

**Submission  
No 260**

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

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I am writing a submission for the Inquiry into the management of cat populations in NSW as I strongly believe that our native animals need to be protected. Cats are an invasive species and predate our native birds, reptiles, amphibians, and even insects. They also kill many of our small mammals and marsupials. As a cat owner myself, I believe that it is my responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of my pets, ensure the safety of native species, and ensure that my cats are not roaming on other people's properties.

I live in an area that is quite close to natural water sources, so there are a lot of native animals that call my suburb home. The Regent Honeyeater has been seen in my area, as well as other charismatic species like the Rainbow Bee-eater, Fairy wrens, and Striated Pardalotes. These species are all suffering from encroachment into their habitat, and the Regent Honeyeater is critically endangered with only 250-300 individuals left. I believe that it is vital that we do all we can to save these iconic Australian natives, and one way to help their numbers recover is to ensure that pet cats are not supplementing their diets with native birds when they are roaming outside. Cat saliva is toxic to many other animals ([www.wildliferescueleague.org](http://www.wildliferescueleague.org)), so even when a cat does not immediately kill their prey, the wounded animal is then subjected to a slow, painful death from septicaemia. This cruel and prolonged death is often away from a cat's immediate home, so owners never even realise the amount of damage that their cats are doing to local natives.

Apart from predation, cats are also the main host species for the Toxoplasmosis parasite, and the only species where this parasite can complete its life cycle. This parasite can cause extreme illness and even death in our warm-blooded natives like possums, and can cause spontaneous abortions in native species, stock, and humans (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12390281/>). Toxoplasmosis can also cause blindness and other issues in foetuses. I believe that it is incredibly irresponsible to allow an animal that cause miscarriages and congenital disabilities in humans to roam onto other people's property. Cats use vege patches and sandpits as toileting areas, meaning that it is easy for humans to pick up this parasite when they are interacting with their own garden on their own property. Miscarrying is a devastating blow to mothers, and it can affect their mental health for many years, as well as having many negative impacts on the wider family unit. NSW should be doing all they can to reduce the number of cats that roam into the gardens of others. Cats that come in to contact with stock can also pass this on and cause abortions in those species. It is estimated that toxoplasmosis is the cause of 10-20% of all spontaneous abortions in horses (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7033994/>). Allowing an animal to roam that causes such financial losses to farmers and graziers is horrifically irresponsible, and for this reason alone NSW should be doing more to decrease its feral cat numbers and implementing cat containment laws to restrict access of pet cats to stock. Despite the increased costs that will come with implementing and maintaining cat containment laws, NSW tax payers stand to save money by decreasing stock abortions and the other disease symptoms that comes from cats spreading toxoplasmosis.

As stated above, I have 3 indoor only cats. All three of these cats are rescues that had lived outside at some point in their life. While it took a few weeks to adjust them to living inside, it was well worth it. We provide them with plenty of enrichment by playing with

them, and have built a catio. I do not understand why people get a pet, if they are only going to chuck them outside and not spend time with them. Our cats have excellent recall, and also know some tricks. I have enclosed images of the catio that I built for very little money. The first photo shows one that I built from only cheap plastic netting, and the next two are from when I upgraded to using metal wire. This project was not overly expensive, and while I know that the cost of living is affecting people, I believe that pet ownership comes with responsibilities like keeping pets safe from cars, disease, cat fights, and poisoning. This catio cost far less than any vet bill for these issues would have. There are many ways to build a catio that cater to a range of house shapes and household budgets, from a free standing structure to a window box.

Outside cats live shorter, more stressful lives than indoor cats. This is because cats are territorial, but we humans tend to live in closely packed suburbs with more cats than there is territory space. This leads to fighting, and cats are also susceptible to the bacteria in other cat's saliva, such as *Bartonella henselae*, which causes infections and can lead to death. This close packing causes cats to be stressed when trying to defend their territory. Inside cats are restricted to an artificially smaller territory, but they do not feel the need to defend it. Outdoor cats also suffer from repeated infections of fleas, worms, and mites, which cause illness and discomfort. With the cost of living, it is cheaper to keep indoor cats healthy than outdoor cats as they require far less vet visits and less parasite prevention. Of course inside cats are also safer from birds of prey, and from cars. While cats are fast, they have not evolved to deal with the threat of cars, and many struggle to judge crossing the road accurately. I have seen 5 road kill cats in my neighbourhood this year. There are also other risks like dog attacks, poisoning from coming into contact with chemicals, and being locked in people's garages. All these deaths are slow and painful, something that I would never risk with my pets. I believe that it is cruel to subject a loved pet to these outside risks, and that those that care about companion animal welfare should be encouraging people to keep their cats indoors.

The above reasons are why I also object to any suggestions that TNR should be introduced into NSW. Not only is re-releasing an invasive species illegal and unethical to our native animals, it is also cruel to expect cats to recover from abdominal surgery with no medical follow ups. I strongly object to any such proposal.

Now is the best time to implement cat containment laws in NSW. The POCTAA bill is going through Parliament this year, and cat containment laws fit in nicely with bill as they also increase the wellbeing of cats, native animals, and stock.