

Submission  
No 264

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially  
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## **Submission: Management of cat populations in New South Wales**

- **Cats and Threatened Native Animals in Urban and Regional Areas**

Claims about domestic cats' impact on wildlife are often based on flawed studies, with no scientific evidence showing significant effects on native wildlife. Australian research indicates no measurable impact, highlighting the need for evidence-based research and robust monitoring to assess the benefits of cat containment for both cats and wildlife.

- **Effectiveness and Barriers of Cat Containment Policies**

Mandated cat containment is deemed ineffective and not cost-effective, as evidenced by the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) and various councils. Cat owners face challenges such as restrictive landlord policies, neighbour complaints, and the high cost of outdoor enclosures, with some cats struggling to adapt to confinement, raising welfare concerns. Additionally, these policies hinder efforts to assist stray cats and foster misconceptions about roaming cats, discouraging community support. Data from councils like Hobsons Bay, Hume, Casey, and Yarra Ranges indicate that mandated containment fails to protect cats and increases the risk of cruelty, prompting a re-evaluation of these policies.

- **Welfare Outcomes for Contained Cats**

There is growing evidence that environmental contamination from home furnishings and dust can harm cat health. Keeping cats indoors can lead to frustration and behavioural issues, especially in multi-cat households. Some cats may struggle with confinement due to other animals or limited space. Mandatory 24/7 containment might negatively affect their welfare, while voluntary confinement tailored to individual needs could yield better results.

- **Community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives**

Online education about responsible pet ownership often lacks engagement, so the NSW government should implement face-to-face cultural education programs to foster respect for companion animals. Local councils and Animal Management Officers (AMOs) should collaborate with community cat rescuers and local leaders to address the needs of vulnerable populations, using culturally competent policies to target the root causes of pet health and welfare issues for more effective and sustainable improvements.

- **Implications for Councils in Enforcing Cat Containment**

Councils face numerous challenges in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies, as highlighted by the APWF. These include increased cat nuisance and roaming complaints, additional costs and resources for managing captured cats, higher monitoring and reporting requirements with little value for money, and rising euthanasia rates of healthy animals, causing emotional distress for staff. The community, especially cat rescuers, is also impacted as their colonies are diminished. Misinterpretation of legislation by those who harm cats needs addressing. To mitigate these issues, clearer interpretations of relevant clauses in state and council communications, including the NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, are necessary.

- **Effectiveness and Benefits of Large-Scale Cat Desexing Programs**

Large-scale desexing programs for owned, semi-owned, and unowned cats effectively reduce cat populations by limiting breeding, benefiting both the cats and their communities while lowering costs for councils and shelters. In Australia, notable programs include the APWF Community Cat Programs in Queensland, Banyule Council in Victoria, and KCSAH programs in New South Wales.

Additionally, RSPCA SA plans to implement a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) approach, focusing on community education to monitor healthy strays rather than taking them to shelters.

- **Impact of Cat Containment Measures on Pound Systems**

It is recommended to enhance council pound systems and resources to address the needs of roaming, non-microchipped cats and stray domestic cats. This includes funding for rehoming efforts, temporary care, humane processing of unwanted pets, and support for staff with compassion fatigue. Improved communication with stakeholders, community engagement to address issues with cat haters, and additional personnel for administration, customer service, animal management officers, and rangers are also necessary.

- **Outcomes of Cat Containment Policies in Other Australian States**

Several councils in the ACT, WA, SA, Victoria, and Queensland have implemented cat containment measures, but there is little evidence of positive impacts on wildlife. The APWF notes that even a 30-year cat ban in Halls Gap has not reduced feral cat populations. The number of abandoned cats remains unchanged, underscoring the need for community cat rescuers to manage desexing and rehoming. The RSPCA stresses the need for further research to assess the risks and effectiveness of 24/7 cat containment.

- **Reducing the feral cat population**

A review of the 2014 NSW bill on feral cats is recommended for several reasons:

- i. Cat terms need to align with the RSPCA's 2018 definitions.
- ii. New research is emerging about feral cats in peri-urban areas.
- iii. Evidence is being gathered on their impacts on wildlife in specific local government areas (LGAs).
- iv. Communities expect humane methods for managing feral cats, particularly those that were once domestic.

Additionally, the use of 1080 poison should be banned. It is not humane, causes severe suffering, and poses a risk to non-target native animals, as confirmed by the RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations.

- **Other related matters**

New South Wales (NSW) should categorise cats as feral or domestic, with domestic cats further classified as owned, semi-owned, or unowned, noting that stray cats differ from feral cats. NSW needs a Domestic Cat Committee and a comprehensive cat management strategy involving stakeholders like the RSPCA, APWF, AVA, AIAM, and community cat rescuers. The NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act should be updated to support desexing programs and community cat rescuers, address risks related to abandoned cats, ensure proper biodiversity assessments, and revise Clause 32 to manage cats harming other animals.