

Submission
No 195

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: FOUR PAWS Australia

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into ‘The Management of cat populations in New South Wales’.

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, and operates with a commitment to sustainable, humane, and science-based approaches. With offices in 16 countries, including Australia, and 10 species-appropriate sanctuaries we work to build a world where animals are treated with respect, empathy, and understanding.

Founded in 1988, FOUR PAWS has over 36 years’ experience in animal welfare, over 25 years of which have been in effective cat management, FOUR PAWS runs successful programs across Europe and Southeast Asia, guided by a One Welfare approach. The One Welfare Framework promotes the link between animal welfare, human wellbeing, and the physical and social environment. It complements the One Health Approach which addresses the interconnectedness between human, environmental, and animal health focusing mostly on health aspects not taking into account welfare considerations¹.

Our initiatives based on the One Welfare Approach focus on large-scale, targeted desexing, microchipping, vaccination, community education on responsible pet ownership, and support for shelter adoptions. We have implemented sustainable and humane cat and dog population management programs in countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Thailand, and Vietnam.

FOUR PAWS are concerned regarding current cat management practices in NSW and across Australia. These practices do not align with modern science, fall short of community expectations, and are outdated, ineffective and inhumane. While we acknowledge the need for effective cat management strategies, mandatory containment risks unintended consequences that could exacerbate existing challenges.

Evidence-based approaches, including targeted desexing, education on responsible pet ownership, and community cat programs, will not only support sustainable cat management but will also better meet the needs of cat owners, rescue and welfare organisations, local councils and the broader community while promoting positive environmental outcomes.

For clarity we include the following table of definitions base on the work of RSPCA Australia and the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation ²

¹ Pinillos, R. G., Appleby, M., Manteca, X., Scott-Park, F., Smith, C., Velarde, A. (2016): One Welfare – a platform for improving human and animal welfare, Veterinary Record, URL: [vetrec-2016-october-179-16-412-inline-supplementary-material-1.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1136/vetrec-2016-100179) (onewelfareworld.org)

² Australian Pet Welfare Foundation: <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-faq/> RSPCA Consultation Draft of the Revised Feral Cat Threat Abatement Plan (page 10): <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-12-08-Revised-Feral-Cat-TAP-RSPCA-Submission.pdf>



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Category	Definition
Feral cats	Are unowned, unsocialised and have no reliance on humans directly or indirectly for food or shelter. They are typically found in the wild at least 2-3km from the nearest human habitation or building. Feral cats hunt and survive on their own and reproduce in the wild.
Domestic unowned cats	Are indirectly dependent on humans via casual and temporary interactions with humans. They have varying sociability, including some that are unsocialised to humans and may live in groups (such as cat colonies) or on their own. They live in urban and peri-urban areas such as on the grounds of shopping centres, housing complexes, universities or private properties.
Domestic semi-owned cats	Are directly fed and provided with other care by specific people who do not consider they own them, but are rather their caregivers. They have varied sociability with many socialised to humans and may be associated with one or more households. Semi-owned cats may live on their own or in groups such as cat colonies. They generally provide companionship for their caregivers. Just like unowned cats, they live in urban and peri-urban areas such as on the grounds of a shopping centre, housing complex, university or private property.
Domestic owned cats	Are identified with and cared for by a specific person and directly dependent on humans. They are sociable, however, sociability varies. Owned cats may be wandering due to lack of suitable cat safe fencing or confinement in the owner's home. <i>*It should also be noted that domestic owned cats can also fall into the unowned and semi-owned categories if they are lost or wandering.</i>

(a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

Australia's biodiversity crisis is deeply influenced by habitat loss due to extensive land clearing and deforestation, which poses a far greater threat to native wildlife. Despite this, flawed data is used to disproportionately scapegoat and blame cats for species extinctions and impact on native animals. This ignores the primary threat of deforestation and land clearing on native animals for the purposes of agriculture or housing developments across regional and metropolitan environments.



