

Submission
No 315

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

Name: Ms Meredith Brownhill

Date Received: 21 November 2024

21st November 2024

The Chairperson,
The Hon. Emma Hurst MLC,
The Parliamentary Animal Welfare Committee,
Parliament House,
Sydney. 2000

Dear Ms. Hurst and committee members,

Please accept this submission to the Inquiry into the management of cat populations in NSW.

I am happy for any part of this submission to be published with my name if necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute comments to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Meredith Brownhill

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Introduction

I am a Blue Mountains resident and am privileged to live in a town that is surrounded by bushland and National Parks that constitute the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

My backyard has native vegetation and I live very close to an environmentally protected Blue Mountains Swamp and other Woodland vegetation. During the 38 years I have lived here I have had a regular flow of pet cats, stray cats and feral cats visiting my yard with subsequent deaths of birds, skinks and a lovely Peron's Tree Frog – torn apart with sharp claws. These cats have defecated in my garden and probably contaminated the soil including vegetable garden soil with *Toxoplasmosis gondii* and other cat dependent diseases.

So I became engaged in looking for solutions to protect native wildlife from cat disease and predation. Plus seeking solutions to the nuisance factor of roaming cats. I have assisted Blue Mountains City Council staff in drafting educational leaflets about responsible cat and dog ownership, and supported the introduction of two Wildlife Protection Areas.

I grew up on a farm in South Australia and usually holiday in western NSW so have an interest in outcomes for cat management in the rural sector.



Feathertail glider rescued from the mouth of a cat.
Blue Mountains. Photo Julia McConnell 2009

I will be addressing all the terms of reference.

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

Predation by feral cats was listed as a key threatening process in 1999 under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The reduction in the population of feral cats and predation impacts on threatened species is a priority.

The impacts of predation upon ALL Australian wildlife needs to be considered. The consequences of cat predation upon species populations is a contributing factor to their decline and subsequent listing as Threatened Species under NSW and Federal legislation.

In *Cats in Australia Companion and Killer*, the authors state -

Cats are likely to have been a main cause of 27(57%) of the 47 extinctions of Australian reptiles, birds and mammals that have occurred since European settlement of this country... and a contributing factor to a further seven (15%) with this impact particularly pronounced for extinctions of Australian mammal species (1).

In the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area the total numbers of threatened species are 28 mammal, 33 bird, 4 reptile, 7 frog, one dragonfly, one snail and 100 plant species according to Blue Mountains Conservation Society.(2) Native fauna all play an important role in pollination and reproduction of native plants, so the long view is that the loss of one animal species, negatively impacts upon other animals and plants.

In the Blue Mountains local government area, and in other peri-urban local government areas native wildlife come into urban areas and into streets, parks and backyards where there are pet cats and stray cats. The impact of cats would primarily be upon small marsupials, birds, reptiles, frogs and invertebrates.

The use of tracking collars on pet cats has shown that they are known to travel long distances and frequently do not bring home all their prey to show their owners. According to the Invasive Species Council average pet cats out roaming are estimated to kill 110 native animals every year. (3) Some NSW council websites are still quoting a figure of 30 p.a. which is now out of date.

The injuries and suffering of wildlife need to be considered. Wildlife welfare needs to be considered equal to companion and agricultural animal welfare. Most commonly, after a cat attack wildlife die of shock or injury, or have to be euthanised by a vet. Wildlife carers say that very few wildlife survive a cat attack. If wildlife do survive, their injuries may leave them incapacitated and they are not able to support themselves in the wild, so have to be kept by carers in captivity.

Cat dependent diseases also impact upon native wildlife. The most common of these is *Toxoplasmosis gondii*, which is carried by cats and is spread to other animals and humans through contamination from faecal matter. Disease impacts upon native animals need to be widely recognised as an important reason to contain pet cats, and remove stray cats and feral cats from the environment.

(1) Woinarski J., et al., 2019 *Cats in Australia*, page 136.

