

Submission
No 225

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

Name: Stuart Carter
Date Received: 13 November 2024

Dear Emma Hurst

Chairperson of the Legislative Council inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales.

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to this most important inquiry that is long overdue.

May I begin by saying that pet cat owners in our neighbourhood not only let their cats roam, they are in denial when it is suggested their cat roams way beyond their immediate house yard and they are in denial when it is pointed out that cats are hunters and kill lizards and birds and small mammals - especially when in the juvenile stage of life. They maintain their cat only wanders around their house and their cat is such a soft hearted purring pussy that they wouldn't harm anyone, let alone go hunting native animals. When we point out that all the university research and evidence from volunteers at places like Hunter Wildlife Rescue tells us otherwise, they refuse to admit it could apply to their pet.

We have cats frequently trespassing into / invading our yard that we observe during daylight hours. Goodness knows what goes on under the cover of darkness. We can say for sure, that the lizard population has been noticeably declining over the years. And we don't have any small birds at all. They have been frightened off or killed off or both.

That pet cats enter another person's property unannounced and uninvited is trespassing. In New South Wales, trespassing is a criminal offense that can be dealt with under the Inclosed Lands Protection Act 1901: Unauthorized entry:

Entering a property without permission is an offense that can result in a fine of up to \$550. The fine increases to \$1,100 if the offense occurs on a prescribed premise, such as a school or hospital.

Refusing to leave: If you ask someone to leave your property and they refuse, they are committing an offense. The penalty for this is a fine of 10 penalty units, or 20 penalty units if the land is a prescribed premise.

And yet this is a common daily occurrence across the state with thousands of domestic cats trespassing on others' property. We have chosen to give it a more polite description of roaming, as if this is less offensive and therefore an act that can be condoned on grounds that are spurious when considered that if a possum roams onto a person's property people go to great lengths to get rid of them.

This is what we are up against. No amount of education, which has been the preferred way of consecutive NSW governments to combat roaming domestic cat predation to this day, can be effective in the face of this blatant refusal to face the facts. It is therefore essential, that a more correctional action is urgently required to stem the tide of roaming domestic cats. The message of be-a-good-neighbour has not got through. The dominant superior attitude of our culture has overwhelmed any sense of decency and balance when it comes to valuing indigenous native animals over the introduced domestic cat. While billions of dollars are spent on caring for, and pampering, these lovable pets every year, precious little is given over to caring for, and protecting, native wildlife. The voice for cats has been loud and long. The voice for wildlife has also been loud and long but for reasons unknown to those of us witnessing the harm done to nature, it has not been able to compete with this vocal mega industry.

Every utterance from the Nature Conservation Council, Birdlife Australia, the Invasive Species Council, the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation (NRJO) of Councils, The Biodiversity Council and various shire and municipal councils around the state, needs to be carefully listened to and acknowledged as coming from a place of great

respect for all the stakeholders. But, and foremost, the interests of native animals must override all others in this instance.

It is appalling that the same rules that apply to dogs don't apply to cats. Dogs don't climb trees and stalk their prey. Dogs are required to be contained or tethered when in public. It is because of the behaviour of a few dogs and a few irresponsible dog owners that we have these rules for dogs. In spite of the behaviour of all cats and thousands of irresponsible cat owners, we have allowed them to get away with doing what we are told is against the law – knowing that native animals are protected, at least from human harm, but not from the harm done by a human pet. The laws that apply to dogs must therefore apply to cats, without any exemptions or exceptions. Cat containment 24/7 must be the default position when it comes to responsible domestic cat management.

In summary ...

As a resident of Macquarie Hills, I am very concerned about the impact roaming pet cats are having on our native wildlife. I therefore support sensible amendments to the law to enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats, bringing NSW into line with almost every other state.

Cats are both valued companion animals and one of the world's most successful predators. In NSW, approximately 96 million native mammals, birds and reptiles are killed by roaming pet cats every year – with about 110 native animals killed by each roaming, hunting pet cat. Unfortunately about 70% of cat owners still allow their pets to roam.

We can't change the nature of cats, but we can change the culture that allows pet cats to roam and kill. We urgently need responsible pet ownership, and this starts with clear rules to ensure pet owners keep cats contained to their property to save our native wildlife.

This will also benefit pet cats. Cats that are kept at home are happy and can live up to 10 years longer than cats that roam which are often injured or killed through fighting, car accidents and disease.

This reform should be accompanied by funding for education, compliance and to make desexing and registration easier. We also need clear rules around desexing by 4 months of age to prevent unwanted breeding and requirements for all local governments to develop and implement companion animal management plans.

I am therefore calling on the NSW Government and the Animal Welfare committee to support:

- .. AMENDMENTS TO THE NSW COMPANION ANIMALS ACT 1998 to enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats at a local level, bringing NSW into line with almost every other state.
- .. STATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING of a minimum of \$9 million to fund compliance, education, desexing, identification and registration programs.
- .. REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS to develop companion animal management plans to protect wildlife, as is required in Victoria.
- .. DEVELOPMENT OF A STATE-WIDE WEB RESOURCE for responsible pet ownership.
- .. MAKING DESEXING MANDATORY state-wide by 4 months of age, as is required in WA, Tasmania, ACT and SA.
- .. ENACT THESE CHANGES TO THE CAA ACT WITHOUT DELAY, acknowledging that the need is urgent and the safety of native animals is paramount.

I would appreciate an acknowledgement of receipt of this submission and being informed of the Committee's recommendations to parliament.

Kind Regards,

Stuart

“Humanity must take no more from nature than nature can replenish”

Source: IUCN, UNEP, and WWF. Caring for the Earth: A strategy for sustainable living.
Gland, Switzerland, 1991.