

**Submission
No 290**

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

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Date Received: 22 November 2024

DRAFT NSW CAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. PROMOTE CAT WELFARE & RESPONSIBLE CAT OWNERSHIP

I believe in responsible pet ownership eg desexing and microchipping pets, and providing proper care for them with nutritious food, and veterinary treatment. However, not all of us are well versed in responsible pet ownership. I remember meeting a lady who needed her 2 cats desexed, (about 4-month-old siblings). She did not know that siblings could mate, and I advised her to keep them separate until desexed. Education and care for pets needs to be taught from a young age (eg kindergarten and up until teenage years). It could be taught at school, and I would like to see schools caring for pets onsite, with students assisting in their care. Some kindergartens have in house pets for this reason. Maybe organisations like the RSPCA could provide the vet care, free of charge, when schools adopt/foster these pets. There have been many studies on the positive benefits of owning a pet. The bond between humans and cats enhances human health and well-being; access to those benefits is a social justice issue. Pets are excellent for your health, lowering blood pressure, assisting with mental well-being, providing companionship for the elderly, isolated and vulnerable in our community. I remember meeting an elderly lady who had a cat that escaped her home (she couldn't afford an enclosure, nor desexing, or microchipping) and as a result her cat was killed by the pound. This had a dire impact on her health, and she contemplated suicide. In England, the RSPCA gives out desexing vouchers to vulnerable members of the community. Being a responsible pet owner can be prohibitive (if you do not have the funds to desex, microchip or register your pet), but want a pet for companionship and wellbeing.

If the Parliament of NSW is concerned about the negative impacts of cats on the environment and community, they also need to consider impacts of dogs on the environment, but more importantly the negative impacts of humans on our flora and fauna. Dog bites, dog faeces etc also negatively impact on the environment and community, but I am sure there will never be a Dog Management Strategy, due to a positive bias towards dogs.

It is important to develop resources for multicultural communities, as to the benefits of desexing and microchipping of pets. These resources could also include organisations that provide subsidised desexing and microchipping for those on low incomes. Information for cat welfare and responsible pet ownership could be available through community programs, social media, libraries, councils, vets, animal charities, cat rescues, local newspapers etc. The more places they are distributed the better.

2. INCREASE CAT DESEXING RATES

Mandatory cat desexing is common throughout Australian councils, but it is not particularly effective. It is difficult to monitor, with additional staff required to check if pets are desexed. It is compulsory to have cats desexed where I live, but this has not been successful as a method to reduce cat numbers. When I worked at my local pound as a volunteer, I witnessed many undesexed, non-microchipped, but socialised cats entering the pound, many of whom were trapped by the council (mainly in the lower socio-economic areas in my municipality). In these areas, many people struggle to support themselves financially, let alone pay \$300-\$400 to have their cat desexed. Are you aware that financial constraints are the main reason for not desexing pets? Hence, we need to focus on the root of this problem, and provide high volume, low cost (preferably free) cat desexing and microchipping programs throughout Victoria. This needs to be coupled with optional transport of pets to vets, as not every pet owner has a car. Cheap pet desexing needs to be readily accessible and cheap, so everybody can afford it. It is particularly important in suburbs where there are high cat impounds and public complaints. Councils collect pet registrations, and fines from pet owners, so surely some of this money could be used for cheap pet desexing initiatives. Providing low cost desexing and microchipping will save pounds money in the long run, as there will be less cats wandering, less complaints, less pets impounded, and less pets killed. Banyule council in Victoria, is a good example of this.

I have included some examples of low-cost desexing initiatives around Australia.

*Pet Welfare Foundation is currently running a pilot program for high volume, low cost, cat desexing in regions around Australia.

*Banyule council in Victoria has for many years been running free cat desexing programs, where staff collect cats for desexing, transport them to vets and then return to owners.

*Cat Protection Society in NSW has 3 different programs that provide cheap cat desexing. Program 1 is available to everybody, and it costs \$70-\$80 for a cat castration and \$100-\$120 for a cat spay. Program 2 Adopt a Stray costs \$100 for desexing, chipping, vaccinating and registration of a stray. Program 3 is a targeted program for low-income people in particular areas to get their cats desexed. It is particularly useful for colony cats. Cost is minimal at \$10 for 2 cats.

*AWL in NSW also provides vouchers for people on Centrelink payments to get their cats desexed. Prices vary between vets eg \$80 for a cat desex.

Large animal welfare groups like RSPCA, Lost Dogs Home (Vic), Cat Protection Society, Lort Smith Animal Hospital (Vic), AAPS (Vic) etc receive donations, memberships and bequests from the public, so they should be encouraged to

provide cheap or free cat desexing, especially for low-income earners. Maybe this could be subsidised by the NSW state government.

It is imperative that grants be provided to stakeholders such as rescue groups, pounds, animal welfare groups, and vets to undertake high volume, low cost, cat desexing. Rescue groups who are volunteers, should not have to spend hours applying for grants, so this process needs to be streamlined. Councils and animal welfare groups should be encouraged to allocate a certain amount of revenue raised from pet registrations etc to implement these programs. Mobile desexing clinics would also be beneficial for country locations, that have limited, or no vet services. High volume, low cost, desexing clinics would also be very useful. With a combined effort from all stakeholders, we could achieve high cat desexing rates in NSW, which would ultimately save costs to these organisations in reduced staff levels, equipment, and supplies, and of course reduced kill rates of cats. It would also lead to less mental health issues relating to pound staff, rescues, volunteers, veterinary staff and the community, due to trapping and killing of cats.

