

Submission
No 253

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

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Partially
Confidential

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

TOR A. According to the Threatened Species Recovery Hub, 1.1 million cats are already being kept responsibly by being contained at home, with another 2.7 million allowed to roam. Each one of these roaming domestic cats are allowed to kill 186 animals each year.

A study has revealed that 4 out of 10 cats thought to be inside, were actually roaming at night. Even just keeping them inside at night, only changes what type of animal they kill, not how many – night roaming kills more mammals, and day roaming kills more birds and reptiles. Another study has shown that a single roaming domestic cat is enough to drive a local native species to extinction in that area (Bamford and Calver 2012, Greenwell et al 2019).

They are natural predators and despite being fed multiple meals each day, they will still hunt and kill with a protracted taunting of the prey that extends the suffering of the native animal. Even those able to escape, will still die an excruciating death from poisoning due to the toxins in the cat's claws within six hours – even a single scratch will kill a possum or tawny frog mouth.

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TOR B. According to the Threatened Species Recovery Hub, 1.1 million cats are already being kept responsibly by being contained at home, with another 2.7 million allowed to roam. Each one of these roaming domestic cats are allowed to kill 186 animals each year.

While cat owners may decry the needs of their cat to roam, it's also time to consider other people who are affected by this roaming. Cats entering other homes and spraying or fouling gardens are a real problem in some neighbourhoods. Many residents around my neighbourhood adjacent to bushland enjoy being able to offer their garden and neighbourhood to our local wildlife – I love that a local possum pops in and eats the broccoli from the garden before we can and loved watching the rosellas forage on the front lawn but recently new neighbours allowed their cats to roam free in my yard, killing all the frogs I'd support raised through winter as tadpoles and terrorising the birds and echidnas in the national park across the road. Our gardens and neighbourhoods offer a vital haven for our native animals in a world with ever shrinking habitat.

TOR D. Those cat owners who want to do the right thing and protect native wildlife, already are. It will take legislated 24-hour mandatory containment to get the cat owners who don't care enough to keep their cat contained, to do so. It worked for dogs when the Companion Animals Act was amended and should have been introduced for cats at the same time.

While education and support programs for desexing and microchipping are essential, the recent Keeping Cats at Home program by the RSPCA has proven to have had little effect in my local council area. In order to stop the extinction crisis our native wildlife is suffering, we must have cat containment legislated and local government councils must have the ability to introduce this legislated requirement, until the Companion Animal Act requires 24-hour mandatory cat containment.

TOR E. Recent changes to the Companion Animal Act have had the unintended consequence of a disincentive for councils to control street/stray cat populations. Some councils are no longer picking up stray and street cats, due to the new requirements of holding them them

for two weeks and contacting shelters because they are always full and unable to take any more stray/street cats. The additional costs and capacity needed to administer the new requirements has made it unviable and so now, some councils don't bother. Local government councils must be able to pick up a street cat, assess the behaviour and if deemed appropriate, have the cat humanely euthanised to protect native wildlife from predation and to ease the suffering of the street cat as a life on the street is quite horrific for stray cats, and adds to the cost of living burden for the kind hearted people who feed the street cats (who often are the ones who can least afford the cost to feed the stray/street cat population, so they can go on to kill wildlife for entertainment).

TOR F. Widescale desexing for street/stray cats (trap neuter release) can only work if every single cat is desexed at the same time (highly unlikely). This theory is predicated on the misconception that cats do not kill native animals - which we know to be false. Even if it could be done, these cats will still live on the street and continue killing native wildlife for entertainment for another ten or so years – as awful as it seems, to protect our wildlife from extinction, we must remove the ability of all cats to roam, now. Our native wildlife has no time left.

Bamford M.J and Calver M.C (2012) Cat predation and suburban lizards: a 22-year study at a suburban Australian property. *Animal Welfare*

Greenwell, C Calver, M (2019) Cat gets its tern: a case study of predation on a threatened coastal seabird, *Animals*