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Australia remains one of the global hotspots for deforestation, with a recent report from Greenpeace and the RSPCA Queensland highlighting the staggering impact: an estimated 100 million animals are affected annually within cleared areas in Queensland and New South Wales alone, with a local wildlife vet commenting ‘a significant proportion of the 24,000 wildlife patients admitted each and every year to our wildlife hospital are as a result of the long-term and ongoing effects of habitat destruction and fragmentation³.

While the impact of cats on native wildlife is not denied as an issue that needs to be addressed and managed, the narrative of cats being a primary cause of biodiversity decline is incorrect, driven by limited reliable data on cat populations and their actual impact on native species. In order to accurately and effectively address the true impact of cats on native species, accurate and reliable data must be collected and used to inform decisions and policies.

The number of ‘feral’ cats in Australia is also a point of contention, with politicians historically noting 20-million feral cats killing 20 billion animals per year – both claims which were deemed unverifiable by the ABC.⁴ Later calculations made by the National Environmental Science Project, a government funded research group, estimate there are 0.7 million feral cats in urban areas and between 1.4-5.6 million feral cats in the bush, depending on rainfall⁵. It should also be noted that the bad faith and inaccurate characterisation of unowned or semi owned cats as ‘feral’ further distorts these numbers.

It should be noted that there is currently no direct evidence that domesticated cats (owned and unowned) in urbanised areas have directly caused the decline of threatened species in Australia. Threats such as land clearing, development and other human activity have a greater impact and threat to endangered native wildlife than domestic cats.⁶

In urban and peri-urban settings, the impact of cats on wildlife is overestimated, whilst the impact from habitat destruction is underestimated. Fragmented and degraded habitats pose multiple hazards for wildlife. Animals in fragmented landscapes face inadequate shelter, nesting and food resources, exposure to the elements causing dehydration and starvation, as well as increased human wildlife conflict, collisions with powerlines, structures or vehicles on busy roads as well as stress induced diseases.

Cats living in metropolitan and regional areas often rely on humans for their primary food sources, not predation on wildlife. Various studies have found that cats in urban areas will eat foods left by humans (food scraps, rubbish, commercial cat food, raw/cooked meats). In one study, 57.7% of stray cats in

³ ‘The Ongoing animal Welfare Crisis from Deforestation in Australia’ Greenpeace and RSPCA Deforestation report 2024

⁴ Fact check: Are feral cats killing over 20billion native animals per year.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-11-13/greg-hunt-feral-cat-native-animals-fact-check/5858282>

⁵ National Environmental Science Programme Threatened Species Recovery, The Impact of Cats in Australia <https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/2j1j51na/112-the-impact-of-cats-in-australia-findings-factsheetweb.pdf>

⁶ Grayson et al 2007 ;Lilith et al 2010; Cogger et al 2017 As cited in Australian Pet Welfare Foundation. Key Issues in 24/7 Cat containment



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Australia were found to have vast amounts of inedible materials in their stomachs, including life threatening amounts - while only 40% had consumed native animals, with the remainder of their diet primarily comprising non-native species⁷.

Other studies have shown that that over 85% of animals predated were introduced species, and that although some native animals were caught, the total number was low and mainly consisted of skins and lizards⁸. Additional research suggests that cats may selectively prey on sick or old animals, which can have neutral or even positive ecological effects, as noted in studies of black rat predation, which benefited tree-nesting birds in Sydney bushland areas. This study is in line with a global analysis undertaken where there is evidence that cat predation is generally upon whatever species is available to them within their environments⁹, in many areas where cats reside this means that a majority are non-native species.

b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

It is important to note FOUR PAWS do not accept so called 'euthanasia' as a way to dispose of unwanted pets or to reduce the number of animals in a shelter or reduce size of stray animal populations. Euthanasia should only be performed by qualified veterinarians on medical grounds i.e. as a necessary procedure to end the suffering of an animal with a poor prognosis after having exhausted all other treatment. Referring to killing healthy animals that may have been trapped off the street or are in shelters does not meet the definition of euthanasia.

