

Submission
No 189

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Canterbury Bankstown Council

Date Received: 22 November 2024



21 November 2024

Animal Welfare Committee
The Department of the Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Re: Submission on the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Canterbury-Bankstown Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Legislative Council's Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales.

Council submits that more can and must be done to protect our biodiversity and reduce the continuing threats to and extinction of our native species by managing feral cat populations and domestic cat movements. Currently local government in NSW is disproportionately responsible for managing feral and domestic cats, enforcement actions and stakeholder and community engagement.

There are shortcomings with the current legislative framework and reform is necessary through amendments to the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. Further, as the level of government operating at the coalface of the destruction caused by cats, local government needs greater state support and increased resources to manage, implement and enforce measures that mitigate the impacts of feral and domestic cats in NSW.

Council has considered the Animal Welfare Committee's Terms of Reference and would like to draw the Committee's attention to the work Council has done and the recommendations Council makes to the Legislative Council and the NSW Government in response to the matter.

Council background

The City of Canterbury Bankstown is located in Sydney's south-western suburbs, between 8 and 23km south-west of the Sydney CBD. The City of Canterbury Bankstown is one of the most culturally, socially, and economically diverse communities in Sydney with a population of around 361,551 and covering an area of 110 (sq km). There are over 129 nationalities and around 200 languages represented by people living in the City of Canterbury Bankstown.



Community Animal Welfare Scheme (CAWS) campaign

In collaboration with the RSPCA, the Community Animal Welfare Scheme (CAWS) Campaign offers a subsidised desexing program for residents with pension, healthcare, or new start cards. This initiative provides affordable healthcare services while reducing the number of abandoned animals. In the past year, the campaign successfully desexed 425 animals, 370 (87%) of which were cats.

The program commenced in 2016 with Council contributing \$15,000.00 and has steadily increased to a \$50,000.00 in the 2024/25 financial year. This service also ensures that all animals through the program receive vital vaccines and microchipping at no expense to the community. Making responsible pet ownership accessible could assist to encourage those caring for semi-owned cats to take full ownership, especially in lower economic areas, where there is often a greater roaming cat population¹.

Impact of cat populations on environment

While the *Companion Animals Act 1998* does contain provisions for the control of cats within NSW, current methods do not go far enough for local government to manage feral and domestic cats. Companion animals can be beloved as a member of the family. However, cats cause considerable damage to Australian wildlife.

According to the Invasive Species Council, roaming cats have resulted in the extinction of 27 native species and another 123 are at threat of the same². Introducing changes to legislation which makes trap, neuter and release (TNR) programs legal in Australia, could have a positive impact on the stray and feral cat community. While opinion is divided on its potential for success within rural areas, it has had some positive results internationally³. Advocates consider that it would be an important move, specifically in urban and metropolitan areas. Results⁴ have shown such TNR programs trigger a population reduction without unnecessary euthanasia and can be a more ethical⁵ alternative. Not only does it improve cat welfare but also the mental health⁶ of those involved with having to kill animals. Running TNR programs alongside other initiatives to increase community awareness and knowledge could hopefully result in greater numbers of the community claiming semi-owned and unowned animals as well, thereby positively effecting the impact of cats on the environment.

¹ Jenni L McDonald and Jane Clements, [Engaging with Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Communities and Their Cats: Human Behaviour Change for Animal and Human Benefit](#), *Animals*, 2019

² Invasive Species Council, [Combating invasive species: Priorities for the next NSW government](#), 2023

³ Daniel D. Spehar and Peter J. Wolf, [Back to School: An Updated Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Long-Term Trap-Neuter-Return Program on a University's Free-Roaming Cat Population](#), *Animals*, 2019

⁴ Kuan Tan et al, [Trap-Neuter-Return Activities in Urban Stray Cat Colonies in Australia](#), *Animals*, 2017

⁵ NSW Parliamentary Research Service, [Feral cats: Do Trap-Neuter-Return programs work?](#), 2014

⁶ Helen Swarick and Jacque Rand, [Application of a Protocol Based on Trap-Neuter-Return \(TNR\) to Manage Unowned Urban Cats on an Australian University Campus](#), *Animals*, 2018



feral cats. An amendment to the *Companion Animals Act* to provide Local Government with greater powers to enforce the management of cat populations within NSW. Revised, effective and enforceable legislation will provide for the improved management of problem feral and domestic cats across greater areas for all levels of government, particularly Local Government as the primary land managers¹⁰.

Secondly, funding be provided by the NSW Government for the continuation of community education and outreach programs focusing on responsible pet ownership, encouraging practices such as desexing and microchipping. Additional grants for programs that encourage, promote and incentivise responsible pet ownership would also be recommended¹¹.

Finally, additional funding for further collaboration with local animal welfare organisations which support TNR programs, which can offer a humane and sustainable solution to reduce the roaming cat population.

Concluding remarks

Council would like to thank the Animal Welfare Committee for their consideration of the above-mentioned recommendations. Council considers reform to State Government legislation, together with sufficient resources for Local Government are essential for the delivery of positive and effective outcomes in managing the impacts of cat populations and movements in NSW¹².

Yours sincerely,

DIRECTOR PLANNING

¹⁰ Canterbury-Bankstown Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown submission on the Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia, 2020

¹¹ NESP Threatened Species Recovery Hub, The management of cats by local governments in Australia: summary of national survey results. Project 7.4 Research findings factsheet, Brisbane, 2021

¹² Canterbury-Bankstown Council, City of Canterbury Bankstown submission on the Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia, 2020