

Submission  
No 262

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

**Name:** Ms Marie Humphries

**Date Received:** 22 November 2024

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Dear Inquiry Committee

I have addressed the following terms of reference regarding management of cat populations in NSW.

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

**Cats in NSW are being unfairly demonised and targeted by cruel methods like baiting, trapping, and mandatory containment – practices that are not only ineffective but lead to unnecessary suffering. The Invasive Species Council is pushing for lethal controls despite a lack of evidence that these measures actually work. There exists no data to confirm that there is a drop in feral cat populations.**

The proliferation of homeless and unsocialised animals is the result of human failures. It is humans who continue to breed, buy, and sell cats and kittens; humans who abandon their animal companions; and humans who fail to desex, contain, and supervise them. To then allow humans to shoot or poison the resulting animals (and any other unlucky enough to become an unintended victim like our native wildlife) is inhumane and illogical. This violent behaviour towards cats also models inappropriate wrong behaviour sanctioned by our government that can be replicated in the community towards other innocent animals and people. Violence towards animals is a precursor to violence in the home and towards people.

There is the lack of solid evidence of the direct impact of wild feral cats on Australian wildlife. Native habitat and species conservation in Australia must be addressed holistically, with research and policy focusing on the **real causes of biodiversity loss** which is widespread habitat loss caused by governments and industry. Non-native animals (cats) are not responsible for biodiversity loss. They may contribute but the real reason is the constant decimation of species habitat approved by the state government.

Cats in NSW are being unfairly demonised and targeted by cruel methods like baiting, trapping, and mandatory containment—practices that are not only ineffective but lead to unnecessary suffering.

"...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/>

Evidence-based research is needed that mandated cat containment can achieve objectives for cats and wildlife and if introduced, then effective monitoring provides evidence that the potential negative impacts are eliminated or mitigated. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

The current treatment of "feral" and domestic cats lacks moral consideration of the suffering incurred by these sentient beings when they are poisoned and killed. Australians and the government are accountable for biodiversity loss through the policies that permit ongoing native forest logging. Shifting the blame by vilifying cats that were introduced into Australia by ourselves, is wrong. Humane methods must be used for feral cats and to treat these animals with respect, dignity, compassion, and kindness. After all this problem exists because humans have abandoned them.

b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Many cat owners are unable to contain their cats e.g. because of housing limitations, on leased properties by landlords, body corporates, and complaints from neighbours; homes do not have air conditioning, nor are owners able to afford air con operating throughout the very long and more humid summers; not being able to afford outdoor cat enclosures; the lack of acceptance of cat enclosures by neighbours; putting owned cats at risk in their own backyards; concerns about the welfare of cats as not all cats accept and like being in small enclosures.

Mandated cat containment becomes a barrier to those assisting stray cats. It may be interpreted that all roaming cats are "illegal" which may also mean that community members and specifically community cat rescuers are also seen to be "illegally" assisting. This can halt all efforts to save, desex and rehome and adopt abandoned cats. <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inquiry-into-pounds-in-NSW-APWF-submission-final.pdf>

Mandating cat containment can therefore act as a hindrance to help abandoned cats through no fault of their own. All pets including cats are deserving of a loving home and that is the ultimate mission.

c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

*"...Keeping cats indoors can cause frustration and unwanted behavioural challenges leading to stress and compromised health, especially in multi-cat homes"*

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7829302/>

Most cats can tolerate containment in the home but not all. Providing a cat-run may provide the answer to cats that need some access to the outside environment. The individual needs of the cat must be recognised, and adjustments made or modified, like widening and lengthening the cat run, providing enrichment, multiple scratching posts, toys, human-interactive games that encourage exercise, and shelves to lie on at varying levels, and small trees within the cat run where it can run to climb and explore.

In these cases, in order to maintain ownership of their cat and avoid them being abandoned, some financial funding could be provided to households to install a cat-run.

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

Public awareness and education should be sensitive to all opinions of cats and, at the very least, must be tailored to individual community types - inner-city, suburb, regional, rural, and remote. A one size fits all approach is not the answer.

