

Submission
No 182

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Community Helping Campbelltown Cats

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Management of Cat Populations in NSW

Community Helping Campbelltown Cats Submission

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

I am quoting the insightful thoughts of Nathan Winograd, attorney, journalist, and no kill advocate in relation to the subject of Non-Native or 'Invasive Species'. This forward-thinking approach of accepting cats as legitimate members of the ecosystem is critical to achieving long term success in cat management.

“A growing number of biologists, ecologists, and ethicists are calling out their own colleagues for creating a moral panic about cats. Conservation biology article : <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.13346>. Most importantly, the authors in this Conservation Biology article argue against killing cats and position the idea that “free-ranging cats should be accepted as legitimate members of their ecosystems.”

Other biologists and ecologists are calling the paper “an important and comprehensive rebuke” to the kinds of allegations you label against cats. They likewise reject the unworkable and unethical approach of killing cats.

First, because it is unscientific. Each species on Earth, moreover, “has a characteristic distribution on the Earth’s land surface... But in every case, that distribution is in practice a single frame from a very long movie. Run the clock back only 10,000 years, less than a blink of an eye in geological time, and all those distributions would be different, in many cases very different. Go back only 10 million years, still a tiny fraction of the history of life on Earth, and any comparison with present-day distributions becomes impossible, since most of the species themselves would no longer be the same.” The geographic and fossil records tell us that there is but one constant to life on Earth, and that is change.

Second, because removing one species to allegedly help another does not work as a meta-analysis of every published study concluded. What you propose is a slaughter with no end.

Third, because those calling for the removal of cats by claiming they are “non-native” are guilty of the most pernicious hypocrisy.

Humans, by your own (il-)logic, are “non-native” to most places we reside in on Earth. We belong to a species that is the most “invasive” the planet has ever experienced, causing all the environmental destruction, including the tragic decline of species. Some, beholden to the violent philosophy of xenophobia, blame cats for harming animals, while simultaneously supporting a viciously cruel industry that kills billions of birds and other animals annually so they could eat them.

Yet for reasons based entirely on narrow self-interest, nativists do not hold their own actions to the same standards which they impose upon cats: they do not force themselves to live exclusively indoors, they do not pack up and move back to the continent where humans first evolved, and they do not stop killing and eating other creatures.

Fourth, because “non-native” and “invasive species” are terms that have entered the lexicon of popular culture and become pejorative, inspiring unwarranted fear, knee-jerk suspicion, and a lack of thoughtfulness and moral consideration. They are language of intolerance, based on an idea most of us have rejected in our

treatment of our fellow human beings — that the value of a living being can be reduced merely to its place of ancestral origin.

We need a kinder, more tolerant, and saner vision of environmentalism. On a tiny planet surrounded by the infinite emptiness of space, in a universe in which life is so exceedingly rare as to render every blade of grass, every insect that crawls, and every animal that walks the Earth an exquisite, wondrous rarity, it is breathtakingly myopic, arrogant, and quite simply inaccurate to label any living thing found anywhere on the planet which gave it life as “alien” or “non-native.” There is simply no such thing as an “invasive species.”

Accepting that cats are here as part of our ecosystem is critical so that we can refocus our efforts on better managing the population via implementation of humane solutions. Killing any animal merely because of what type of being it cannot be regarded as humane. We would never apply such thinking to human beings.

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

Mandated cat containment will not be effective, particularly in lower socio-economic areas of NSW. In Campbelltown City Council it can be difficult to get many residents to microchip their pets even due to their fear and avoidance of related registration fees and annual permit fees for late desexing.

