

**Submission
No 277**

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

Name: Mr Martin Derby
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Dear Inquiry Committee

Please read my submission to the Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations

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

The Invasive Species Council is pushing for lethal controls despite a lack of evidence that these measures work. Cat owners know that cats are loving, intelligent, and social animals who deserve kindness, not persecution. They are sentient living beings that feel pain, suffering, abuse, cruelty and neglect.

There is the lack of solid evidence of the direct impact of cats on all 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– not predation by non-native animals.

This is a man-made problem that has not been dealt with in a clear well thought out compassionate way. Of course, it must be dealt with to protect native wildlife, however instead of turning on cats and vilifying them come up with a solution that fixes the problem properly. The NSW government wastes public money in many areas. A glaring example is NSW Forestry Corp's wastage of taxpayer money to keep logging native forests causing the destruction of habitat and species decline eg Greater Glider and Koala. Yet the government is happy to waste our money on a financially draining industry and does not care about the ruin to nature and the deaths and suffering it is directly causing to our wildlife as they lose their habitat and succumb to predation by feral animals including cats. So, they turn their attention and focus on cats as the sole problem to deflect ANY responsibility they share in creating this problem in the first place. The impact of cats on native animals is a threat but it is a symptom of the government's mismanagement of the situation because they do not want to invest money in programs to reduce stray cat populations in the first place through neutering and rehoming. Increase funding to financially support animal charities (RSPCA NSW, Animal Welfare League, Sydney Dog and Cats Home and many more) would be a kinder solution. Increase funding to all Councils to provide intensive de-sexing programs and increase local pound/shelter support in their own local government areas would be a practical and necessary solution. The government's inaction is making the situation worse, not cats!

b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

The effectiveness of cat containment policies and welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions: Cats can happily live indoors or in secure outdoor cat runs (or a combination of the two), provided they have access to enrichment, such as toys, a feline companion, puzzle feeders, scratching posts, human-interactive games that encourage exercise, and shelves, levels, and cat trees for climbing. 92% of Australians support or do not oppose 24/7 at-home cat containment. Allowing cats to roam outside the home is dangerous not only for wildlife but also for the cats themselves, who are at risk of disease, being hit by cars, or becoming the victims of cruel people. Cats responsibly contained at home can live up to 10 years longer than those allowed to roam free. Financial support to install outdoor cat-runs would increase their usage and improve the lives of cats, as well as address some negative behaviours that could induce owners to abandon their cats adding to the stray cat problem. This could be a preventive measure that decreases abandonment levels.

c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Not all cats suit indoor mandatory containment. Keeping some cats indoors all of the time can cause frustration and unwanted behavioural challenges leading to stress and compromised health.

“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>

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

Appropriate NSW government funding should be delivered to every local Council to-

- invest in the ongoing education of communities to contain their cats at night especially and why this protects our native wildlife.
- provide financial programs where the community can purchase cheap affordable cat runs that allow their cats the freedom to venture outside and inside the home.
- raise public awareness in the free microchipping of cats at a Council level.
- offer free de-sexing of cats in their council area.
- promote adoption of cats rather than purchasing a cat. Educating the community as to not supporting purchases of cats from breeding farms but rather **adopting and rehoming from a shelter** is best practice. Every animal bought from a breeder costs one in a shelter the chance of a loving home, contributing to the increased euthanasia rates of animals in shelters.

Public awareness and education should be sensitive to all the varying 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. Councils know their own community but will need sustainable financial funding to initiate the above actions.

Controlling Australia's cat population requires a **multipronged approach** that must rest first and foremost on stemming the flow of new cats via establishing breeding restrictions. Council shelters are overflowing, putting pressure on staff and denying new animals in need safe spaces. Australian shelters and pounds must euthanise some 50,000 healthy cats and kittens a year, yet 25% of cats – 1.32 million in 2022 – are still being purchased from breeders directly or via pet stores. Breeding of cats needs to end completely.

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

Councils must advocate strongly for responsible cat "ownership" which is paramount. It should include early-age desexing of all 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. Or cat-runs can be installed with Council incentives and financial support so that cats have controlled access to an outdoor environment that promotes their well-being. Community, Council 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. Local Councils will need to drive these changes at a local level that relates to the specific requirements and needs of their LGA. The state government will spearhead these actions and provide the financial funding to implement these tailor-made Council programs that are fit for purpose and satisfy the needs of their local community.

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

Cat management strategies must be focused on humane ways of addressing the root cause of overpopulation, not employing cruel, dangerous lethal measures to reduce feral cat populations.

There is a move toward societal acceptance that the onus is on humans to minimise the impact of cats' predation on wildlife, by minimising the number of cats that exist across all NSW environments. Cat populations can explode in cities and towns because there is no desexing, this increases the likelihood of abandonment and increases stray cats that in turn can turn feral. This is why a state-wide plan by the state government but delivered at a local level by every Council is needed to reduce cat populations in NSW.

The effectiveness and benefits of implementing large-scale cat desexing programmes includes a reduction in cat numbers and the threat they pose to other animals must start with stemming the flow of new animals into a world where there are not enough homes for them. Humans are responsible for deliberately increasing cat populations as well as the reproduction of unfixed roaming and homeless cats. All cats wherever possible must be caught and desexed. Cats that are bought must be mandatory desexed. A cat not desexed can reproduce and the problem is compounded. A single free-roaming, unfixed cat can give rise to as many as 5,000 cats in seven years.

