

Submission
No 249

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

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Submission on Cat Management

Terms of Reference

- a) Common opinion in some urban area cat rescue groups that there are no threatened species in their area so cats should be allowed to roam and feeding of community cats should be allowed to continue without control. This is not necessarily based on evidence. Habitat restoration and cat containment should take priority over cats' freedom to roam wherever threatened species exist. Local extinctions can extend to regional extinctions and loss of unique Australian species. Innovative projects like the Wild Deserts with their cat exclusion areas and threatened species training areas to give time for native species to build survival skills to survive low numbers of cats should be supported by governments.
- b) Cat curfews have been shown to be useful but not a solution as cats simply change their hunting behaviours if confined at night and let out in the day time so local councils and the state government need to increase requirements for cat containment 24/7. Barriers include costs of cat enclosures and cat enrichment equipment for low income owners. Design of cat enclosures that can be used by renters and installed and removed without impact on the rental property need to be promoted eg handbook of samples and online availability. Possibilities include freestanding cat window boxes and security screens with cat flaps that can join a freestanding cat enclosure.
- c) Increasingly people have too many pets confined inside the home and this overcrowding causes problems like evictions, surrenders, health problems for pets and people, lack of exercise and obesity and heart and diabetes problems in cats. Stricter controls are needed on numbers of pets kept on properties. Community education needed for strategies for enrichment and healthy indoor life for cats. RSPCA and other groups have some useful educational resources online but with limited promotions. Local councils should be encouraged to share link to these resources on the social media and web pages. Vets could be encouraged to do the same as they are important influencers for pet owners.
- d) Sound research on behaviour change for pet owners and community should be used to guide community education. Research like the McLeod research used in the RSPCA keeping cats safe at home project should be supported by state government. Their identification of different profile groups and effective strategies from community education to compliance and fines should be built on with ongoing funding to continue this and similar projects. A new round of funding for another group of councils across NSW for a 3 year project would be useful. NSW Cat Protection Society and Animal Welfare League of NSW should also be funded to do their community education too.
- e) Local councils need to give greater priority to funding their ranger units and keep them pet focused rather than adding too many other compliance roles. Marketing, social media and positive community education events should include a cat management focus. Community expectations of local councils in relation to cats has changed and the state government needs to support them with new funding streams. Models for projects to match the current and projected populations of LGAs should be encouraged.
- f) There is no doubt that large scale desexing is needed. Desexing funding is needed for hot spot projects to tackle cat overpopulation in general, cat colonies especially near bushland reserves and national parks, and hoarder and backyard breeder areas. These projects are likely by necessity to include euthanising. Where local councils are showing great rehoming statistics for desexed cats and a willingness to work collaboratively with local community and animal welfare groups, then a temporary increase in euthanising of cats with health and behaviour issues needs to be recognised as necessary and not an adverse KPI. Because many

of the worst areas for cat overpopulation are low income areas, fully funded desexing is essential. Trap Neuter Release activities may be a necessary part of a cat management project as a transition strategy but “breed and feed” without desexing must be challenged and should not be allowed to continue without action. Strategies to address this include psychological understanding embedded into the practices of authorities, cultural and language awareness, liaison with local community and welfare groups and community education and compliance activities. Overseas models for TNR cannot be used in Australia without modification to protect our unique Australian Wildlife.

- g) Staffing levels and facility size and design needs to be improved across the state. Many pounds do not have suitable cages, separate rooms and cat behaviour aware staff. Where there is no funding available to tackle this in the short term then case studies, how to guides and sample and cat handling strategy guides, and training programs need to be provided so local council pounds can take in and accommodate cats, run on fear free principles for cats and rehome desexed cats to good homes. Pounds and shelters can become the go to place for cat adoption if this is done. Too many ranger staff say they are dog people not cat people or they’d rather face an aggressive dog than any cat anytime. That is good if it’s out in the open, not just an underlying attitude but it must be tackled with appropriate recruitment, training, decent sized and well designed cages and comfortable cat friendly spaces – safe for the cats, the staff and the volunteers. It is possible to make significant changes as short term, transition strategies with local goodwill and innovation. Ranger visits to other pounds and shelters with good cat intake and rehoming statistics could really help with these basic improvements.
- h) Case studies and research shared across the states and territories are needed. The significant policy report produced by RSPCA and Landcare, in I think 2018, was very useful. There is much in the submissions and things left out that could be looked at again. Bringing together cat people, groups and researchers with conservation and landcare people, groups and researchers is essential at local, regional and national levels.
- i) Feral cat management including exclusion areas and humane euthanising, sadly, is essential for the survival of wildlife and cat welfare. What is happening about fertility control as cats can reproduce quickly? Anything? The issue of travel time and transport method versus on site humane euthanising needs to be looked at in regional areas. Further community education and ranger education on what is a homeless cat in urban and peri urban areas as compared to a feral cat is needed. Most pounds and shelters need an intake and assessment area, a quarantine area and a rehoming area. Funding for the innovative projects like Wild Deserts project and the RSPCA Keeping Cats Safe at Home project are needed.
- j) Suggestion – local government councils implement a working party or local committee to bring together local rangers, cat rescue and shelter volunteers, researchers, First Nations and other cultural groups, neighbourhood centres and landcare and wildlife habitat group representatives to develop local strategies as one size fits all and top down strategies are not as strong as those locally developed and implemented.