

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

**Organisation:** Tamworth Water Security Alliance

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We are from the Tamworth Water Security Alliance. We have been alerted to this Inquiry by members who are also in the Tamworth Open Garden Trail Association and have asked our social media manager to lodge this submission on behalf of all the Water Security Alliance members. The below are our collected thoughts on the issue of management of cat populations in New South Wales.

As a group that campaigns for the health of our local water ways, we are deeply concerned with all matters that affect local wildlife. Cats are spreaders of Toxoplasmosis, and this parasite is known to infect wildlife by travelling through our waterways. There is even evidence that Bottlenose dolphins have been infected with Toxo via runoff into the ocean. Decreasing cats access to our wild waterways would greatly decrease the spread of toxoplasmosis to our native mammals and marsupials, and so we therefore support any proposals that encourage responsible pet ownership and cat containment policies. In this region we have grey-headed flying foxes, multiple wallaby and kangaroo species, koalas, brushtail possums, and platypus. All of these species can be infected with toxo, which can cause blindness, weight loss, rear leg paralysis, changes in protective behaviours, and even death. Our native animals already fight against so many threats, and decreasing their exposure to this parasite would reduce mortality.

Upon reading the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, we are concerned to see the phrase “large scale cat desexing programs” as we assume that this is about possible TNR programs. We are strongly opposed to the idea that an invasive species like cats could be re-released into the environment. Currently it is illegal to release cats in NSW, with good reason. A neutered cat still kills wildlife, still spreads toxoplasmosis, and still causes damage to our delicate ecosystems. If a cat is caught and no owner can be identified, it should be either put up for adoption or euthanised. Releasing an invasive species individual into our environment is an ecological crime. All of our members strongly oppose any programs that allow for this to occur. While some organisations point to TNR reducing cat populations, it is obviously less effective at reducing numbers than culling and enforcing responsible ownership.

As a community group that works closely with our local council, we understand that there are financial issues that may arise from the extra cats that end up at the pound when a cat containment policy is implemented. However, it is not acceptable for pet dogs to roam, and the ones that are caught are taken to the pound. We believe that the same standard should be applied to cats, and that council has a responsibility to enforce pet containment laws. Of course there will be a large influx of cats at the start of such a policy, but soon people will learn. The cats that are not collected will be considered abandoned and then the next step can be implemented. This will lead to a large decrease in roaming cats very quickly, and will force people to be responsible for their pets.

As staunch defenders of the environment, we believe that feral cats should be treated the same as other feral, invasive species – they should be culled. This already occurs in many places in Australia, with shooters employed to cull cats and with targeted baiting programs. It is unfair to expect our delicate ecosystems to cope with the introduction of an apex predator that they have never evolved to deal with. There has never been a native feline in Australia, meaning our bird, lizard, frog, and small mammal species are not adapted to dealing with this predator. We should be doing all we can to protect our threatened species. We live in an area with Regent Honeyeaters. There are only 300 of these endangered birds left, and we should be doing all we can to protect them. This includes culling feral cats.

We do have members who have pets cats, and all these members are successful at keeping their cats contained to their properties. Some of our members have catios, which enables cats to have safe outside time. Cats can be happily kept inside, they just need stimulation similar to what people provide for their dogs. Cats can be taught recall, fetch, and other games. There are also many cat enrichment toys on the market. If finances are a barrier, simple toys like ribbons, scrunched up paper balls, springs, and other household items make great toys as well.

In short, the members of this group believe that the barriers to cat containment are easily reduced and mitigated, and the benefits from containing pet cats and reducing feral numbers will have a positive impact on our native species. It is the responsibility of owners and our councils to protect our ecosystems, and keep cats safely contained.