Extensive and readily available desexing programmes made affordable via state government subsidies must therefore be coupled with legislation banning the breeding and sale of animals by breeders, kitten farms, pet stores, and online operators to stem the flow of new animals for both cats and dogs. There is an oversupply, and the breeding of companion animals and their sale must end. Shelters and pounds are at breaking point having to be supported greatly by communities financially and in volunteer work.

Desexing also improves the welfare of individual animals. Spaying eliminates female feline stress and discomfort during heat periods, eliminates the uterine cancer risk, and greatly reduces mammary cancer risk. One study found that spaying cats younger than 1 year old was associated with an 86% reduction in the risk of developing mammary gland neoplasia. Neutering makes males far less likely to roam or fight, prevents testicular cancer, and reduces the risk of prostate cancer. Desexed animals are less likely to contract deadly, contagious diseases, such as feline AIDS and feline leukaemia, which are spread through bodily fluids.

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 education programmes to inform the public about why there can be no such thing as a "responsible" breeder while homeless cat numbers continue to skyrocket.

Council pound systems and resources will need to be significantly increased through state funding by the NSW government. Gaining information on the estimated un-microchipped, owned cats allowed to roam and the domestic semi owned and unowned cat strays. Increased funding to accommodate rehoming, and temporary care; humanely processing higher numbers of unwanted pets for rehoming and/or increased euthanasia rates, and to support council pound staff emotionally and mentally throughout this process.

To facilitate communication with stakeholders and the whole community, including cat rescuers and care givers. Trapping and surrendering cats to ensure cats are always treated humanely, meeting social licensing and governmental obligations. Promoting community information engagement to repress cat haters. Increased administrations, customer service and animal management officers (AMO) and as well as Ranger roles will also need to be carefully considered to support humanely cat containment measures that impact the pound system at a local level. Advertising costs to promote adoptions to reduce cats held in shelters and pounds. The NSW government is strongly encouraged to financially support local Council with these initiatives. After all they waste huge amounts of taxpayer money subsidising fossil fuel projects that exacerbates climate change and creates another cause of species decline due to increased natural disasters (bushfires, floods). Continued native forest logging that is decimating habitats is hugely supported by public money that affects the survival of our native wildlife. This is the cause of decline of our native animals not feral cats! Diverting this funding to properly address cat containment in our state is well overdue. Better still end native forest logging so our wildlife have habitats to help them survive in the first place!

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>

i) options for reducing the feral cat population

I am generally opposed to the breeding of domestic cats when we have so many that are stray, homeless and abandoned. Domestic cats should not be bred or sold commercially without robust regulation, and this is always lacking. Pet shops and the in-person and online sales of cats should end as it is based on monetary profits and poor animal welfare outcomes. Only desexed and microchipped shelter/rescue cats should be sold at affordable prices for the community that only covers the cost of the cats' care, so that breeding cats becomes a non-profitable activity that is faded out.

In regard to tackling the root causes of overpopulation, it is not enough to rely on reactionary control methods, such as the impounding of animals identified as having homes and the killing of homeless animals. The NSW government should consider the following preventive measures to reduce cat populations:

- A ban on the sale of animals by breeders, in pet stores, and online
- A ban on kitten farms
- The enforcement of 24/7 cat confinement laws if households can implement
- Continuation of mandatory microchipping
- Financial support to install cat-runs for households
- Increased public education about the importance of cat desexing, at-home confinement (including environmental enrichment), fostering, and adoption
- Increased state government funding of adoption groups and shelters to better house impounded animals and enhance rehoming efforts
- Government funding of increased desexing programmes to capture all impounded cats and street cats
- In cases where it is necessary, humane euthanasia
- An end to cruel, inaccurate lethal methods such as shooting and poisoning of cats due to the risk of native wildlife.

j) any other related matters

Poisoning as a cat control measure, is counterintuitive to protecting wildlife. Sodium fluoroacetate (colloquially 1080), which is commonly used in cat baits, is an environmental disaster. It is easily ingested by companion animals as well as native species, and its victims endure a slow, agonising death.

Similarly, shooting cats is cruel. Shooting moving targets, which is usually done at night, can result in inaccurate shots and cause a prolonged, painful death for cats.

The government MUST redirect how they spend taxpayer money in this state. We have a right to question their gross misuse of public money. NSW Labor government believes that the timber industry is 'sustainable'. It is neither environmentally nor financially sustainable. The government's direct actions and support of Forestry Corp NSW are causing the displacement and deaths of our wildlife. If it ended we would save our native wildlife

and their habitat and could redirect money to programs that contain all feral animals (foxes, pigs) that negatively impact our wildlife. Government sanctioned native forestry operations are subsidised by public money every year. In the last 3 years there has been a loss of \$30 million. The undercharging of logs is an additional subsidy funded by public money paid by the government directly to the industry. More than \$200 million was paid to Forestry Corp NSW in the period 2019-2023. Imagine what problems could be solved in an innovative and more compassionate manner to address the issue of not only cats but all companion animals in the state. The government's knee jerk reaction of lethal shooting is quick expedient and cheap and requires little thought and planning. But it is cruel, not humane and not acceptable! We can as a state do better than this!

We must prioritise cat welfare and support 100% humane management practices, including desexing and education.

Thank you

Martin Derby