(2) Blue Mountains Conservation Society, <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/threatened-species.shtml>

(3) Invasive Species Council, <https://invasives.org.au/our-work/feral-animals/cats-in-australia/pet-cats/>

Toxoplasmosis gondii has been identified in native animals, and marsupials are considered to be susceptible to this organism, which can contribute to mortality. According to Wildlife Health Australia -

Within Australia, clinical, serological or pathological evidence of toxoplasmosis has been reported in a wide range of marsupial species, including:

- *red and grey kangaroos, wallaroos and wallabies, pademelons, bridled nailtail wallaby and rock wallabies.*
- *bettongs, potoroos and quokka*
- *brush-tail and ring-tail possums and pygmy possums*
- *common wombats*
- *bandicoots and bilbies*
- *Tasmanian devils, quolls, antechinus, phascogales, kowari and dunnarts.* (4)

The Tasmanian Government in its submission to the Inquiry into the problem of feral and pet cats states that Tasmanian marsupials have died from the disease Toxoplasmosis, and name Eastern-barred Bandicoots, Pademelons and Bennetts Wallabies as affected.(5)

Their submission refers to the infection of ocean mammals. The Australian fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*) is listed as a vulnerable species under NSW Threatened species Conservation Act 1995, lives off the NSW coast, and its population is declining. The females are spontaneously aborting foetal seals which are infected with Toxoplasmosis. (6)

The NZ Dept. of Primary Industries has stated that *T.gondii* oocysts travel via streams and creeks into the marine environment, where Dolphins contract Toxoplasmosis. They advise cat owners to dispose of cat faeces in the bin and not the toilet. (7)

In 2006 research in the City of Sydney found that common Brushtail Possums were infected with Toxoplasmosis. Of a sample size of 124 possums 6.3% tested positive. (8)

Spotted-tail Quolls, (*Dasyurus maculatus*) are listed as Vulnerable in NSW and Endangered under the EPBC Act 1995. They have a 71% seroprevalence in Tasmania in one survey (9), so the probability of Spotted-tail Quolls in the Blue Mountains having been infected with *Toxoplasmosis gondii* is very likely, as Quolls notoriously like backyard chickens.

The vulnerability of marsupials to cat diseases in NSW appears to need much more research and publication of data. Cat dependent disease, i.e., diseases that require cats for transmission, particularly *Toxoplasmosis gondii* is easily transmitted to wildlife entering home gardens with contaminated soil. Wildlife such as Brushtail possums, Spotted-tail Quolls, Bush rats and Bandicoots, all feed from the ground and are most vulnerable to the disease.

Other cat dependent diseases affecting wildlife are Toxocariasis which is a roundworm (*Toxocara cati*). There is also cat scratch disease, caused by a bacteria *Bartonella henselae*. Sarcosporidiosis is another disease caused by *Sarcocystis* spp. These diseases can affect other animals and humans. (10)

(4) Wildlife Health, *Toxoplasmosis of Australian mammals*, 2019

(5) Tasmanian Dept. of Parks, Water and Environment *Submission to the Inquiry into the Problem of Feral and domestic Cats* 2020. Page4.

(6) Gardner B.R. et al., *Surveillance for Toxoplasmosis gondii, Brucella spp. In Australian Fur Seal (Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus) abortions*, National Library of Medicine 2024.

(7) New Zealand Government, Department of Conservation, *Toxoplasmosis and Hector's and Maui's Dolphins*.

(8) Eymann J., et al, 2006, "Serologic Survey for *Toxoplasmosis Gondii* and *Neospora caninum* in the Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula* from Urban Sydney, Australia)", *Journal of Parasitology*.

(9) Hollings T. et al, *Wildlife disease ecology in changing landscapes 2013*

(10) Woinarski J. et al, *Cats in Australia*, 2019 page 162

As at March 2024, in NSW there are 1,113 listed threatened species and ecological communities according to the Dept. of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).⁽¹¹⁾

There is now ample scientific and anecdotal evidence of pet, stray and feral cat impacts on native wildlife and their decline, to cause us all to take action.

Recommendations:

1. That wildlife are better protected by legally containing pet cats on the owner's property in NSW.
2. That stray/unowned cats are removed from urban areas, parks and reserves, and rehomed when possible or euthanised.
3. That the NSW Government works with the Federal Government and other governmental agencies to eradicate feral cats.
4. That the NSW Government conducts an inquiry into the prevalence and impacts of cat diseases in Australian native animals, including oceanic mammals in NSW.

(a) The effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers.