Future public awareness and education campaigns should focus on the sentience and individual worth of cats in order to foster compassionate wildlife conservation techniques.

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. Therefore, if the NSW government were to end native forest logging in NSW, hundreds of millions of dollars would be saved that props up this destructive industry that is the major contributing factor anyway for biodiversity loss in the state not cats. This public money could be diverted to local councils to initiate their own community led management programs that are fit for purpose for their own council needs. For instance, a regional council would need a specific program of community education that suits their specific needs as apposed to a community education

program in a metropolitan setting. Local councils are more in tune with their community than the state government but without state public funding the delivery of effective programs at a local level will be limited to achieve the goal of responsible pet ownership.

The councils and their animal management officers (AMOs) could 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 in order to meet NSW legal obligations.

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

Responsible cat "ownership" is paramount and should include early-age desexing cats; indoors-only cats; curfewing "outdoor" cats at night; installing cat-proof fencing and cat-runs where possible.

Depending on the LGA and if located near bushland and native wildlife, responsible cat "ownership" is dependent on circumstance, largely based on geographic location. It may be necessary for people with domestic cats in wildlife-sensitive areas to keep cats indoors at all times; while people with cats in the inner-city may feel comfortable to supervise their cat in a backyard. Community and media campaigns should encourage creative, kind ways to keep cats as companion animals, while limiting their breeding and minimising predation of native animals in order for compassionate conservation to flourish.

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

By minimising the number of cats that exist across all NSW environments this will ultimately reduce the impact of cats' predation on wildlife.

**Immuno-contraceptives are the most humane method of cat population control.** Population control of cats will likely depend on the development of new non-surgical methods for sterilisation.

At least two reproductive antigens, zona pellucida and GnRH, have been identified as possible targets for fertility control in cats. The responsiveness of cats to fertility control via GnRH suppression should encourage researchers and cat control stakeholders to continue efforts to optimise vaccines that induce multi-year contraception following a single dose in a high proportion of treated cats. Funding and media focus should be on the research, development and promotion of fertility control in cat populations. The NSW government is encouraged to invest in this research in order to increase the rate of desexing in cats as injected vaccines will be a quicker solution to current desexing procedures.

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

The government should promote through Councils, adoption and at-home containment and invest in desexing projects and educational programmes.

These educational programmes should inform the community about homeless cat numbers and shelters that are overburdened with a surplus supply. A leaflet drop in the LGA is suggested to inform the community. Encouraging adoptions through shelters and pounds rather than purchasing a cat through a breeder should be promoted. Supporting a breeder usually means you support animal cruelty!

Informing the public about desexing and microchipping incentives for their cat and providing information on cat-runs with financial support is recommended to encourage families to keep their cats.

Council pound systems and resources will need to be significantly increased through state funding by the NSW government to accommodate rehoming, and temporary care and humanely processing unfortunately higher numbers of unwanted pets for increased euthanasia rates. Once desexing programs are established and more importantly maintained indefinitely the drop in cat populations and abandoned cats should be seen. Developing the fertility control vaccine above to be used as a dart gun on feral cats to make them infertile could also see a solution to the stray cat problem.

To engage with stakeholders and the whole community, including cat rescuers and care givers and get their insight as to how better outcomes can be achieved for abandoned cats in their area. The trapping and surrendering of cats should always be done humanely, meeting social licensing and governmental obligations. Increased administrations, customer service and animal management officers (AMO) and as well as Ranger roles will also need to be increased to support humanely cat containment measures.

Advertising costs to promote adoptions to reduce cats held in shelters and pounds could be another initiative. The NSW government is strongly encouraged to financially support local Council with these initiatives as an ongoing long term solution to this problem. Managing cat populations in NSW has been a neglected issue for decades by successive governments. It cannot be solved quickly. Feral shooting is only a band-aid, temporary, inhumane and ineffective solution. With strategic planning, proper financial investment by the state government, initiatives to support people to rehome cats from pounds and keep their cats and a focused desexing program, cat populations will gradually decline. A collaborative approach between the state government and local councils is encouraged along with assessment of a structured methodical program to ascertain achieved targets of a decrease in cat populations.

