood of secondary poisoning and disruption of ecosystems through 'trophic cascades' (Marlow et al. 2015; Wayne et al. 2017a; Wayne et al. 2017b). Table 1 in the Appendix lists native species at risk of consuming poisoned baits, highlighting the potential impacts;

d. **Community concerns**: There is growing concern about the humaneness of 1080 baiting, particularly in relation to domestic companion animals and native wildlife (Sherley 2007; O'Brien 2020; Curtin 2021; Wooley 2021; Wilson 2021; Ewen 2023). Additionally, Indigenous ranger groups have significant concerns about non-target consequences (DCCEEW 2023b);

e. **Long-term efficacy**: The persistence of bait-avoidance behaviours in cats due to sub-lethal exposure or learned aversion poses challenges to long-term success (Risbey et al. 1997; Moseby et al. 2011a). Effective control measures must incorporate robust monitoring to assess effectiveness and adapt strategies (DCCEEW 2023b: 36).

In conclusion, poison baiting for 'feral' cats presents a complex challenge with considerations of efficacy, humaneness, environmental impacts, community perceptions, and long-term control strategies. The variability in outcomes underscores the need for adaptive management practices, thorough research, and public engagement to balance conservation goals with ethical and ecological considerations.

9.7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The management of 'feral' cats in Australia, as discussed in this section, highlights a multifaceted challenge that requires a holistic and ethically responsible approach. Despite considerable financial investment in lethal control methods, including shooting, trapping, and poison baiting, these practices face significant ethical, financial, and practical obstacles.

The reviewed data on 'feral' cat management in Australia, focusing on the challenges and limitations of trapping, shooting, and poison baiting, reveals a need for a reconsideration of current strategies:

a. **Humane and sustainable alternatives**: The ethical implications of lethal control methods, coupled with their questionable effectiveness and environmental impact, necessitate exploring more humane and sustainable approaches, such as TNR programs. Investments in non-lethal methods should be prioritised;

b. **Ban on poison baiting programs**: Given the significant welfare concerns associated with baiting programs utilising toxins like 1080 poison and PAPP, it is evident that these methods are both inhumane and indiscriminate in their impact. Both 1080 and PAPP pose unacceptable risks, are increasingly unacceptable to the Australian public, and should be subject to a phase-out with a view towards initiating a state-wide ban on their use;

c. **Community engagement and transparency**: Public acceptance is crucial for the

c. implementation of control measures. Efforts should be made to improve public dialogue, ensure transparency in control methods, and address community concerns regarding both welfare implications and environmental consequences;

d. **Robust monitoring and research**: Implementing control measures without comprehensive monitoring is insufficient. We strongly recommend that the NSW Government establish robust monitoring protocols that account for detectability and reliability. Similarly, we recommend that the NSW Government facilitate research into alternative and non-lethal control methods to evaluate their efficacy and welfare implications;

e. **Financial and resource allocation**: Given the substantial financial investment in lethal methods, there should be a reevaluation of funding for such measures. We recommend that the NSW Government invest in non-lethal methods with comparable efficacy and superior welfare outcomes while exploring cost-effective alternatives that balance conservation needs with humane treatment of animals;

f. **Environmental and welfare integration**: Control strategies must integrate ethical considerations with environmental protection. Efforts should balance the need for cat population control with the preservation of native species while addressing the potential for trophic cascades and unintended ecological disruptions.

In summary, the future of cat management in Australia requires a multifaceted approach that prioritises ethical considerations, ecological sustainability, and scientific rigour. A shift towards non-lethal methods, enhanced by robust monitoring and community involvement, offers the greatest opportunities for successful and humane control of ‘feral’ cat populations.


The question is not
‘Can they reason?’ nor
‘Can they talk?’ but,
‘**Can they suffer?**’
JEREMY BENTHAM

CONCLUSION

Animal Liberation is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing dialogue by submitting this document in response to the Inquiry into the management of cat populations in NSW. We believe that the informed insights and perspectives presented herein merit careful consideration, as they aim to foster a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues surrounding 'feral' cat management.

As Australia's longest serving animal rights organisation, we are dedicated to the welfare and ethical treatment of all animals. As such, we approach the Inquiry with a commitment to balancing conservation goals with humane and ethical considerations. The information and recommendations provided in this document are intended to contribute to a robust decision-making process, one that takes into account not only the ecological implications of 'feral' cat control but also the ethical dimensions and potential consequences associated with various current and proposed management strategies.

We trust that our submission will be thoroughly examined and we emphasise the importance of transparency in the forthcoming decision-making process. A comprehensive evaluation of the perspectives presented here, along with other stakeholder contributions, will undoubtedly lead to more informed and effective strategies for cat management in Australia. Animal Liberation appreciates the consideration of our submission as part of this critical process.

REFERENCES

A full list of references is available upon request.

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