

Submission
No 239

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

Name: Ms Valeria Luongo

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Valeria Luongo

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Dear Sir/ Madam

Re: Managing Cat Population in New South Wales

Killing animals for being animals is a moral failing of a government.

I am writing this submission to urge the Australian government and NSW policymakers to seek non-violent, ethical, moral and future-focused means of controlling cat populations in NSW. Killing animals for being animals is a moral failing and a fundamental ignorance of any government. There is strong community opposition to animal cruelty and voters will not excuse the crude cruelty of animal culling.

We show who we are as a country by the way we treat those who cannot speak up for themselves, and this is an opportunity for us Australians to show the world that we believe in finding solutions that allow us to co-exist with the sentient beings with whom we share our land, and that includes cats. Compassion to animals is the expression of a civilized society.

Demonising abandoned or un-homed cats is illogical, irresponsible and repugnant to voters

It is unfair to demonise cats who are not as 'social' as we would like them to be or those who do not have human homes through no fault of their own. Do all animals have human homes? Should they? It cannot ever make sense to kill an animal because he is free or because he is afraid of humans and therefore deemed 'feral'.

It is also illogical and unjustifiable to blame cats for declines in the numbers of our native species of animals. How dare we demonise cats for trying to survive while, by the same breath, we clear land and destroy native animal habitats to build more and more homes, to unsustainably farm meat and for human entertainment, leisure and pleasure?

After all, when it is convenient for our governments, we do not hesitate to violently massacre our native species of animals. I will point out the violent shooting of our Australian Native Parrots when they were upsetting golf players in a Victorian golf course. There are hundreds and hundreds of other examples.

Finally, targeting cats is irresponsible and dangerous for our nation. It is but another form of racism. It is animal genocide. In Australia we do not advocate killing a 'species' or a 'race' – or do we?

It is a human problem, not a cat problem

Animals naturally co-exist and maintain balances in their populations. It is humans who are to blame for the loss in population balance and no innocent animal should have to pay the price with their lives time and time again for our human failings.

It is humans who continue to breed, sell and buy cats and kittens. It is humans who fail to desex and contain their pets and it is humans who abandon their animal companions to suit their own convenience. To then give guns and poisons to these humans to fatally harm the very animals whom they have failed is not only incomprehensible and evil, but it does nothing to address the root of the problem. Nothing.

Let's be proactive, not 'violent' and 'reactive'

In addition to culling being inhumane, it is ineffective in every sense.

Will our governments be pulling out their lethal weapons every year, forevermore to address symptoms, instead of addressing causes? Is this what they are happy to do? Surely our Australian government is smarter than that? I believe it is.

Yes, cat populations should be managed but it should be done via ethical, subsidised community-based approaches which are proactive and focus on long term solutions. Successful management should have at its core education programs which proactively, as opposed to 'reactively', control cat populations and which focus on responsible pet ownership.

I support non-violent, proactive methods of cat population control.

A multifaceted approach is necessary and should include:

1. Investment in TNR – Trap, Neuter and Re-home (or release) programs

There are thousands and thousands of community members who would personally volunteer their time to support TNR programs. My 2 sisters and I have personally self-funded the TNR of over 29 community cats whom we have microchipped and whom we feed and care for but whom we cannot contain within our homes. In this way we have stopped many thousands of kittens being born. We are working class people. Imagine what we could all achieve together with government coordination and support?

2. Investment in Neutering Programs and Community Education

Subsidised and accessible spay/neuter initiatives are proven, ethical methods to control cat populations. Partner with increased veterinary and animal welfare authorities to subsidise the cost of neutering and microchipping. Community education initiatives should also be presented in all community languages. Again, the community themselves would volunteer their support in promoting education within

their socio-economic and cultural communities and would prove an ongoing asset to you in controlling cat populations. Use us.

3. Support for Cared-for Cat Colonies

Properly managed cat colonies, supported by responsible caretakers, can coexist within communities without harm. These colonies play a vital role in stabilising stray populations. In addition, these cats are less likely to kill wildlife as their hunger needs are met. Please do not enforce curfews and containment on these caretakers who already play such an important role. That isn't fair.

4. Transition Away from Automatic Culling

We urge authorities to phase out harmful culling practices in favour of animal contraception and other non-lethal management strategies.

5. Respect for Responsible Ownership

Limiting the number of cats per household is unnecessary when owners provide proper care and ensure their pets do not harm others or the environment.