If we are in a situation where people are avoiding existing fees and protocols due to financial hardships, realistically they either may not be in a position to take on costs associated with building enclosures, keeping houses cool in summer without opening windows etc which cats may escape from, being able to afford to buy litter for the cats to toilet inside. APWF has findings from a number of Australia councils which show it does not achieve aims and is not cost effective / value for money.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/08/31/australian-pet-welfare-foundation-position-statement-on-cat-containment/>

If it is interpreted that all roaming cats are "illegal" community cat desexers, rescuers may be seen to be completing illegal activity. This will work against proactive activity occurring on the streets to proactively remedy community cat issues.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inquiry-into-pounds-in-NSW-APWF-submission-final.pdf>

Sadly, there are people in our community that can be regarded as ‘cat haters’. Cat containment laws are likely to result in such individuals feeling that they now have the law on their side to take matters into their own hands in respect to killing any cat found outdoors by unscrupulous means.

Findings from Hobson Bay, Hume, Casey and Yarra Ranges councils have been reviewed. It was recognised that mandated containment also contributes to cats for stray and pet cats.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

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

At time social media/web Initiatives are seen that could be useful and informative but on large I do not believe that they reach the audiences which really need the knowledge and education.

Responsible pet ownership needs to be championed in our school system, educating our next generations so that we can see positive change in years ahead.

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

- The most substantive impacts I see will be a massive increase in costs (capex and opex) to manage cat containment policies. A good proportion of NSW Councils have negligible capacity to hold and manage cats as they have opted to play the ‘free to roam’ card and not instigate any proactive cat management activity in their LGA’s. They simply do not have the facilities, let alone resourcing to manage such a law change. A massive injection of funding would be required to implement such a solution.
- High euthanasia rates would be unavoidable even if the facilities and resources existed to hold all the cats that may come in. No kill facilities would no longer be able to maintain this.
- Council shelter staff would suffer severe levels of trauma/psychological distress due to the requirement to be constantly euthanising healthy rehomingable cats. This would result in lifelong conditions such as PTSD that may have ongoing legal and financial implications to council.
- Potential vigilantism within the community resulting in animal cruelty.
- High volumes of complaints could be expected to be received.
- Difficulty may be experienced in securing veterinary professionals who are prepared to be involved in constant euthanasia.

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

StrayCare Campbelltown - Targeted Cat Desexing through Keeping Cats Safe at Home

This program offered free desexing and microchipping for cats within designated target suburbs of the Campbelltown local government area. Target suburbs were selected with the highest council pound and RSPCA Sydney cat intake adjusted for estimated resident population. Close collaboration with the Campbelltown City Council animal shelter and companion animal teams, local unowned cat carers, and local cat rescue and rehoming organisations ensured promotion of the program was carefully targeted towards those caring for unowned cats, or those overwhelmed with multiple cats.

This program aimed to convert unowned cat “semi-owners” into owners using a human behaviour change approach. While many participating cats joined the program as unowned “strays”, a condition of their participation was that they leave the program with an owner – a person responsible for their lifelong care and wellbeing.

Participating Cats

	Male	Female	Total
RSPCA Sydney	54	67	121
Ingleburn Veterinary Hospital	159	208	367
Total	213	275	488

- 3 out of 4 participating cats were acquired as “a stray”.
- Less than 1 in 20 were “actively acquired” from a pet shop, breeder, pound, or shelter.
- 94% had never been to a vet.
- Almost half the cats were from locations or households with five or more cats.
- Less than 1 in 20 cats were already microchipped, 87% were microchipped at time of desex*.
- 31% were kittens <6 months of age.

- 30% of participating female cats had had at least one litter.

*A requirement to pay a registration fee can be an important barrier to semi-owners taking responsibility for the unowned cats they care for even when desexing and microchipping is free. Note the caregiver declined microchipping for 10% of participating cats, likely because of the cost of registration.

The Impacts:

- Campbelltown City Council pound cat intake reduced by one third from 1049 to 706 (FY22-23 compared to the average between FY17-18 and FY20-21).
- RSPCA Sydney's shelter intake from the Campbelltown local government area reduced by 33% (FY22-23 compared to the average between FY17-18 and FY20-21).
- Cat-related nuisance complaints to Campbelltown City Council in FY22-23 decreased by 56% compared to FY21-22.
- We expect to see greater impacts once data are available for FY23-24

TOR (i) options for reducing the feral cat population.