FOUR PAWS Policy on Euthanasia calls on Governments to implement no-kill legislation in terms of both pets and stray animals, with the exception that euthanasia can only be performed as a means of ending the suffering of an animal with a poor prognosis after having exhausted all other treatment possibilities.

When referring to 'euthanasia' throughout our response we will be using inverted commas to signify that the context the term is being used does not match the true definition.

FOUR PAWS supports the practice of cat containment and recognises its benefits for both cat welfare and wildlife protection. We are concerned about the potential impact of mandatory containment laws due to concerns about their effectiveness and potential impact on cats, and vulnerable people and communities.

⁷ Crawford H. M., Calver M. C and Fleming P. A. (2020) Subsidised by junk foods: factors influencing body condition in stray cats (*Felis catus*) *Journal of Urban Ecology* (<https://academic.oup.com/jue/article/6/1/juaa004/5819288>)

⁸ Franklin M, Rand J, Marston L Morton J 2021 Do Pet Cats Deserve the Disproportionate Blame for Wildlife Predation Compared to Pet Dogs? <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/veterinary-science/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.731689/full>

⁹ Lepczyk C. A. et al 2023 'A global synthesis and assessment of free-ranging domestic cat diet' - <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-023-42766-6>



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Additionally, the current regulatory system and a history of governmental inaction on the rising number of unowned, semi owned or community colony cats in NSW have created a situation where mandatory cat containment laws are both unworkable, unenforceable and likely to result in harm to both cats and people. It is also yet to be proven that cat containment laws are effective.

Mandated cat containment results in more stray cats being trapped, impounded and then killed because they do not have an “owner” to contain them. However, this trap, adopt or kill approach does not reduce the overall wandering cat population in the area over time, because it results in low-level ad hoc culling, insufficient to override the high cat reproductive rate, immigration of new cats into the area and increased survival of juveniles¹⁰

Cat containment policies have been demonstrated to drive up impounding and therefore ‘euthanasia’ rates. In the City of Casey (Victoria), 20 years after introducing mandated 24/7 cat containment: the number of cats impounded was still 296% higher than baseline¹¹

Trapping unidentified cats would increase ‘euthanasia’ rates and have a negative impact on the mental well-being of staff involved. Enforcement would be resource-intensive, demanding additional traps, expanded cat-trap services, and more staff to handle the rise in nuisance complaints, trapping, and impoundments that typically accompany these laws.

There are three clear barriers to implementing cat containment policies in NSW:

- A large number of cats fall into either an unowned or semi owned category and therefore unable to be contained;
- Cat owners who due to their personal circumstance have difficulty containing their cat; and
- Indoor contained cats who escape, commonly referred to as ‘door dashers’.

Many individuals and small rescue organisations play a vital role in managing unowned and semi-owned cat populations. These carers contribute significantly to reducing cat numbers through trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs and by rehoming socialised cats and kittens when possible. While these cats may not be “owned” in the traditional sense, they are still cared for and supported by people and organisations who dedicate considerable time, resources, and effort to their welfare.

Introducing mandatory cat containment laws that result in community colony cats being trapped and ‘euthanased’ could have serious implications. Such policies risk undermining the progress made by TNR programs in stabilising and reducing cat populations. Additionally, they could negatively affect the mental health of carers who are dedicated to humane and effective cat management strategies, further straining the informal networks that support homeless cats.

