

Submission
No 261

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

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MANAGING THE CAT POPULATION OF NSW

I make this submission, having been involved in animal rescue work since 2013 and as an owner of cats. Since 2013 I have specifically been involved in trapping and desexing cats (in excess of 100) and paying for the medical care of cats for individuals and rescue groups.

I make the following observations about the management of the cat population in NSW.

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

Evidence-based research is needed that mandated cat containment can achieve objectives for cats and wildlife and if introduced. All too often, interest groups are citing figures which have no factual basis. I note:

“...there is no scientific evidence that domestic cats... have any viability or conservation impacts at a population level on native wildlife. Australian population studies have not found a measurable effect” <https://petwelfare.org.au/2023/07/10/position-statement-on-domestic-cats-and-australian-native-wildlife-populations/>

TOR (b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Mandated cat containment is not effective. APWF has findings from a number of Australia councils which show it does not achieve aims and is not cost effective.

Many cat owners are unable to contain their cats e.g.: housing limitations on leased properties by landlords, body corporates, and many owners are unable to afford to afford outdoor cat enclosures.

Mandated cat containment can become a barrier to those assisting stray cats as fosters and adopters. Furthermore, this approach endangers those that are not contained as roaming will be viewed as feral or "illegal". Given this, it is likely that the good work of rescuers will be discouraged as people will believe that their efforts to save, desex and rehome/ adopt abandoned cats are wrong.

It is also recognised that mandated containment also contributes to risks for increased cruelty to all cats. <https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

TOR (c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

The containment of all cats is simply implausible. Many people living in family homes simply don't have the room to contain them and this of course is more of an issue for those living in apartments, villa homes and shared accommodation.

The creation of crowded cat environments is potentially dangerous to the physical wellbeing of cats, especially if they are accommodated with cats suffering from FIP etc.

The other reality is that it has the potential to provoke aggressive behaviours between animals, especially between those who are hyper territorial.

The RSPCA found that "there are some circumstances under which a cat's physical and mental needs will not be successfully met in containment due to a range of factors including the presence of other animals, space available, human factors, and ability to modify the property. There are also some cats who are unable to cope with containment... Mandatory 24/7 containment may increase the potential for negative impacts on animal welfare and the community, compared to voluntary implementation of 24/7 containment on an individual basis, by imposing it on people and cats who are not suited or capable of implementing it appropriately" <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

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

Education and obligations for responsible pet ownership on webpages, brochures, and social media is fairly static and low on engagement levels. It is recommended the NSW government lead, and each council delivers face-to-face cultural education and change management programs to respect and care for companion animals. The councils and their animal management officers (AMOs) may work collaboratively with community cat rescuers and community leaders on solutions for the vulnerable / low incomes and for cultural groups where respect for animals is currently not a priority nor meeting our NSW legal obligations.

"Person-centered and culturally competent policies and programs that focus resources on addressing root causes of pet health and welfare issues as opposed to an emphasis on code enforcement can create more positive, scalable, and sustainable improvements in human, other animal, and environmental health and welfare outcomes." Punishment to Support: The Need to Align Animal Control Enforcement with the Human Social Justice Movement <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902>

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

Cat containment policies could be unenforceable, and lead to significant disputes within the wider community. Such policies have the potential to

- increase tensions between neighbours and between residents and cat rescuers
- increase cat nuisance and cat roaming complaints
- increase time, effort and resources to manage a higher number of captured roaming cats
- increased euthanasia rates
- cruel and violent actions against homeless cats
- traumatic experiences for community cat rescuers and care givers
- cat haters empowering themselves to trap and harm/ cull cats with inhuman methods - all state and council communications (and the NSW Companion Animal Act with focus on clause 32, and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act) need to be improved and provide clear interpretation of clauses.

