

**Submission
No 188**

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: World League for Protection of Animals (WLPA)

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Submission to Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input on this important and troubling issue both here in NSW and worldwide.

Acknowledging that current practices are not effective in relation to reducing the cat population in NSW, we would like to suggest humane strategies towards achieving this goal.

Along with examining prior strategies that have not had the desired outcome. Mandatory Cat containment policy undertaken by some local government council areas in the short and long term, did not reduce cat numbers.

There are a number of benefits to cat containment such as less risk to cats from harm in being injured by cars, falls from buildings, hostile people and other animals. Containment also minimizes risk to exposure to contagious feline diseases. Containment in areas close to National Parks is advisable to restrict their access to wildlife. In general cat containment should be strongly encouraged but imposing mandatory rules, other than the latter situation as described re proximity to National Parks and sensitive wildlife populations does not lessen the cat population.

One of the barriers to Cat Containment for individual households can be the cost in providing facilities for containment. Also a large number of cats wandering and not contained are abandoned and dumped cats, who because of irresponsible people are trying to survive in a tough environment. Their health and well being can be compromised by lack of nutrition, endless pregnancies, safe places and cruelty from members of the public.

Cat containment effectiveness in managing wandering cats where it has been mandated has not shown to be effective as evidenced in controlling wandering cats or reducing cat numbers. In fact councils that have in place Mandatory cat Containment City of Yarra (Victoria) 3 years and City of Casey (Victoria) 20 years both had an increase in the number of cats impounded rate. City of Casey rate of impoundment in 1998 was 264 and 1047 2019 /20 which was more than double the rate of the human population increase.

Some other implications for Councils in implementing and enforcing containment policies is increased cat nuisance complaints and euthanasia rates. Not an effective management strategy as Pounds, would not have the capacity to maintain this system, as it is not targeting the main issue which is the high birth rate of cats and is not cost effective long term. Being killed in a pound or shelter is still the leading cause of death for companion animals in NSW. Do not make this disgraceful situation even worse by introducing already failed policies.

Government Funding would be better utilized in Strategies around education in particular local government areas, in relation to responsible pet ownership. Targeted to communities who may culturally not agree with desexing of cats, nor current laws in relation to microchipping or be reluctant to spend money on animal care in this instance cats. This education must also enforce the fact that it is not only illegal and cruel to abandon and dump cats but that this behaviour puts responsibility onto others. We recommend that the provisions in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act NSW 1979 be enforced and publicity given to prosecutions of people for abandoning animals, as few seem aware it is an offense as well as cruel. At the same time, as offering assistance to those in crisis situations, such as fleeing domestic violence and homelessness, where they potentially may abandon animals.

Education of the community regarding a compassionate approach to animals and their welfare needs to begin in the school system so as to influence belief systems from an early age. The benefits of large scale and targeted Desexing programs and their effectiveness in reducing cat numbers is evidenced by a 12 year study by the Koret School of Veterinary Medicine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Demonstrating that the ideal control method for Urban stray cats is to ensure that at least 70% of stray /street cats are continuously desexed. Granted this study applies to specifically to street cats/TNR and that we need to put in place strategies that prevent cats ending up on the street in the first place. It would seem that this is the very least percentage of desexed cats required to have any impact on cat numbers. Otherwise we are going backwards. We need to be aiming higher.

This approach would indicate that government funding must be prioritized to undertake large scale state wide desexing programs including TNR. Whilst government and councils have put in place schemes that have attempted to address the "Cat Problem" they have fallen short. TNR should be legalized with all species so as to control population numbers. For example several councils have offered low cost desexing for cats owned by persons on low income and or on pensions and health care cards. Generally the desexing surgery is done at the RSPCA Yagoona. There is often a long period of waiting to get a cat desexed and this has resulted in another pregnancy and a litter. Hardly

the desired outcome. Cat Protection also has in place some good programs Adopt a Stray and the Diva program. The latter targets once again people on low incomes etc and in particular LGAs.

The way forward I would suggest needs to be multipronged to be effective in addressing stray abandoned and non desexed owned cats in our community.

Another strategy in reducing the cat population would be to ban the sale of undesexed animals by breeders and shops. This should apply to charities too but is less of a problem as most of them are ethical and do this already.

Across the state the government needs to ensure that all persons have access to cheaper desexing. This should not depend on your income or location (as in specific LGA). It doesn't make sense nor is it fair that persons in particular LGAs have access to less expensive desexing programs. This strategy will require a significant amount of government funding to implement firstly and maintain for a period of time until evidence of change in community attitudes and cat numbers occurs. It will also require the cooperation of community veterinary practices. Veterinary surgeons would need to be compensated financially for reducing their costs. For far too long there has been an expectation by some members of the public that Vets have a vocation to help animals and should waver or lesson costs.

Further there has been a reliance on Charities and Volunteers, to not only perform rescue of stray and abandoned cats but to cover veterinary costs. Many cats are rehomed where possible but this is not always the case. This is a heavy burden for many to carry both financially and health wise. Government departments and councils have provided little relief. This should not continue.

In the short term Government Funding needs to be directed to covering Charities and Rescuers veterinary costs particularly in relation to desexing of cats.

Longer term it would make sense for the Government to fund several larger charities/organisations to undertake community education programs, rescue operations, desexing and rehoming programs.

Further the establishment of an independent Office of Animal Welfare would ensure that animal protection is improved in NSW. This then obviously gives weight to the protection of wildlife too.