There are a range of cat containment policies throughout the nation, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, all having differing legislation. The ACT and Northern Territory also have cat containment policies.

The effectiveness of containment is dependent upon

- legislation enabling local government to contain cats and the powers of enforcement
- access to funding by local councils to enact and enforce legislation
- financial subsidies to low income residents to build fences or enclosures
- community education programmes about the benefits of containment
- co-existing policy and strategy addressing mandatory desexing
- co-existing policy limiting the number of cats in each household e.g., two cats
- the removal of roaming cats in the neighbourhood, adjacent parks and reserves
- the type of cat containment, which can be overnight or, inside 24hrs a day and/or on the owner's property at all times.

- 1) **Indoors overnight** has limited effectivity. It keeps the cat safe from attack by other cats and possums at night only. It protects nocturnal animals such as possums from cat attack. It is ineffective because roaming cats in daylight are vulnerable to car accidents, attacks and injuries. Also birds and reptiles are active in daylight and are predated upon. Roaming cats entering neighbours yards are a nuisance and the cats spread *Toxoplasmosis gondii* and other diseases wherever they roam.
- 2) **Indoors all the time**, possibly connected to a cat run or enclosure provides the best safety for pet cats, keeps wildlife safe from predation, and stops the spread of disease, which also eliminates the risk of disease to the cat owners.
- 3) **Containment on the owner's property** at all times requires the owner to be fully responsible for the whereabouts of their cat/s. This option keeps the cat/s safe from external attacks and diseases. An added benefit is that in the long run it would reduce numbers of lost cats impounded and reduce pound costs to the council. It would be most effective if the cats are also contained indoors or in an enclosure to protect wildlife that may enter the property.

(11) DCCEEW Audit Office, *Threatened species and ecological communities*.

As the Australian Capital Territory is progressively phasing in the introduction of cat containment on the owner's property it appears that community acceptance exists and it is reasonable to consider this is a quite successful management strategy enforced by government.

Within NSW, the Queanbeyan – Palerang Regional Council has introduced cat containment on properties in six suburbs adjoining bushland under the NSW Local Gov Act Section 124. Also within NSW, the Albury City Council has introduced cat containment on properties adjoining bushland under the Conveyancing Act 1919, Section 88B. These legislative forms have limited application to contain all cats within these council areas and are not suitable for all councils.

The potential barriers to successful cat containment are –

- lack of state legislation with enforcement powers requiring containment
- state legislation that fails to meet the needs of a local council and its community
- inadequate council finances to support transition to new regulations through community education and compliance
- an uninformed community that resists changed regulations
- costs of fencing and cat enclosures to cat owners on their own properties
- cats breeding because there is not a desexing programme
- roaming stray/unowned cats entering private property and public parks and reserves.

Recommendation:

1. That the Companion Animals Act in NSW is amended to contain cats 24hrs a day.
2. That councils/shires are required to prepare Companion Animal Management plans.
3. That the NSW government funds local councils with a range of grant options to assist in the transition to new regulations.
4. That means tested subsidies are made available to cat owners to install fencing or cat enclosures; similar to schemes for solar installation.
5. That councils employ an Invasive Species Officer/s who are specialised in handling feral animals such as cats, foxes, rabbits, which need co-management.

(c) Welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions.

The welfare outcomes for cats living in owner contained conditions must be better with warmth, cool where there is air conditioning in hot climates, human company – hopefully with lots of affection, and regular food supply. The cats will feel safer without threat of external attacks be it, cats or dogs, motor vehicles or humans.

The cats will receive more attention from the owner so are likely to receive veterinary care including vaccinations against disease, so will be healthier and happier. They will not become infected with cat transmissible diseases, lost and homeless and become either a stray or feral cat which is a life of suffering and abandonment.

A cat's lifestyle may be variable depending upon whether the cat is contained on the owner's property and allowed outside in the yard or garden, or whether it is contained within a house and cat enclosure. This should not risk good welfare.

(d) The effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives.

Community education programmes are most important in achieving understanding and willing co-operation with changes in local regulations. The education needs to start in advance of any regulation changes, and programmes will need to be specific to meet the needs of any given community or local government area. This can be done by community events, picnics in parks, talks and discussion groups, leaflets, council websites and social media.

