

Submission
No 316

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date Received: 21 November 2024

Partially
Confidential

To the Committee,

I write to urge the NSW Government to implement urgent reforms in cat welfare, focusing on the plight of homeless cats and the pressing need for comprehensive policies to protect their wellbeing. Despite progress in some areas, significant gaps in current legislation and resources continue to exacerbate the suffering of stray, abandoned, and feral cats.

The Plight of Homeless Cats

1. Overpopulation and Resource Strain

Studies show that Australia is home to an estimated 2.8 million 'feral' cats, with urban areas contributing heavily to this figure. In NSW alone, it is estimated that councils and rescue organizations spend millions annually on managing stray and feral cats. Shelters often face euthanasia rates exceeding 50% for cats, especially during "kitten season," when intake numbers overwhelm capacity. These figures underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to curb overpopulation and reduce reliance on reactive responses.

2. Health and Welfare Concerns

Homeless cats are at significant risk of disease and injury. Research highlights that up to 75% of 'feral' and other homeless cats in urban areas suffer from ailments such as feline leukemia virus (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Malnutrition, untreated injuries, and harsh weather conditions further compromise their welfare. This silent suffering reflects poorly on societal animal welfare standards.

3. Environmental Impact

Humane interventions to protect native wildlife while addressing the root causes of cat overpopulation is vital.

Key Recommendations for Reform

1. Statewide Mandatory Desexing and Microchipping

Evidence from jurisdictions with mandatory desexing laws, such as the ACT, shows significant reductions in stray cat populations over time. In Canberra, the introduction of desexing requirements correlated with a 27% reduction in shelter intake numbers within five years. Making desexing and microchipping mandatory for all cats in NSW would ensure responsible ownership and prevent unplanned litters.

2. Support for Low-Cost Veterinary Services

Financial barriers are a significant factor in pet abandonment and neglect. Subsidized desexing programs, such as the National Desexing Network (NDN), have proven successful in providing affordable services to low-income households. Expanding access to similar services in NSW would enable more owners to desex their cats, reducing abandonment rates and long-term management costs for councils.

3. **Funding for Community Cat Management Programs**

Trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs, as implemented in parts of the United States and New Zealand, have shown measurable success in stabilising feral cat populations. For instance, a long-term TNR program in Wellington, NZ, resulted in a 45% reduction in feral cat numbers over ten years. Implementing similar programs in NSW, supported by government funding, could achieve humane and effective population control.

4. **Public Awareness Campaigns**

Research shows that public awareness campaigns can significantly impact behaviour. For instance, campaigns in Western Australia promoting indoor cat policies have led to a 20% increase in owners keeping their cats indoors, reducing the risk of predation and injuries. Educating NSW residents about the importance of responsible pet ownership—such as desexing, microchipping, and (non-mandatory) containment—could significantly improve welfare outcomes for cats and native wildlife alike.

5. **Strengthened Shelter and Rescue Support**

Shelters in NSW face high euthanasia rates due to limited funding and resources. A 2021 report by the RSPCA highlighted that nearly 15,000 cats were euthanized nationwide due to overcrowding and unadoptable conditions. Increasing government funding for shelters and rescue organizations would enable them to expand their capacity and improve rehoming rates. Partnerships between local councils and rescues could further enhance community-based efforts to address cat welfare challenges.

Conclusion

The homeless cat crisis in NSW is a multifaceted issue requiring urgent and sustained attention. Evidence-based reforms such as mandatory desexing, subsidised veterinary care, TNR programs, and public education initiatives have demonstrated their effectiveness in other regions and should be prioritized here. Addressing these challenges will not only improve the welfare of cats but also reduce their environmental impact and align NSW with community expectations of compassionate animal management.

Thank you for considering this submission. I urge the Committee to recommend bold and meaningful reforms to address these critical issues effectively and most importantly, humanely.

Sincerely,