

Submission  
No 186

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

**Organisation:** Birdlife Shoalhaven

**Date Received:** 22 November 2024

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BirdLife Shoalhaven is a branch of BirdLife Australia Limited ABN 75 149 124 774

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The Hon Emma Hurst MLC  
Chair, Animal Welfare Committee  
Legislative Council of New South Wales  
NSW Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

22 November 2024

Dear Chair

**Submission: Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales**

Birdlife Australia (BLA) is Australia's largest bird conservation organisation with over 200,000 members and supporters. For over a century its members have protected birds and their habitats through practical conservation and advocacy based on the best available science.

BirdLife Shoalhaven (BLS) is a branch of BLA, which itself has 1,200 members and supporters. Our charter is to help our members and the wider community enjoy and learn more about birds and to advocate for the conservation of birdlife across the Shoalhaven.

Birdlife Shoalhaven welcomes this inquiry and thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission.

One of the conservation priorities for BLS is action to improve the management of domestic cats to improve health and safety outcomes for humans, cats and native wildlife. In the Shoalhaven, we are fortunate to have populations of threatened species such as the Eastern Ground Parrot and Eastern Bristlebird, as well as New South Wales' only endemic bird species, the Rockwarbler. Predation by feral and domestic cats is an ongoing and real threat to these and other bird species, not to mention other wildlife such as mammals, marsupials and reptiles.

The impact of cats on native wildlife is well documented. A joint fact sheet produced by Birdlife Australia, the Biodiversity Council and Invasive Species Council summarises this impact and outlines measures to tackle this very substantial problem (see [Pet-cat-impacts-June-2023.pdf](#)).

Predation by cats is recognised as a key threatening process in New South Wales and nationally under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (Cth) and *Threatened Species Conservation Act* (NSW). A national Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) was

first approved in 2008, updated in 2015 and is currently undergoing its third revision ([Draft updated threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats. - Climate](#)). BLS was one of the more than 1500 organisations/individuals that provided comment during the public consultation phase for the latest draft 'cat TAP'.

The threats posed to native wildlife by feral and domestic cats are clearly outlined in these documents and in the scientific literature. We strongly encourage the Committee to draw on these detailed and science-based materials to assist your deliberations.

One of the identified shortcomings for effective cat management, is patchy and inconsistent regulatory and management frameworks, particularly to allow stronger cat containment laws for domestic pets. As stated in the 2023 draft national cat TAP *"The resulting patchwork of regulations is confusing to the public, and hard to enforce. Improving alignment of companion animal legislation across jurisdictions, and across local governments, and enabling local governments to set bylaws (such as cat prohibition) to suit local conditions more easily, would help lift the standards of pet cat management, and reduce the biodiversity impacts of pet cats."* (p.27)

In New South Wales, a major problem is that the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (NSW) limits the powers of local Councils to formulate and implement effective policies to control domestic cats. BLS has written to our local Council – the Shoalhaven City Council – urging that they write to relevant State Ministers, seeking changes that would allow cat containment laws to be introduced (letter of 10 July 2023 attached). Subsequently, on 17 July 2023 the Shoalhaven City Council unanimously approved a Motion that stated:

*That the CEO write to the Premier, The Hon. Chris Minns MP, the Member for South Coast Liza Butler MP, the Minister for the Environment The Hon. Penny Sharpe MP, the Minister for Local Government The Hon. Ron Hoenig MP, the Leader of the Opposition Mark Speakman MP, the Shadow Minister for the Environment Kellie Sloane MP, the Member for Kiama Gareth Ward MP and Ms Sue Higgs MLC urging that the Companion Animals Act 1998 be reviewed so that NSW LGA Councils have the power to formulate a policy to control domestic cats in the Council area with the ability to:*

- 1. Introduce and police new regulations in relation to cat control that are deemed appropriate in their local government area for the protection of native species, the suppression of diseases carried by cats, and for the health and safety of cats generally.*
- 2. Introduce controls on domestic (pet) cats on a trial basis for at least 12 months with a view to eventually introducing a 24-hour curfew.*
- 3. Make 24-hour curfews on cats a condition of consent on all new greenfield development sites.*

This clearly demonstrates that in the Shoalhaven region, one of the barriers to more effective cat containment lies in inadequacies with the regulatory framework under the *Companion Animals Act*. BLS considers that a desirable outcome from the current inquiry would be to provide concrete recommendations for urgent legislative amendments.

