

Submission
No 168

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Management of Cat Populations in NSW

Introduction

I would like the committee to please consider the urgent need for significant funding for and implementation of humane, assistive strategic initiatives to improve cat management in New South Wales. Key strategies should include community education programs and targeted free and subsidised desexing programs, as well as investigation into population control measures such as immunocontraceptives and support for trap, neuter, release (TNR) and other cat rescues.

Community Education Programs

Importance of Education

The importance of educating cat owners about responsible cat ownership cannot be overstated. Several decades ago, 'indoor cats' were almost unheard of. Today, they are not uncommon. Community perceptions are changing – but we need to be working towards indoor cats being the norm. Effective community education programs should focus on the benefits of keeping pet cats indoors. These programs should be accessible, widespread, and informative, ensuring that all cat owners understand their responsibilities and the positive impacts of their actions.

Benefits of Keeping Cats Indoors

There are myriad benefits to keeping cats indoors. From a welfare perspective, indoor cats are less likely to suffer from injuries, diseases, and death from causes such as being hit by vehicles or attacked by other animals such as roaming dogs, thereby leading to longer and healthier lives. Indoor cats pose significantly less risk to local wildlife populations, which can be vulnerable to predation by outdoor cats. As a wildlife volunteer, this is of concern to me: balancing the wellbeing of cats with the wellbeing of our wildlife. Educating the public on these benefits will lead to a cultural shift in how cats are cared for and managed within the community, which will benefit the cats, their families, and other animals. I can also attest to how distressing it can be, as a community volunteer microchip scanner, to scan deceased cats who have been hit by cars and at times needing to liaise with the families

who have lost their beloved cats in this way. Increasing the proportion of indoor cats will help reduce the number of tragic losses like this which occur.

Role of Local Councils

While it is understandable that local council policies may permit cats to roam, this should not absolve councils of their responsibility to scan cats for microchips and assist concerned community members who are trying to locate the owners of cats suspected of being lost or dumped. There is a big difference between a cat who is simply roaming and can easily find its way home, versus a cat who has lost its way, accidentally caught a ride in someone's vehicle, or has been intentionally transported and abandoned. These cats can't find their way back to their families without assistance. I recently scanned a cat that was found 45 km away from its home, for example - this cat was never going to find his way home without assistance. Councils should not dismiss these cases by simply stating that cats are allowed to roam, but should instead provide the necessary support to reunite lost cats with their owners.

Free and Subsidised Cat Desexing Programs

Free and subsidised cat desexing programs have proven to be highly effective in controlling cat populations and reducing the number of stray and abandoned cats. Studies have shown that communities that implement subsidised desexing initiatives see a marked decrease in the number of cats entering shelters and an overall improvement in public health and animal welfare. For instance, a study conducted by the Australian Veterinary Association found that targeted desexing programs in low-income areas resulted in a 35% reduction in cat euthanasia rates over five years (Australian Veterinary Association, 2020).

These programs not only help manage cat populations humanely but also alleviate the financial burden on shelters and rehoming services, enabling them to allocate resources more efficiently. By providing free or affordable desexing options, we can ensure that all cat owners, regardless of their financial situation, have the means to prevent unwanted litters and contribute to a sustainable solution for managing cat populations. Please do read the full Australian Veterinary Association study cited above (also linked here: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/11/1615>), as it's very enlightening and shows the efficacy of using assistive, rather than compliance-based, methods.

I would also like to see further research and investment into fertility control methods such as immunocontraceptives.

Microchip Lookup Program

I'd like to draw attention to a very successful microchip lookup program "Find My Owner" run by Animal Welfare League NSW during 2024 (<https://www.findmyowner.com.au/volunteer-microchip-scanner>), which has provided a highly-responsive microchip lookup service from 8am-10pm seven days a week for community volunteer microchip scanners who are assisting members of the community to try and locate the owners of lost and roaming dogs and cats. This program has resulted in reuniting of hundreds of companion animals with their families during the eight months the program's been running, with an 86% return-to-owner rate, keeping these animals safe and out of the pound system. I would love to see further funding and support for this program to continue, if not under AWL – if they are unable to continue it – then under other authorised organisations or parties. Feedback regarding the program amongst the community of volunteer scanners I have contact with has been extremely positive. We've gone from sometimes taking an hour or several hours to be able to find someone with authorised access who can look up the microchip number and liaise with the owners, to literally taking only minutes in many cases.

Cat Ownership

It is important to recognise that cat ownership exists along a spectrum, ranging from single-owner companion cats to community cats through to free-living (preferred description, rather than the negatively perceived term 'feral') cats. This complexity means that a significant number of cats remain undesexed, contributing to population growth.

I am not however in support of forced containment laws at the current time, as we currently have far too many cats in NSW who do not have clearly identified ownership. Putting such laws in place and enforcing them would put immense pressure on the pound system and would massively increase the already high euthanasia rates for cats in pounds. Perhaps at some point well into the future, when populations are under much better control, this may be a viable option – but not now.

Trap, Neuter, Release

Trap, neuter, release (TNR) rescues also help to stabilise and gradually reduce the population of colony and free-living cats, improving the health and quality of life of these cats while helping minimise their impact on local wildlife. A study published in the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science found that TNR programs led to a 66% reduction in

colony sizes over a decade, demonstrating the long-term effectiveness of this humane population control method. Given that cats are allowed to roam, I don't see why TNR programs can't be considered a viable, humane strategy for helping control cat populations if effectively managed and supported.

Support for Local Cat Rescues

Cat rescues play a vital role in managing and caring for cat populations and from what I've seen in my region they are entirely overwhelmed and under-resourced. Recently, at least two rescues in my local community faced the daunting task of assisting large groups of cats found in dire conditions due to hoarding. These situations place immense strain on the resources and capacities of rescues, highlighting the urgent need for financial assistance. By allocating funds to support these organisations, we can help ensure they have the resources needed to provide immediate and long-term care for these cats, facilitating their rehabilitation and rehoming. Enhanced funding can also enable rescues to expand their operations, increase their capacity, and improve their facilities, ultimately leading to better outcomes for the cats and the community at large. It is imperative that we recognise the invaluable work of these rescues and provide them with the financial backing they need to continue their compassionate and essential efforts.

Conclusion

Cats are sentient beings, each having his or her own character, habits, and preferences and capacity for affection, fear, playfulness, and a range of other emotions. They are deserving of our compassion and care. They have a right to live. I respectfully request that the committee please support assistive, humane, non-lethal control mechanisms to improve the management of our cat populations in NSW. By investing heavily in community education, subsidised desexing programs, TNR initiatives and support for local cat rescues, we can address the issue ethically and effectively. These measures not only protect the welfare of cats but also benefit the community and local wildlife populations. Your support is critical in fostering a compassionate, ethical and sustainable approach to cat population management.

Kind regards,

References

Australian Veterinary Association. (2020). Effectiveness of targeted desexing programs in reducing euthanasia rates in low-income areas. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, 98(3), 145-152.

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