¹⁰ As cited in Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Key Issues to consider related to mandated 24/7 cat containment (Lazenby 2015, Miller 2014, Tan 2017 & RSPCA Australia 2018)

¹¹ Casey Council Domestic Animal Management Plan 2021-2025 b



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One of the core challenges of mandatory containment is that many of the cats found outdoors are unowned, semi-owned, or belong to households where containment is not practical¹². Low-income households would face disproportionate consequences, as they may not have access to desexing, microchipping, or containment resources like, flyscreens on windows or "catios." If their cats are impounded, the retrieval fees may be financially prohibitive, leading to distressing losses for these families. Cat containment is also a barrier to people who are in domestic violence situations where it is not safe to keep a cat contained inside. Additionally, current NSW rental laws add another barrier to cat containment.

Another significant risk of containment laws is the potential for beloved pets to be trapped and 'euthanised'. Studies indicate that one-third of cat owners lose their pet at least once, with 41% of lost cats being indoor-only cats. Even microchipped cats are not guaranteed safe recovery, as chips may go undetected on the first scan or become faulty.¹³

(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Cats can thrive in indoor and contained environments. In general, the physical welfare of cats is greatly improved indoors as they are protected from road accidents, fights, misadventure, infectious diseases like feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), and intentional or unintentional harm from humans.

Cats are intelligent and curious animals that require stimulation and enrichment in a contained environment. It is necessary to accompany any containment of cats with educational programs that ensures owners understand that indoor cats need adequate enrichment to ensure their physical, behavioural and social needs are met.

Consideration should also be given to those people who have cats that may have previously lived on the streets and may struggle to quickly adapt to a 100% indoor environment.

(d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives

Community education and responsible pet ownership initiatives are core parts of all FOUR PAWS stray animal care projects.

FOUR PAWS' Responsible Pet Ownership Programme focuses on raising awareness amongst pet owners and future pet owners about how to appropriately care for their pets. This approach is based on the understanding that pet ownership comes with certain responsibilities towards the animal(s) in their care and the broader community.

Responsible Pet Ownership and Stray Animal Care are interconnected. Irresponsible pet ownership can be considered a significant root cause of the stray animal problem, as it often leads to the abandonment

¹² McLeod, J 2023 Understanding the Factors Influencing Cat Containment

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370742721_Understanding_the_Factors_Influencing_Cat_Containment_Identifying_Opportunities_for_Behaviour_Change

¹³ Lazenby B, Mooney N, Dickman C 2015 . Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: a case study from the forests of southern Tasmania <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/wr14030>



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of, or negligence towards animals, which contributes to the growing population of stray animals. When individuals fail to take proper care of their pets, this can result in numerous negative consequences for both the animals and the community.

One of the primary ways irresponsible pet ownership contributes to the stray animal population is through abandonment. Too many people acquire pets without fully considering the long-term commitment and responsibilities involved. When the novelty wears off or unforeseen circumstances arise, some people abandon their pets, leading to an increase in the local stray animal population, or surrendering them into often overcrowded shelters.

Another factor contributing to an increasing stray animal population is the failure to desex pets, especially if they are free-roaming pets. When owners neglect to desex their animals, they can unintentionally contribute to the stray population. Uncontrolled breeding among non-sterilised animals can result in unwanted litters. Desexing plays a crucial role in preventing overpopulation and helping to reduce the number of stray animals.

FOUR PAWS' experience through our stray animal care programs demonstrates that when communities are provided with accessible information, education, and support—particularly when combined with free desexing and assistance in accessing veterinary care—there is a significant improvement in pet care practices. These initiatives often lead to increased pride and responsibility among pet owners, fostering stronger bonds between people and their pets.

There is a clear role for government and local councils in promoting responsible pet ownership through community education and resource allocation. Governments should invest in accessible and targeted desexing programs to reduce barriers for pet owners, particularly in vulnerable communities. Local councils can play an important role by engaging directly with their communities through outreach initiatives, local events, and support services that encourage responsible pet ownership and provide practical solutions for accessing affordable care.

Education, paired with tangible support, is a proven and effective way to improve animal welfare outcomes and reduce the number of unwanted and homeless pets in the community.