6. Support for animal sanctuaries within communities

Create designated sanctuaries where un-owned or stray cats can live without impacting local wildlife or give more funding and support to animal charities which strive to do this.

7. Promote Coexistence, Not Control

A collaborative approach that values community input and emphasises education and support will yield better outcomes for humans, animals and for governments alike.

8. In cases where un-owned cats are suffering, only humane euthanasia may be considered.

Conclusion

Australia is a progressive country with a progressive government. Our communities will not stand for outdated, violent treatment toward any of our animals, irrespective of whether they live at home with us or not. We are known for being peace-loving and we must extend this peace to all animals as our fellow sentient beings, and that includes cats.

A multifaceted approach which reflects our ethical values, which is community and education based, and which proactively controls cat populations is the only answer. By working together, we can protect the environment, significantly affect community education, and ensure the well-being of animals with human homes, and those without one.

I trust that this government will be exemplary in its solutions and make us proud for having voted them in.

The effectiveness and benefits of implementing large-scale cat desexing programmes:

Any serious strategy to reduce cat numbers and the threat they pose to other animals must start with stemming the flow of new animals into a world where there are not enough homes for them. Humans are responsible for deliberately increasing cat populations as well as the reproduction of unfixed roaming and homeless cats.

Every animal bought from a breeder costs one in a shelter the chance of a loving home, contributing to the euthanasia of animals in shelters. Council shelters are overflowing, putting pressure on staff and denying new animals in need safe spaces. Australian shelters and pounds must euthanise some 50,000 healthy cats and kittens a year, yet 25% of cats – 1.32 million in 2022 – are still being purchased from breeders directly or via pet stores.

If the bought animal is not desexed and reproduces, the problem is compounded. A single free-roaming, unfixed cat can give rise to as many as 5,000 cats in seven years. Extensive and readily available desexing programmes made affordable via state government subsidies must therefore be coupled with legislation banning the breeding and sale of animals by breeders, kitten farms, pet stores, and online operators to stem the flow of new animals.

Desexing also improves the welfare of individual animals. Spaying eliminates female feline stress and discomfort during heat periods, eliminates the uterine cancer risk, and greatly reduces mammary cancer risk. One study found that spaying cats younger than 1 year old was associated with an 86% reduction in the risk of developing mammary gland neoplasia.

Neutering makes males far less likely to roam or fight, prevents testicular cancer, and reduces the risk of prostate cancer. Altered animals are less likely to contract deadly, contagious diseases, such as feline AIDS and feline leukaemia, which are spread through bodily fluids.

The effectiveness of cat containment policies and welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions:

Cats can happily live indoors or in secure outdoor cat runs (or a combination of the two), provided they have access to enrichment, such as toys, a feline companion, puzzle feeders, scratching posts, human-interactive games that encourage exercise, and shelves, levels, and cat trees for climbing. And 92% of Australians support or do not oppose 24/7 at-home cat containment.

Allowing cats to roam outside the home is dangerous not only for wildlife but also for the cats themselves, who are at risk of disease, being hit by cars, or becoming the victims of cruel people. Cats responsibly contained at home can live up to 10 years longer than those allowed to roam free.

Options for reducing the feral cat population:

Cat management strategies must be focused on humane ways of addressing the root cause of overpopulation, not employing cruel, dangerous lethal measures.

Poisoning as a cat control measure, for example, is counterintuitive to protecting wildlife. Sodium fluoroacetate (colloquially 1080), which is commonly used in cat baits, is an environmental disaster. It is easily ingested by companion animals as well as native species, and its victims endure a slow, agonising death.

Similarly, shooting cats is cruel. Shooting moving targets, which is usually done at night, can result in inaccurate shots and cause prolonged, painful death.

In regard to tackling the root causes of overpopulation, it is not enough to rely on reactionary control methods, such as the impounding of animals identified as having homes and the killing of homeless animals. I urge the New South Wales government to consider the following preventive measures to reduce cat populations:

- A ban on the sale of animals by breeders, in pet stores, and online
- A ban on kitten farms
- The enforcement of 24/7 cat confinement laws
- Continuation of mandatory microchipping
- Increased public education about the importance of cat desexing, at-home confinement (including environmental enrichment), fostering, and adoption
- Increased state government funding of adoption groups and shelters to better house impounded animals and enhance rehoming efforts
- Government funding of desexing programmes
- In cases where it is necessary, euthanasia – and an end to cruel, inaccurate lethal methods such as shooting and poisoning