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

*"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>

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

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-15/mayor-says-halls-gap-cat-ban-success-native-wildlife/102337372>

If the NSW government focussed more on preventing the problem FIRST through a state funded desexing program across the entire state by local councils, we would not be having this discussion of containment, supposed threats to native wildlife, potential strain (mental, physical and financial) on animal charities, community and individual cat rescuers and pounds to care, rehome or euthanise exploding populations of cats and kittens.

i) options for reducing the feral cat population

Killing cats for conservation purposes is inhumane in principle. Further, Australia's government-sanctioned five-year cat killing has had no proven impact on the biodiversity and spread of native species. Despite the recent development of baits for cats, no broadscale and enduring mechanism

with acceptably small non-target effects has yet been developed for the control of "feral" cats - meaning any program to bait cats would result in the painful death of cats and non-target species, for no proven gain. Meaning that our native wildlife would be the collateral damage of extensive baiting with 1080 poison.

Future research and policy surrounding cat population control should focus on non-lethal methods.

Despite Australia having millions of homeless cats that are killed by various means, people continue to breed, buy and sell cats in Australia. This aspect needs to be banned immediately. You cannot tackle a problem successfully whilst you have breeders and sellers contributing to the problem. The haphazard, unregulated buying and selling of any animal for profit is WRONG. It also results in poor welfare conditions for the animals being bred and sold. Domestic cats should not be bred or sold commercially; pet shops and the in-person and online sales of cats should be banned to ensure that only desexed and microchipped shelter/rescue animals are sold at prices that only cover the cost of the cats' care, so that breeding cats becomes a non-profitable industry and ends.

Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) programs are under-studied in the Australian context. Trap-neuter-release (TNR) is an ethical approach to the management of populations of free-roaming cats of varying sociability, with Trap, Desex, Adopt or Return and Support (TDARS) considered a more appropriate tool for urban cat management in Australian conditions.

An increasing body of evidence suggests that long-term TNR programs can effectively reduce free-roaming cat populations, especially those programs that include an adoption program, monitoring and desexing of new cats. Bali uses this approach by animal organisations as well as some other Asian countries in the Pacific region.

Australia should begin research into TNR and TDARS adapted to the challenges and conditions unique to Australian landscapes, with particular focus on their efficacy of reducing wildlife predation by cats.

#### j) any other related matters

Cats in NSW are being unfairly demonised and targeted by cruel methods like baiting, trapping, and mandatory containment—practices that are not only ineffective but lead to unnecessary suffering. The Invasive Species Council is pushing for lethal controls despite a lack of evidence that these measures work. We must acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of all species and respect the wellbeing of animals and the environment alongside that of humans and human societies.

Fostering respect, kindness and compassion for all species as core values in the way in which governments design and deliver initiatives and the manner in which they function should be a priority.

Not the quick ineffective solution of inhumane baiting or lethal control.

Many non-native animal species, introduced to Australia by people for varying activities, are modifying the environment, competing with native species and contributing to biodiversity loss and ecosystem decline. It is not just the cat!

Shooting, hunting and fishing (e.g. rabbits, foxes, deer, European carp), animal agriculture (e.g. sheep, cows, pigs, goats), biocontrol (e.g. cane toads) and the use of animals for labour and companionship

(e.g. horses, donkeys, camels, dogs, cats) all have an impact on our environment and native wildlife. All these actions by people and the government affect our wildlife in a negative way. We are responsible directly for our lack of action to protect native wildlife properly and our inaction to control problems effectively.

Various non-native species have either escaped, been lost or abandoned, or are permitted to free roam by humans; some individuals and species have survived and are now free-living in the Australian environment. People are responsible for the impact of these non-native species through poor decision making and accountability, lack of appreciation of actions and disregard for native species and the environment. Cats should and must not be the only ones demonised. Accountability belongs to us for creating these problems in the first place!

Marie Humphries