

**Submission
No 190**

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: SAFE Rehoming
Date Received: 22 November 2024

SAFE Rehoming Inc. submission for the NSW Government inquiry into Management of Cat Populations in New South Wales

SAFE Rehoming is a registered rehoming organisation based in Roseville, Sydney. Having a cat rehoming centre our primary focus ends up being cats, and we take in hundreds of cats every year for rescue, rehabilitation, vet work and rehoming. As a registered charity, we operate solely from donations from the animal loving community in Sydney and beyond.

We take in cats from throughout Sydney and have a detailed knowledge of the cat crisis that is a huge stress on all rescues in the Greater Sydney region. From our experience the following should be considered to ensure this crisis is managed in a humane way for cats and wildlife alike.

- Reform to the legislation to ensure there is correct terminology to clear up the differences between owned cats, semi-owned cats, unowned cats and feral cats. These all have distinct differences and should be dealt with in different ways to ensure human treatment.
 - o Owned – Cats which are microchipped, should be microchipped, identified and registered to a current owner who is providing full time care. Should be desexed and vaccinated, indoors overnight at a minimum
 - o Semi-owned – Cats which are not owned in any official capacity, but are being cared for by a member of the public by feeding, vet care and sometimes informal shelter and are dependent on this care for survival. Will usually not be microchipped but may have had some vet attention, might be desexed and/or had an initial vaccination. These cats live outdoors 24/7 as they do not have a ‘house’ to reside in. They may or may not live in a colony with many other cats.
 - o Unowned – Cats which are not owned and not being provided care direct care from members of the public. They may rely on food scraps from a human source as well as hunting but have very little contact with humans and are not provided vet care. These cats live outdoors 24/7 and are usually in a colony setting with other cats.
 - o Feral – Cats which have no dependency on humans in any capacity. They rely solely on hunting, have no human contact at all and therefore no vet care. They are rarely even seen by humans and exist in bushland 24/7 in a colony setting.
- Management for each of the above categories should differ in different settings. Many cats from semi-owned populations are social enough to be rehomed, some cats and certainly kittens from unowned populations may also be rehoming candidates.
- The way the legislation is currently set up, it makes it very difficult for rescues to intervene without council involvement. Some reform in regards to how rescues can deal with abandoned cats, semi-owned cat, unowned cats and even lost cats would go a long way to streamline processes for councils and make the rescues’ workloads easier.
- In line with the previous point, an option to access to the Companion Animal Register to internally process surrenders, adoptions and registrations for registered Rehoming Organisations would greatly reduce council workload and streamline processes for rescues.
- Community outreach and education is an absolutely vital cog in the process. Sydney is a diverse city with a multicultural population. With this comes a bring together of cultures which have different expectations of how to responsibly care for a cat. Education in key areas where semi-owned and unowned cat populations are high, in different languages and easy to understand language would go a long way in ensuring everyone understands the expectations of looking after cats in Australia.

- Alongside the above, subsidised desexing programs in partnership with local vets and other stake holders to ensure semi-owned (and cats the cross the line from unowned to semi-owned) can be desexed and receive appropriate veterinary care.
- Legislative reform to ensure rental properties have appropriate rules for cat ownership. Cats are far less likely to cause damage to properties than dogs or even children, yet landlords persistently discriminate against pet owners. This would reduce the burden on Council Pounds and rescues for surrenders due to moving to non-pet friendly rentals and also expand the potential for people to adopt cats.
- Trap, neuter, return programs have a proven efficacy overseas in reducing stray cat populations. When these are implemented in conjunction with rehoming the appropriate semi-owned cats, unowned kittens and appropriate unowned cat through rescues, this would go a long way to significantly reduce these populations over time. This program can be run in conjunction with subsidised desexing as well as many of these areas where this is required will overlap.
- Caution should be used when considering trap and kill programs. Not only are these programs proven to not be effective, they are also frowned upon from the public's perception as the cat's welfare is generally compromised.
- Further caution should be used when considering methods that include any type of poisoning of cat populations. These programs are not only cruel and inhumane in the method which they use to kill the cat, but they also have severe adverse effects on scavenger wildlife that consume the remains. These programs are detrimental to the cats, the wildlife, the public perception and given they are also kill programs, as per the last point are proven to not work in the long term
- Caution should be used on limiting cats per household, these limitations make it harder for responsible owners to adopt and care for more cats and also put into to question grey areas around fostering litters of kittens and fostering cats in general. The focus should be on education around responsible cat ownership, cracking down on people breaking cruelty laws (i.e. backyard breeders) and ensuring help is provided to people that get themselves into unfortunate situations due to overbreeding (i.e. hoarding), rather than restricting law-abiding citizens.
- Caution should be used when looking at mandatory confinement programs. These are generally hard to enforce, unpopular and are not overly effective in reducing wildlife predation and impoundment. Owned cats who never go outside are less likely to return home if they accidentally escape and human activity has been proven time and again to be far more destructive to native wildlife than cat predation, despite best efforts at misinformation being broadcast to the public.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Tim Crossman
President
SAFE Rehoming Inc.