Education about local wildlife such as the Backyards for Biodiversity programme or citizen science projects will develop awareness about wildlife and responsible cat ownership.

Some of the councils that are currently leading the way in responsible cat ownership are –

- Albury City Council <https://www.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/services/pets-and-animals/responsible-pet-ownership/cats>
- Eurobodalla Shire Council <https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/residents/pets/cat-ownership>
- Hornsby Shire Council <https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/property/myproperty/pets/keeping-cats-safe-at-home>
- Tweed Shire Council <https://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/property-rates/pets-livestock/cats/love-cats-love-wildlife>

Here in the Blue Mountains our council has encouraged cat owners to keep their cats at home and recently were participants in the Keeping Cats Safe at Home project with the RSPCA. It is my observation that over the past ten years community opinion has shifted, and there is now an expectation that cat owners should keep their cats at home. In fact, our community presented a petition to Blue Mountains City Council last year, asking BMCC to write to the state government seeking amendments to the Companion Animals Act 1998. Council did proceed and do this (BMCC minutes 29th August 2023).

According to my review of 128 NSW council websites in 2023, (unpublished), I have interpreted the intention of councils promoting responsible cat ownership and consider that

- 51% or 66 councils advise keeping cats in at night
- 26% or 34 councils advise keeping cats inside 24hrs or in an enclosure
- 25% or 32 councils advise keeping cats on property at all times, with above options.

So this indicates that an estimated 77% of NSW councils now have some form of containment in progress and, education is successful in developing awareness of responsible cat ownership, particularly as councils do not have any enforcement powers.

Recommendations:

1. That the Office of Local Government conducts state wide educational programmes and
2. That grants for educational programmes are made available to local councils.
3. That education programmes are conducted in partnership with the RSPCA, Cat Protection Society, Wildlife organisations and other appropriate organisations.
4. That wildlife protection is promoted with cat education e.g., Backyards for Biodiversity programme.

(e) Implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies.

The implications will vary in each council/shire according to the natural environment, urban environment, size of the local government area (LGA) and community expectations.

Councils will have to address

- Estimates of pet cat numbers and pet ownership in the LGA
- Estimates of numbers and locations of stray/unowned/feral cats
- Budgeting for increased costs e.g., administration, more staff, pound improvements
- training programmes for staff
- programmes for education and desexing, cat containment fences and enclosures
- strategies for collecting roaming cats, whether it is by a ranger or residents taking the cat to the pound
- strategies for pound management
- a strategy for hiring traps to residents, with deposit and signed guarantee to care for the trapped cat by the hirer. According to my review of NSW councils an estimated 59% of councils support trapping of stray/feral cats by either themselves, residents or other NSW government agencies. An estimated 28% of councils hire traps and 23% have a hire contract as in 2023.
- A strategy to remove stray and roaming cats from parks and bushland such as, declaring Wildlife Protection Areas on some parks and reserves. This will also help a council develop a social licence within the community to remove roaming cats.

Recommendations:

1. That new regulations are phased in over several years to enable councils to implement the new regulations and communicate effectively with the local community, and to maintain harmony in the community.
2. That Start – up grants are made available to councils
3. That the Companion Animals Act is amended to introduce and phase in annual registration of cats, with a discounted three or five year registration fee. This will provide current data about population numbers and will raise revenue.
4. The Companion Animals Act is amended to limit the number of cats to two per household, more may be feasible during the phasing in of new regulations.

(f) The effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs.

The benefits of desexing programmes will be to -

- reduce predation impacts on wildlife by slowing cat population growth
- reduce the spread of diseases to native wildlife, other companion cats, agricultural animals and human beings by slowing cat population growth
- reduce the number of cats in a household and enable owners to provide better care to existing cats
- reduce the numbers of unwanted/ abandoned/stray cats in urban areas
- reduce the interbreeding between companion and stray and feral cats
- reduce the need for catteries/cat care homes for stray/unowned cats
- reduce the need for euthanasia of unwanted cats
- reduce the feral cat population long term and government workload in lethal control
- reduce costs to all levels of government in cat management in the long term by slowing the increasing population of cats.