Trap Neuter Return Programs

Trap-Neuter-Return is the humane and effective approach to prevent the reproduction of unowned and semi owned cats. Such programs have been practiced for decades in the US and Europe and proven successful. Australia is quite behind the times in this respect.

Trap-Neuter-Return improves the lives of the cats, stabilises, and reduces community cat numbers over time, and improves their relationships with the people who live near them.

Cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinarian to be neutered and vaccinated. After recovery, the cats are returned to their home, their colony outdoors. Kittens and cats who are friendly and socialized to people and adopted into homes.

Grounded in science, TNR stops the breeding cycle of cats and therefore improves their lives while preventing reproduction.

TNR Project Compassion (run by Community Helping Campbelltown Cats)

TNR Project Compassion was commenced 2 years in Campbelltown ago by a few community cat managers from the Campbelltown and Camden areas. Since inception 660 cats have been brought in and desexed, rehomed or returned and managed.

The team work on groups of community cats to help improve problematic cat areas of Campbelltown.

Significant improvement has been observed in the areas that have been worked on. Streets that contended with problematic cat populations are now under control, have Community Group Managers to feed and monitor, nuisance activity has ceased, resident complaints have ceased, kittens getting run over have ceased, population numbers have reduced, and breeding stopped.

Interestingly, often negative people in the community regarding the cats and TNR end up being positive supporting advocates for the activity, even contributing and getting involved.

TNR should be a recognised and supported component of managing cat populations in NSW.

The use of 1080 poison needs to cease. 1080 is not a humane approach to killing any animal (RSPCA, Animal Liberation, APWF, Animal Justice Party) and was banned in other countries decades ago, the impacts of 1080 include convulsions likened by a vet to be electrocuted for up to 2 days, and it kills many non-targeted native animals. <https://www.al.org.au/ban-1080>
<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-using-1080-for-pest-animal-control/>

Conservation fencing areas and "training" zones are supported.

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/conservation-fencing-provides-hope-for-threatened-wildlife/>

Gene technology for suppressing feral cat breeding is supported.

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/our-work/feral-cat-and-fox-control>

TOR (j) any other related matters

➤ **Categorisation of Cat Types**

NSW need to ensure they categorise/define all the groups of cats that exist. Owned, Semi-owned, Un-owned, feral. Treatments plans for each group will need to be different to ensure that appropriate activities are undertaken.

A stray cat is not a feral cat. Often, they are merely a victim of human incompetence, abandonment, cost of living / rental crisis, poor education, and would be suitable for rehoming post the completion of necessary vet work and care. Owned cats who are allowed to roam can also be easily mistaken for stray or unowned cats. Not correctly categorising and assessing cats will have both legal and moral implications. Refer to the Domestic Cat Management in Australia RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018 which made this recommendation in terms of categories 6 years ago. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management-in-Australia-RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018.pdf>

➤ **Annual Permit Fee for Cats not Desexed by 4 Months**

The current annual permit fee for cats undesexed by 4 months is proving to cause issues in the community for rescuers, adopters, and cat owners alike. Nonregistered rescues, independent rescuers and people in the community are being penalised for taking in cats that are over 4 months old.

Residents in the community are taking in cats and are choosing not to microchip to avoid these fees and penalties. Low cost desex programs are enforcing chipping and registration, hence annual permit fees and as a result people are opting not to pursue them. The annual permit fee was deployed to encourage desexing but in many ways it is resulting in the complete opposite.

➤ **Vet Shortages throughout NSW**

It is a well-known fact that NSW is experiencing vet shortages and that graduating vets are often leaving the profession within 5 years. The potential impacts of vets having to perform constant euthanasia to be able to address the fall-out of mandatory cat containment will without a doubt put further strain on the profession and further increase the exit rate of veterinary professionals.