(e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

Containment laws have been shown to drive up the cost and time required for cat management, funds that could be directed towards evidence-based solutions like targeted desexing and community education programs.

Trapped unidentified cats then need to be rehomed or 'euthanised', increasing costs for cat management and increasing the number of cats 'euthanised', which negatively affects the mental health of staff involved. Enforcement is very time-consuming and costly requiring expansion of cat-trap services, purchase of additional traps to reduce waiting times, and additional staff to deal with the



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increased nuisance complaints, trapping and impoundments that occur after mandated cat containment is introduced¹⁴.

Trapping by Rangers or Animal Welfare Officers is very time-consuming because multiple trips to the site are often required including a trip to set up the trap and then trips to check the trap each morning (for animal welfare reasons) and to reset the trap each evening until the cat is caught. Times required to trap cats can range from an average of 8.9 days to 29 days per cat to trap 90% of the target cats.¹⁵

Conversely Councils that have instead chosen to implement council funded, no-barriers and targeted community cat desexing program, like Banyule City Council in Victoria which started in 2013, have demonstrated that these programs are both successful, in terms of reducing impoundments and 'euthanasia' rates and cost effective.

The program provided free cat desexing, microchipping and registration in the first year of the program, with no limit on the number of cats from households. The program also provided free transport to these services as well as encouraging semi-owners who regularly feed stray cats to participate, as well as transition to full cat ownership.

Over an eight-year period, there was a 66% fall in impoundments, 82% fall in euthanasia rates and 36% fall in cat-related complaint calls. In another positive outcome, the council saved an estimated \$440,660 due to reduced charges by contracted services accepting cats and saving time due to fewer cat-related complaint callouts.¹⁶

(f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs

FOUR PAWS has been conducting sterilisation and vaccination projects for companion animals since 1999, and we have sterilised and vaccinated over 230,000 dogs and cats worldwide. Since 2017 we have conducted targeted companion animal projects in South Africa, to enable veterinary care in resource-poor communities and provide sterilisation programmes to humanely control growing populations of dogs and cats.

The trapping and killing of large numbers of healthy, unowned, or semi-owned cats is an outdated, inhumane and ineffective practice that is unaligned with modern scientific approaches. Such strategies are inconsistent with contemporary community values, which increasingly reject the widespread killing of healthy animals. Additionally, these practices can have a detrimental impact on the mental health of veterinary professionals tasked with euthanising otherwise healthy animals.

¹⁴ https://theconversation.com/how-to-cut-stray-cat-numbers-in-a-way-that-works-better-for-everyone229291utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwY2xjawEyA4NleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHXYPJ_FC5ByVlz7Iz

¹⁵ Australian Pet Welfare Foundation - Key Issues in mandating 24/7 cat containment

¹⁶ Chua D., Rand J. and Morton J. 2023 'Stray and Owner Relinquished Cats in Australia – Estimate of numbers entering municipal pounds, shelters and rescue groups and their outcomes (<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/11/1771>)



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Community Cat Management programs have demonstrated effectiveness in controlling cat populations. These programs, which often involve trap-neuter-return (TNR) initiatives and community engagement, significantly reduce the numbers of unowned or semi-owned cats in specific areas while offering a humane and sustainable alternative to traditional methods.

FOUR PAWS brings extensive expertise in implementing humane and sustainable solutions to stray animal population management, even in the most challenging environments, including war-torn countries and disaster zones. Our professional, evidence-based approach ensures that both animal welfare and community well-being are prioritised, and that government benefits through reduced costs and numbers of stray animals.

Evidence based methodology

FOUR PAWS employs the internationally recognised *Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR)* approach for managing stray cat populations. TNVR is widely acknowledged as the most humane and effective strategy for reducing stray cat numbers over time. By sterilising and vaccinating cats, we prevent further reproduction and the spread of diseases, allowing populations to stabilise and decline in a sustainable manner.

