

Submission
No 193

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: No Kill Collective
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Cat population management is a challenging policy arena. The numbers of homeless and mismanaged cats in urban Sydney appear from experience not reduced over the 14 years I have been active in this space, previously as Cat Concern from 2008, then as Coordinator of WLPA, the World League Protection of Animals Inc, the oldest no kill agency in Australia, where I worked from 2010 to 2023, and now as No Kill Collective, which focuses on rehoming pets with desexing and followup. I have collaborated with scores of rescue agencies in this time. The ones I like least are desexing zealots who fail to remedy the overall welfare of the homeless cat. TNR programs are thus deficient and as the literature reports are a partial solution only. Rescuers are known to dump tame cats back on streets immediately after desexing.

In 2024 RSPCA reported in the Sydney Morning Herald a 60 percent increase in pet abandonment due to Sydney's rental and housing crisis. Thus, overpopulation and cat mismanagement are far more complex matters than current shallow policy discussion about desexing acknowledges. Professor Rand' paper at last week's AWL Animal Welfare conference alluded to this. Data are disappointing showing that widespread funded desexing programs don't necessarily result in reduced entry of unwanted pets to pounds and thus does not impact by reduced killing in pounds as we would hope..

Regarding feedback on the policy levers proposed, stemming from the Federal Environment Minister's Threat Abatement Plan which she largely proposes be implemented nationally around 2 key ideas: 1) a cap on household pet cats nationally and 2) 24 hr containment of cats in the boundary of a property, some calling it a curfew.

WE SUPPORT CAT NUMBER CAPS PER HOUSEHOLD IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES, where undesexed, roaming or lost cats can predate wildlife and create feral cat populations. WE DO NOT SUPPORT A ONE SIZE CAP FITS ALL in urban contexts.

WE SUSPECT DESEXING PROGRAMS SHOULD TARGET RURAL PROPERTY RESIDENTS AND FARMERS WHERE WILD DOGS AND FERAL CATS IN RURAL AREAS STEM FROM FAILURE TO DESEX.

WE SUPPORT 24 hr PER DAY CONFINEMENT OF CATS TO WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF A PROPERTY and our experience is that this is achievable in private properties occupied by owners. The idea of INDOOR VS OUTDOOR cats must be replaced with the notion of INSIDE CATS WHO LIVE WITHIN THE BOUNDAY OF A PROPERTY.

WE DO NOT SUPPORT THE POLICING OF CATS AND PENALTY OF DEATH FOR THOSE STILL ROAMING, but instead education or fines to property owners and cat owners, including placing pressure on landlords to reasonably allow netting and other requirements to accommodate pets owned by tenants.

The problem pointed out by Professor Rand is that such a position penalises the poor. Pets are increasingly a luxury. However new norms must be instilled community wide to stop roaming cats and cats becoming lost.

There are serious deficiencies in policy making and implementation. First, the nomenclature proposed in your literature is not scientific. That is, there is no such cat type , "stray" nor "street cat". There are only owned cats at home, owned lost cats, or unowned cats or some

might say, semi owned cats. Your definition of feral cat is unacceptable and unscientific. In science the term, feral, is not an animal to be vilified, but one born one generation removed from domesticity. The main cat type rehomed by rescue agencies are feral kittens who are housed through adoption very successfully if given time. Education by vets of the community and by rescuers and rehomers with pet owners is hampered by the misuse of cat type nomenclature.

Policy development in recent years is largely influenced by a toxic document from RSPCA Australia, Best Practice Cat Management. It utterly failed to properly consider no kill approaches. Recent data on numbers of cats as problematic, are unreliable indicators due to five years since 2019 of natural disasters, drought, bushfire, COVID and now an economic crisis. The size of "the problem" of overpopulation is unclear. What is clear is cat management costs are greatly increased for agencies seeking humane responses and for householders with pet cats.

Previous effort to educate pet owners cannot be expected to impact. First, Councils in my experience have no educational materials or ones that vilify cats. Websites do exist but there are no public meetings, no materials for rehomers, no clarity on who should be excluded as a prospective cat owner. There is merely the requirement of point of sale education. One policy possibility is to increase the age of cat ownership to 25 where more reliable homes with stable lifestyles may be more likely.

Desexing voucher programs for pensioners are generous but cannot be accessed by rescue groups, many of whom are pensioners but who fund their work from superannuation. I personally spent \$19,000 in 2017 desexing on one site, a Chinese Market Garden with thousands of cats. Another two women spent \$20,000 each. One of them continues to desex on that site. The desexing programs should be coupled with education about rehoming the kittens, desexing kittens and vaccinating. Numerous barriers exist with Councils obstructing rehoming events, disallowing their halls or noticeboards to be used to rehome animals. I am unimpressed with council management of the problem, other than their collecting and transporting unwanted or lost cats to certain death at pounds.

Policy is adrift, largely due to total lack of consultation with hundreds of rescue agencies, the lack of a peak body for no kill agencies. Opinion leaders are non representative committees advising Government, which appear to only consult Cat Protection Society, RSPCA and Animal Welfare League. Funding is also narrowly directed to these large non volunteer based agencies who kill cats and dogs. It is distressing that \$38M was the cost of the new Blacktown pound Adoption Centre. 10 or more centres in the non profit sector could have been funded instead. None of these big agencies actually "rescue" . AWL does not take in nor rehome "strays". RSPCA wont refer cats to other agencies, preferring to kill instead. While recent large scale desexing programs funded by the Minns Government have been impressive. There is under representation by the non profit rescue and rehoming sector largely volunteer based small organisations who don't kill to engage in policy processes. Infact, since my involvement our organisations have NEVER been contacted nor consulted by any policy initiative.

The July 2024 Office of Local Government regressive changes to Lifetime Registration of cats is an example. Zero education was provided and zero consultation. I found out about it through my local MP, Jenny Leong. Professor Rand suggests the scapping of Lifetime Registration. It is a tax on pet owners to enable pounds to kill.

In conclusion, a serious rethink in process to inform policy making is needed. Thankyou for this opportunity to express some views in this issue to which I have now dedicated a quarter of my professiinal life. I have written already to the Federal Environment Minister already with feedback along these lines.

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