A slowing of cat population growth and long term reduction in the cat population can be achieved with a major desexing programme, if it is co-ordinated with limiting cat numbers per household, containing cats on the owner's premises and removing roaming cats from the LGA.

Improved cat welfare and the protection of native wildlife are achievable major benefits.

Recommendations:

1. That the Companion Animals Act is amended to include mandatory desexing.
2. That permits are not issued to keep an undesexed cat until the vast number of unowned/stray cats are rehomed in private homes, and/or euthanased, then review the situation in five years.
3. That kitten farms breeding cats for commercial purposes are shut down.
4. That pet shops are prohibited from selling companion animals. Pet cats only to be obtained through pounds and animal care centres e.g., council or RSPCA.
5. That financial support is given to low income cat owners for desexing.

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

There will be an impact on the council pound system and probably the pound will need to take responsibility for a large influx of cats from all three categories. There will need to be procedures for receiving and admitting cats as well as for rehoming and euthanasia. It will be necessary to process and rehome admitted cats quickly, so as to avoid the council pound becoming an overwhelmed dumping ground for unwanted cats.

Euthanasia has to be an available process to councils. The South Australian Local Government Association, in its submission to the SA state inquiry states that until cat populations decline, there are more cats than can be rehomed and that it is 'inhumane' to contain an animal in a cage when its inevitable fate is euthanasia. (12) This will be the same situation here in NSW and I do agree that keeping cats in cages for long periods adds to their suffering which is not desirable.

It is understandable that some staff involved in euthanasia find their work distressing, after all their mission is to save lives and give good care. Can the clinics be made congenial places to work? Can the cats be euthanised respectfully? Can staff work conditions be made supportive with adequate meal breaks, holiday leave, good pay and so forth? Basically, the staff involved in the euthanasia process need to be well supported in their work.

Additional impacts to be addressed are -

- estimates of likely numbers of roaming cats to be taken to the pound
- budgets needed for increased expenditure according to pound adequacy, administration, equipment, veterinary needs etc.
- community education in advance of containment commencement
- employment and training of staff, both employed staff and volunteers
- good communication with the community, especially cat owners
- trap hire procedures as stated on previous page 8
- enforcement with cat owners re registration, desexing, micro-chipping, containment.

Recommendations:

1. That the NSW government conducts state wide promotion of containment, well in advance of implementation so cats are contained before it is mandatory, to avoid the impounding of cats as much as possible.
2. That start up grants are made available by the state government to councils.
3. That a supportive work place is created for staff.
4. That owned impounded cats with must be desexed before being returned to the owner, at the owner's cost, plus fee for care and a fine.
5. That the rehoming process happens quickly

(12) The Local Government Association of South Australia, August 2024, *Clarifying current cat management laws – Dog and Cat Management (Cat Management) Amendment Bill 2024*

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

The ACT is often held up as the model to follow because it has slowly introduced mandatory cat containment across the entire territory, which seems to be accepted by the community. The Northern Territory has 2 councils with cat containment, Darwin and Alice Springs.

States with legislative models that empower local councils to enact their own By-Laws, have had different rates of containment implementation.

A review of council websites by a colleague, (unpublished) in 2023, indicates some estimates for the states:-

Victoria: of 79 councils, 38 or 47% have developed a cat curfew containment order or local law, e.g., Mornington Peninsula Shire – see photo below.

Queensland: of 71 councils, 25 or 32% of councils websites indicate clear anti-roaming requirements under Local Law No2 e.g., Redlands City Council.

South Australia: of 69 councils, 7 or 10% indicate cat containment regulations e.g., Adelaide Hills Council.

Tasmania: One council has cat containment regulations, Kingsborough on Bruny Island.

Western Australia is similar to NSW in not having containment legislation, however a community demand for cat containment is growing in both states.



This Mornington Peninsula Shire sign, is displayed in an urban area.

Victoria and South Australia have both completed a public inquiry into cat management in 2024. The S.A. Local Gov. Association (13) and the Victorian National Parks Association (14) both indicate a need for state wide cat containment - in their own states.

One conclusion to be drawn from what is happening around the country, is that successful cat containment at the local level depends upon state wide legislation that gives local councils implementation and enforcement powers. An overview of the states has lead me to conclude that cat management is a national issue.