Community empowerment model

We have 25 years of on the ground experience that demonstrates large-scale desexing programs must be coupled with strong community engagement to achieve lasting change. FOUR PAWS collaborates with local authorities, veterinarians, animal welfare organisations, and community members to address the root causes of stray animal populations. Through education on responsible pet ownership and the dangers of abandonment, we foster a culture of prevention and care.

Data driven and Outcome focussed

Our projects incorporate robust monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of desexing initiatives. By understanding population dynamics and community interactions with stray cats, we tailor interventions to local needs and maximise results.

Humane and Sustainable

FOUR PAWS understands that each cat is valued by its community, whether it is a companion animal or a semi-owned cat cared for by local carers. Large-scale desexing programs not only improve the welfare of stray cats but also reduce the burden on overstretched shelters and pounds, alleviating pressure on local resources.

Global expertise applied with local knowledge

Since 2017, our community engagement programs have been empowering local communities worldwide to take ownership of stray animal issues. By combining TNVR initiatives with medical care, responsible pet ownership education, and support for local adoption systems, FOUR PAWS delivers comprehensive solutions that benefit both animals and people.

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Large-scale cat desexing programs, when professionally implemented with community engagement, represent a humane, effective, and sustainable approach to managing cat populations while promoting animal welfare and reducing strain on local services.

FOUR PAWS Bulgaria: Strategic Cat Population Management

In response to the absence of a formal Cat Population Management (CPM) program in Bulgaria, FOUR PAWS initiated a targeted stray cat project in partnership with the Sofia Municipality in 2021. This was a geographically targeted initiative commencing in the Yavorov district which aims to reduce the stray cat population through a comprehensive, strategic approach. To deliver strategic, impactful, sustainable and humane stray animal projects, we focus on only a few municipalities simultaneously, for a longer period of time.

The program integrates several key components, including:

- **Population Surveys:** Conducting detailed street cat and household surveys to assess the scale of the issue and inform targeted interventions.
- **TNVR (Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return):** Implementing humane population control measures to stabilise and gradually reduce the stray cat population.
- **Community Engagement:** Utilising tools to foster local collaboration and support for the program.

Stray Cat Voucher Program

Since 2011, FOUR PAWS has operated a *Stray Cat Voucher Program* in Sofia, in partnership with private veterinary clinics. Annually, 2,000 vouchers are distributed to the public, enabling individuals to bring stray cats to participating clinics for neutering. This approach leverages the capacity of local clinics, saving resources and extending the program's reach. The voucher system empowers the public to actively participate in stray cat management while ensuring rapid and efficient responses to community needs.

Goals for Sustainable Cat Population Management (CPM)

1. **District-Level Cat Population Management:**
 - o Expand the CPM program to a new district in Sofia (to be determined) and achieve at least an 80% sterilisation and vaccination rate among stray cats.
2. **Continuation of the Voucher Program:**
 - o Sustain the Stray Cat Voucher Program within the CPM framework, providing 1,500 vouchers annually for stray cat neutering.
3. **Improved Access to Veterinary Care:**
 - o Conduct mobile clinic projects in resource-poor communities, offering vital veterinary services to stray cats, community animals, and pets. Many of these animals would otherwise never receive medical attention.



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Impact

FOUR PAWS' efforts in Bulgaria demonstrate an effective and scalable model for humane stray animal management. By combining TNVR, community engagement and education engagement, and access to veterinary care, the program not only addresses stray cat populations but also fosters a community-driven solution to animal welfare challenges.

(g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system

It is estimated that 50,000 cats are killed per year within pounds and shelters across Australia, most of which are young and healthy¹⁷ one in four council pounds in NSW and Victoria killed 67-100% of cats entering their facilities¹⁸ Most cats entering these pounds are classed as stray unowned cats (semi-owned cats are also a significant contributor to pound intakes) and in NSW 50% of cats entering pounds are less than 6 months of age¹⁹. Studies by Australian Pet Welfare Foundation of Councils in Victoria where mandatory cat containment has been implemented show increased rates of both impoundment and 'euthanasia' rates²⁰.