<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

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

Large scale (mass / high intensity) desexing programs for owned, semi owned and unowned cats are supported for their effectiveness in minimising cat populations. This is achieved by significantly limiting the breeding of cats, which also benefits each cat and the communities, and are cost justified in reducing council and pound efforts. Australian examples include: APWF Community Cat Programs in QLD, Banyule Council in Vic, and the KCSAH NSW desexing programs in Parramatta, Campbelltown, and Hornsby councils where semi owned cats and community cat rescuers were involved. It is noted that RSPCA SA intends to run a form of TNR, including “Reduce strays taken to shelters by helping community members understand that sometimes cats are better left where they are. Promote the approach of “leave a healthy cat where they are and monitor” to stray cats.”

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

It is strongly recommended that council pound systems and resources will need to be significantly increased based on an assessment of the additional needs from the number of: the estimated un-microchipped yet owned cats allowed to roam and b) the domestic semi owned and unowned cats (strays), including funding:

- to support and increase rehoming, and temporary care,
- euthanasia rates and additional resources needed to humanely process higher numbers of unwanted pets, and to ensure council pound staff are supported through compassion fatigue;

- communication with stakeholders and the whole community, including community cat rescuers, care givers, and feeders seeing their cats in colonies decimated who need support through compassion fatigue and potential primary trauma themselves;
- additional effort, information, guidelines and engaging with the community for repressing cat haters trapping and surrendering cats to ensure cats are treated humanely, meeting social licensing and governmental obligations,
- increased administrations, customer service representatives, AMO and Ranger roles for the above.

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

A number of councils in ACT, WA, SA, Vic, Qld have mandated cat containment, but where is the evidence of measured impacts and improvements on wildlife? APWF summarises several councils showing negative outcomes. Even the total ban in Halls Gap for 30 years has no evidence, nor any positive impact on the feral cats. In LGAs where cat containment has been implemented it appears the number of cats being abandoned is not decreasing, and there still remains a need for community cat rescuers who take on the burden of abandoned cats assisting desexing and rehoming, without involving current council pounds.

"Due to the ambiguity surrounding the risks and effectiveness of 24/7 containment, the RSPCA advocates that further research is undertaken to provide evidence of the positive and negative outcomes of cat containment before 24/7 containment can be adequately assessed."

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

TOR (i) options for reducing the feral cat population

It recommended it is timely to review the 2014 NSW bill in relation to feral cats: a) as cat terms need to be more tightly classed in line with the RSPCA 2018 definitions etc, b) new evidence-based science is gathered on feral cats near urban areas (peri-urban areas), c) new evidence-based research is gathered on impacts to wildlife in specific LGAs and locations, and d) communities expecting humane methods for feral cats who most recently were domestic cats and it is difficult to assess if they are generation-old feral cats or recent domestic abandoned cats.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Documents/feral-cats-do-trap-neuter-return-programs-work/Feral%20cats%20do%20trap%20neuter%20return%20programs%20work%20brief%2018%202014.pdf>

The use of 1080 poison needs to cease. 1080 is not a humane approach to killing any animal (RSPCA, Animal Liberation, APWF, Animal Justice Party) and was banned in other countries decades ago, the impacts of 1080 include convulsions likened by a vet to be electrocuted for up to 2 days, and it kills many non-targeted native animals. <https://www.al.org.au/ban-1080>

TOR (j) any other related matters

NSW should embrace the cat terms: feral or domestic, and domestic owned, semi owned or unowned. Stray cats are NOT feral cats. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management-in-Australia-RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018.pdf>

NSW needs to establish a domestic cat committee & cat management strategy with domestic cat expert stakeholders, including RSPCA, APWF, AVA, AIAM, & community cat rescuers. Recognise community cat rescuers / carers to include their scope of cats saved and rehomed in estimating resources and funding (not just NSW rehoming organisations).

Both the NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act require improvements to ensure desexing programs and the efforts of community cat rescuers can proceed without impediments or constraints, e.g. threats of abandoning cats, biodiversity risks not being adequately assessed to specific areas, and CAA clause 32 where a cat may be seized for harming any single animal (other than vermin) which includes pest animals, other introduced animals or native animals where the population is not at risk.