Tunks Park, North Sydney Council Photo by D. Simmons 2024

Prominent cat prohibition signs like this, with the amount of fines stated on them will contribute to education of the local community and be a warning to cat owners.

(13) The Local Government Association of South Australia, August 2024, *Clarifying current cat management laws – Dog and Cat Management (Cat Management) Amendment Bill 2024*, page 4.

(14) Victorian National Parks Association, 2024, *Submission to Victorian cat management strategy*, page 2.

(i) **Options for reducing the feral cat population are -**

1. Contain pet cats on the owner's properties at all times
2. Mandatory desexing
3. Removal of stray/unowned/abandoned cats from private and public lands i.e. streets, urban areas, parklands and bush reserves that are council managed.
 - a. The introduction of Wildlife Protection Areas offers a range of benefits, primarily they will help protect native wildlife and enable local councils to undertake cat trapping and removal to a nearby animal care facility with a social license of approval for this task from the local community. This relies on good community education beforehand.
 - b. The employment of an Invasive Species council officer, by a local council, who is specially trained in feral animal control, is a desirable way to remove roaming cats. Council rangers are then able to continue usual duties.
 - c. A very successful example of this approach is by Sydney North Vertebrate Pest Committee. It is my understanding that this co-operating group of seven North Shore Councils have reduced urban cat colonies and roaming stray cats. Owned cats that are caught roaming are being returned to the owners with a fine.
 - d. Engage residents in removing roaming cats from their own properties to alleviate the work load and costs of the local council. Cage traps could be hired to residents, to remove any roaming cat, on their property only. An ethical agreement to not harm the cat could be signed by the hirer and to take it promptly to the animal care centre.

4. Prohibiting Trap Neuter Release (TNR) cat colonies.

It is not proven that this practice reduces cat populations, as cats are attracted to a supply of food and other cats. Also it is impossible to guarantee that all cats will be caught and de-sexed. To leave cats abandoned exposed to all the risks and suffering is bad animal welfare, based on sentimentality.

TNR fails to stop the predation of native wildlife and spread of disease, particularly the *Toxoplasmosis gondii* protozoa to other cats, wildlife and humans. The scientific evidence shows that TNR is not an effective tool in reducing feral cat populations. (15) Compassionate euthanasia to end the suffering of abandoned cats that are not re-homable or feral, is ethical, according to John Read in *Amongst the Pigeons* (16).

5. Lethal control of feral cats in National Parks and agricultural rural areas according to the Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats is necessary.

Lethal feral control is complex and outside my experience. Because of debate about methodology, I will say that I support scientific research into gene technology, fertility control and other options so as to minimise cat suffering. I do also support cage trapping, shooting by experienced workers and the use of 1080 in light of new evidence, as well as the Felixer grooming device. According to John Read in *Amongst the Pigeons* -

cats poisoned by 1080 calmly succumb to the poisoning, arguably dying with far less stress and potential for pain and injury than a cat trapped and transported to a cat shelter hours later to be euthanased by lethal injection or gas. (17)

Recently a worker from Australian Nature Conservancy told me she had witnessed a cat die peacefully, "it just went to sleep", with no suffering after passing by a Felixer device.

(15) American Bird Conservancy, <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/trap-neuter-release/>

(16) Read J., *Amongst the Pigeons*, 2019, page 179.

(17) *Ibid* page 290.

The University of NSW released scientific information about the effectivity of the Felixer grooming device and say that it is safe to wildlife and effective on cats, with either 1080 or PAPP poisons being possible poison choices. (18)

Recommendations:

1. Amending legislation to contain cats on the owner's property
2. Facilitate the introduction of Wildlife Protection Areas as a mechanism to protect wildlife and remove roaming cats from the environment, with fines for cat owners.
3. Prohibit Trap Neuter Release practices in cat colonies.
4. Support legally sanctioned state and federally government lethal feral cat control.

(j) Any other related matters.

1. Impacts of cat diseases on the agricultural sector.

Another reason for containing cats and undertaking feral cat control is because of the effect that cat dependent diseases have upon livestock. The National Farmer's Federation in its submission to the Federal Inquiry in 2020, outlines the impacts of *Toxoplasmosis gondii* and *Sarcocystis*. In South Australia alone Toxoplasmosis infects 13% of sheep to an annual cost of \$70million.