NSW shelters, pounds and rescues are in crisis. The recent inquiry into Pounds in NSW made several key findings including:

- That New South Wales is facing an animal rehoming crisis, with pounds and rescues severely underfunded and over capacity.
- That many pound facilities in New South Wales are sub-standard and not fit-for-purpose, and fail to meet community expectations for animal welfare.
- That the current pound system relies heavily on rescue and rehoming organisations to rehome animals.
- That a large number of animals are still being killed in New South Wales pounds, which is unacceptable.²¹

Mandatory cat containment laws would exacerbate this crisis by increasing the strain on an already overwhelmed pound system. A system that is struggling due to insufficient resources and the growing unowned or semi owned cat population in NSW.

¹⁷ <https://theconversation.com/australian-shelters-and-pounds-kill-50-000-mostly-healthy-cats-and-kittens-in-a-year-theres-a-way-to-prevent-this-pointless-killing-201947>

¹⁸ <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inquiry-into-pounds-in-NSW-APWF-submission-final.pdf>

¹⁹ Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Community Cat Program Update 2024

²⁰ RSPCA Australia, Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia 2018

²¹ Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Key Issues to Consider for 24/7 cat containment



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The impacts include:

- Mandatory cat containment laws mean any uncontained cat can be impounded by councils. Cats not claimed or whose guardians cannot afford fines would likely face 'euthanasia'. These policies would disproportionately affect unowned, semi owned and domestic cats that escape or whose guardians face barriers, such as rental restrictions, to indoor containment. This would result in increased admissions and 'euthanasia' rates, further overwhelming the system.
- Lower-income households are particularly vulnerable to the effects of containment laws. Many families cannot afford the costs of desexing, registration, microchipping, or building cat enclosures. If their pets are impounded, they may struggle to pay the retrieval fees, leading to permanent loss of their companion animals and additional emotional and financial hardship.
- Mandatory containment would likely lead to a surge in community complaints and expectations for councils to trap and impound cats. This would strain council resources, staff, and already under-resourced pounds. Evidence from jurisdictions with containment laws demonstrates that such measures significantly increase complaints, impoundments, and 'euthanasia', further burdening an already stretched system.
- Rather than introducing mandatory containment laws, which create more challenges than solutions, NSW should prioritise targeted, humane measures such as accessible desexing programs and community education to reduce homeless cat populations effectively and sustainably.

(h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories

Mandatory containment laws have proven to be unsuccessful both here in Australia and internationally. As noted in the RSPCA Australia report, "councils with cat containment laws "have not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations.²² The experience in Victoria's Yarra Ranges illustrates this point. In the third year of enforcing a 24-hour cat containment policy, Yarra Ranges saw a 143% increase in cat-related complaints, a 68% rise in impoundments, and an 18% increase in 'euthanasia' rates—all while the local human population grew by just 2% Yarra Council 2021.²³

Organisations like the Invasive Species Council and the government claim cat containment policies are effective by the simple virtue that they have been introduced in certain states and jurisdictions. Yet there is significant evidence that cat containment laws are ineffective, costly and have a negative impact on people cats and councils.

Cat Containment laws have also proven to be ineffective internationally. In some U.S. jurisdictions, 24/7 cat containment laws, or "leash laws," have proven both ineffective and unenforceable. These laws often lead to more cats being impounded and euthanised, without significantly reducing the population of roaming cats. Many areas have since repealed these laws due to enforcement challenges.²⁴

²² RSPCA Australia, Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia 2018

²³ Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Key Issues to Consider for 24/7 cat containment

²⁴ Smithfield, VA, 2003; Edmonds, WA, 2012; Gretna, LA, 2014; Hughes, 2002; Alley Cat Allies, 2022. As cited in Australian Pet Welfare Key issues to Consider Related to Mandate 24/7 Cat containment



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Key observations of the impact of mandatory cat containment policies Include:

Increased Impoundment and Euthanasia Rates

In states like Victoria, mandatory cat containment has been associated with higher impoundment and euthanasia rates. Councils that adopted these laws reported a rise in the number of cats trapped and taken to pounds, many of which were unclaimed or homeless. This has placed additional strain on already overstretched animal management systems and has not effectively reduced stray cat populations.