Guidance for how local Councils should follow up with their own measures must also be provided. This should all be backed up with a significant funding commitment to support consultation, education, implementation and enforcement. Specifically, we support:

- Amendments to the *Companion Animals Act* 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 NSW 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.

In addition to measures relating to domestic cats, we recommend the Committee provide strong and concrete recommendations on actions to address the ongoing and significant risk posed to wildlife in New South Wales from predation by feral cats. This should include the State government providing sufficient resources for research and on-ground management of feral cats, to ensure that New South Wales is the leader in the national effort to address this invidious threat.

If you have any queries, please direct them to Rob Dunn or Deb Callister-Carter, via the email addresses or phone numbers below.

Yours sincerely

**Rob Dunn**  
**President**

**Deb Callister-Carter**  
**Conservation Officer**



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Shoalhaven City Council  
36 Bridge Road  
Nowra NSW 2541  
Attn. All Councillors

C.c. Mr. Dunshea, CEO

10 July 2023

Dear Councillors,

Birdlife Australia is Australia's largest bird conservation organisation with over 250,000 members and supporters. For over a century its members have protected birds and their habitats through practical conservation and advocacy based on the best available science.

BirdLife Shoalhaven (BLS) is a branch of BLA, which itself has 1,200 members and supporters. Our charter is to help our members and the wider community enjoy and learn more about birds and to advocate for the conservation of birdlife across the Shoalhaven.

**BLS draws your attention to the imperative to control domestic cats, to prevent the loss of birds and native wildlife in the Shoalhaven and across NSW.**

NSW and Western Australia are the only States that have no provisions on cat curfews or their containment indoors. This is directly impacting on the loss of birds and native animals across the State.

In 1996, the NSW Companion Animals Act combined cats and dogs within the one Policy. This means that Local Governments are unable to act to control the containment of domestic cats and so help protect native animals.

This problem is well documented. Most recently on 9 June 2023 the Sydney Morning Herald released the findings of research by Australian National University for the Biodiversity Council, Invasive Species Council and Birdlife Australia, entitled "*The staggering death toll of roaming pet cats finally revealed*" - reference below.

The research found that domestic cats kill 6,000 to 11,000 native animals per sq. km. each year in urban areas. However, local governments in NSW are powerless to implement pet management restrictions, such as containment of cats indoors, to stop this. The research identified 14 Councils in NSW, including Wollongong City Council, who have supported the introduction of stricter regulations since 2018. Furthermore, there has been strong community support for them taking this position.

BLS acknowledges there have been good community awareness programs to make pet owners aware of the issue, including NSW RSPCA's aim to '*Encourage cat owners to keep their cats safe at home and reduce cat predation on wildlife*' and their '*Keeping Cats Safe at Home Indoors*' project.

Under this project, Councils across NSW applied for \$92,000 to implement actions for local residents to keep their pet cat safe from harm by keeping them indoors. However, there was only enough funding to support ten Councils, though this included Shoalhaven City Council.

BLS congratulates Council's use of this funding to implement several effective programs, such as working with local veterinarians to explain the benefits to both cats and wildlife if pets are kept indoors and running a program of targeted desexing of cats.

While these actions all help, they are inadequate if we are to address the problem properly. This can only happen if Councils are given adequate powers to control the containment of domestic cats. For this to happen the NSW Companions Act must be reviewed.

**To this end, we ask Council to write to the NSW Government, seeking their support to conduct an urgent review of the NSW Companion Animals Act to legislate for the containment of domestic cats indoors at all times.**

Birdlife Shoalhaven request your urgent attention to this issue.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Rob Dunn**  
**President**

Reference:

- Research by Australian National University - [Domestic cat wildlife killings to surge unless tougher regulation introduced: ANU study \(smh.com.au\)](http://www.smh.com.au)