Sarcocystis costs the sheep industry an estimated \$5million a year because the infected carcasses have to be trimmed or condemned. They also state that a 2019 study found that probably 43% of supermarket lamb mincemeat for human consumption was infected. (19)

The National Farmers submission presents a very good case with recommendations for pet cat containment and feral cat control in rural NSW. Similarly WOOLPRODUCERS Australia present a strong case in their submission for research into improved methodology for cat control and support the recommendations of the NFF. (20)

The Country Women's Association of NSW have a Cat Containment and Management Policy which advocates for *enforced desexing*, a *State-wide Domestic Cat Curfew* and powers granted to NSW councils to enforce containment measures. (21)

The consequences of cat diseases in the agricultural sector are not widely known or discussed in the urban community in regard to cat management. Yet, it is clear from these three organisations representing the rural sector that roaming cats are a significant problem, and cat containment is desirable.

(18) University of NSW, *Felixer the grooming control, works to control feral cats*, 2020

(19) National Farmers Federation submission no. 140, 2020 page 7

(20) WOOLPRODUCERS Australia submission no. 55, 2020

(21) Country Women's Association of NSW, *Cat containment and management*, page 2

(2) Impacts of cat dependent diseases on human populations.

The cat dependent diseases that affect human health are Toxoplasmosis, Cat Scratch Disease and a Roundworm.

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a protozoa *Toxoplasmosis gondii* which humans contract from cat fecal matter directly or through contaminated soil or water. It is known to cause spontaneous abortion in pregnant women, it affects mental health and causes eye disease with permanent scarring and may cause subsequent loss of sight. Cat scratch disease is caused by a bacterium *Bartonella henselae* and can cause severe infections in people (my neighbour, a young healthy man recently spent 4 days in hospital on Intravenous Therapy with antibiotics to treat an infection from a cat scratch). *Toxocara cati* is the roundworm whose eggs are passed in fecal matter by the cat and later incidentally ingested by people.

Generally the infection rate of Toxoplasmosis in Australia is estimated at 30 to 50% of the population. This figure is from the United States and Australians are believed to have a similar infection rate as the US. There is little current information about infection rates in NSW or Australia. Infection rate figures for cat scratch disease and the roundworm are not really not known either as all three diseases are not notifiable diseases in Australia.

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub does estimate some infection rates and estimates direct medical, residential, therapeutic and other costs as \$6.1 billion in one year. (22) Clearly there is a need for more research into population morbidity and health costs. Perhaps Toxoplasmosis should be a notifiable disease.

Cat containment will reduce the spread of disease to human beings and health costs to citizens government.

Recommendation:

1. That Toxoplasmosis is researched and consideration is given to make it a notifiable human disease.

(3) Annual Registration of Cats in NSW

I suggest that there is a strong case for annual registration of cats in NSW. Three other states, namely Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia have yearly registration for cats, and so does the ACT.

The benefits are that it provides current and reliable information about the number of pet cats and their abode, which would assist councils in forming management policies and budgeting. Yearly registration also raises revenue for councils in companion animal management. A three year to five year registration discounted option could be possible.

(22) Threatened species Hub, Science for Saving species, Research findings factsheet, Project 7.4

Concluding Recommendations so that -

1. The Companion Animals Act NSW is amended to enable local councils to introduce cat containment, with powers of enforcement, according to their local council and environmental needs and community expectations.
2. Cats are contained on the owner's property 24hrs a day and in the care of a responsible person when off the property.
3. A limitation of two cats per household is phased in during implementation.
4. Annual cat registration is phased in, with a discounted three to five year option.
5. Mandatory desexing, no permits, is introduced
6. Trap, Neuter, Release is prohibited as are roaming cat colonies of unowned cats, to be phased out during the implementation period of containment.
7. Funding to local councils is made available for implementation of regulations, education and desexing programmes, and subsidies to cat owners for fencing.
8. The NSW Government conducts an inquiry into the prevalence and impacts of cat dependent diseases in Australian native animals, including ocean animals in NSW.
9. Consideration is given to making Toxoplasmosis a notifiable human disease.
10. That the NSW Government works with the Federal Government, other states and territories to achieve improved cat management across the country.

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