Enforcement Challenges

Councils enforcing cat containment laws frequently report difficulties in implementation due to resource limitations. Effective enforcement requires substantial investment in staff, infrastructure, and public education, which many councils lack. This has led to uneven application of the laws and community dissatisfaction.

Impact on Vulnerable Populations

Mandatory containment disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups, including low-income households, semi-owned cat carers, and rescue organisations. These laws often result in the trapping and euthanasia of semi-owned or community cats, cats that, in many cases are being cared for by community members or small local rescuers that are playing a vital role in stabilising populations by practicing Trap Neuter Release.

Limited Success in Wildlife Protection

Evidence suggests that mandatory containment alone has limited impact on wildlife protection in areas where other factors, such as habitat loss and urbanisation, play significant roles. Without complementary measures, such as habitat and wildlife conservation programs, the effectiveness of containment laws in protecting native species remains questionable.

Community Resistance

Community support is crucial for the success of any policy. In many cases, mandatory containment laws have been met with resistance due to their punitive nature, perceived unfairness, and insufficient consultation with stakeholders, including carers and rescue groups.

(i) options for reducing the feral cat population

Lethal methods of population control fail to deliver a long-term solution for introduced species management.²⁵ Eradication of major introduced species is unlikely to be achieved by lethal methods, except within confined areas such as in enclosures and on islands; in Australia's long history of reliance upon such methods, no introduced species has ever been eliminated from the mainland.²⁶

The FOUR PAWS Borneo Program

FOUR PAWS runs an innovative spay, neuter, and vaccination program for stray dogs and cats in Kalimantan, Borneo, a region with critical biodiversity. The program's success highlights a non-lethal and humane model for managing stray animal populations while mitigating their impact on endangered wildlife and the local ecosystem.

Borneo's diverse ecosystem is home to endangered species such as sun bears, orangutans, and rare birds like the Bornean ground cuckoo. With thousands of stray animals, particularly cats, roaming freely,



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there is a heightened risk of competition, disease transmission, and predation affecting these sensitive species. FOUR PAWS identified a need for intervention to stabilise stray populations and address the threats these animals may pose to the region's wildlife, while also promoting animal welfare.

FOUR PAWS collaborated with Pro Natura and Jejak Pulang, local animal welfare organisations, to establish a mobile clinic system providing medical care, sterilisation, and vaccinations for stray animals. By delivering this preventative care, the program improves animal health and reduces population growth, which subsequently lessens stray animals' environmental impact.

The sterilisation component prevents further population growth, reducing resource competition with wildlife. Additionally, sterilised animals exhibit fewer roaming and territorial behaviours, reducing incidents of predation on local fauna. Vaccination further minimises disease risks to both stray animals and the wildlife they may come into contact with.

The program demonstrates the benefits of humane population control through sterilisation and vaccination. By improving the health and reducing the numbers of stray animals, it effectively lowers their impact on local wildlife without resorting to lethal control, which has been tried and failed in the past. Local communities are more accepting of the program as it aligns with compassionate, sustainable solutions that also improve community safety and wellbeing.

The Borneo model highlights the potential for desexing programs as viable alternatives to lethal cat control in NSW. By adopting similar strategies, NSW could better protect its native species and ecosystems, reduce any threat posed by unowned or semi owned cats, and foster community support for humane, non-lethal methods of cat management.

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