3. EXPAND CAT CONTAINMENT

There are some regions in Australia, where there are cat curfews, either overnight or for 24 hours. Where I live there is a 24-hour cat curfew (Mornington Peninsula-Vic), which has been present for decades. It has been a complete failure. Cats still roam and are not always contained to their properties. Having cat curfews has not decreased the number of cats free roaming, but in fact has led to increased costs to councils due to more complaints and therefore more cats impounded. Councils with cat containment laws have not been able to demonstrate reduced cat complaints or wandering. I am sure cat curfews are more expensive for councils as they require more traps, staff, and resources to look after these impounded pets (eg vet work, food, traps etc). These cat curfews have actually led to more cats being killed (even, healthy socialised cats) in our pounds, which is totally unacceptable to many in our community. Cat enclosures, or cat proof fencing is expensive and prohibitive to many people who live in lower socio-economic areas, and therefore would probably be renting or living in commission houses. Enclosures can also be problematic due to property limitations, and issues relating to cats' welfare when contained. Containing a cat can lead to behavioural issues and obesity. They enjoy fresh air, trees, and sunlight, just as we do. For example, if renting, tenants may not be allowed to build enclosures. Many people cannot afford pet enclosures, which often cost a few thousand dollars. Subsidised pet enclosures would be very useful in solving some of these problems. Collaboration with local organisations to build cat enclosures would be very useful, eg. Men's Shed to build enclosures for financially disadvantaged residents. A much cheaper option would be Bedtime Feeding, where cats are brought in at night to be fed, with doors/windows closed, so there is no wildlife predation. This is a much more

reasonable and cheaper alternative, but in saying that in today's economic climate, many more pets are being surrendered due to financial constraints of not being able to feed, vet or house them. I do not support mandatory cat containment or cat curfews, which have not been successful in Australia. They should be optional, with assistance provided to build cat enclosures.

4. REDUCE THE IMPACTS OF SEMI-OWNED & UNOWNED CATS

Some shelters do not even have a Lost Pets site, where you can check if your pet is impounded. This should be compulsory for every pound, and probably one Lost Pets database would be useful for the whole of NSW, where an owner can check if their pet is impounded, as they may not even be taken to a pound where the cat lives, but further away.

I agree with Capture, Desex, Adopt programs for semi-owned, or unowned cats. It is important to get these cats desexed, to prevent further breeding, but also to be rehomed, so they do not have to scavenge for food, and risk their health and safety living on the streets. It also protects our wildlife, from predation for food. It is important to provide support to community cat rescuers and carers (eg desexing/vaccination vouchers, food) for these cats.

I do not think education will have any impacts on people taking full responsibility for semi-owned cats. Councils have a limit on the number of pets allowed, so this would need to change. Allow people to own more pets, if they are a responsible pet owner. Maybe have reduced registration fees, for the more pets they own. Also, currently you have to apply for an excess pets permit to have more pets than is allowed in your municipality. The permit in my area is over \$200. I know a resident in my municipality who had 2 dogs, but moved to a smaller property and therefore had to apply for an excess pets permit. This fee should not be imposed if the person is a responsible pet owner. Offer incentives (eg free microchip and desex) and or a few years of free registration to people who take on the responsibility of semi-owned cats.

I do not think it is possible to provide guidelines for cat behaviour as it will vary from animal to animal. Some cats are fine in a pound environment, but others become stressed, aggressive, as they find this environment very frightening. These cats may be domesticated cats, and owned, but if assessed could be classified as "feral", yet in a home environment are totally different. Having one set of rules to follow for assessing animals is counterproductive.

5. MANAGE FERAL CAT POPULATIONS & IMPACTS

Using poisonous baits on cats (eg Hisstory, PAPP, Felixer, shooting etc), are unacceptable, inhumane, cruel and should be banned throughout the world. 1080 has no antidote, and leads to agonising, painful deaths, with symptoms such as vomiting, anxiety, disorientation, convulsions, kills slowly and can take days for

the animal to die. Pet cats and dogs could also end up being poisoned by these baits, as well as other animals eating the bait or dead carcasses, including native wildlife. This poison can enter waterways and soil and causes further negative impacts in our environment. For these reasons 1080 has been banned in many countries around the world. I do not agree with these methods of culling cats, or any other animal, as its inhumane.

Cats are sentient beings and feel pain just like humans, hence why poisons should not be used on any cat, whether feral, owned, or stray especially when there are humane methods to reduce cat numbers. The money used to develop the Felixer trap and other cruel poisons could surely have been used for mass sterilisation of cats. Only humane and non-lethal methods to manage feral cat populations should be used, such as subsidised cat desexing, cheap containment methods, exclusion fencing, guardian dogs, immunocontraception and Trap, Neuter, Release. Rescues could organise Trap, Neuter, Release, and Trap Neuter, Adopt with funding provided to rescues to feed and vet these cats. In America, Trap, Neuter, Release is common practice, yet it is illegal here in Australia. Human activities such as land clearing, habitat destruction, mining, farming, urbanisation, housing, climate change, pollution, population growth, cars, industry etc are a far greater threat to our biodiversity, than cats and public education on how humans should reduce their impacts on wildlife would be far more beneficial to our flora and fauna.

6. IMPROVE COLLABORATION & INFORMATION SHARING

To improve collaboration and information sharing, a variety of stakeholders must be involved. This should not mainly be animal welfare charities or councils, as then the views are often biased. The public and rescue groups should have a pivotal role in information sharing and collaboration. Rescues are at the grassroots level, desexing, feeding and rehoming cats on shoestring budgets. Include organisations like the Pet Welfare Foundation, National Desexing Network as stakeholders in this NSW Management of Cat Populations. Councils and some animal welfare charities often are more concerned about revenue raising, rather than the best outcomes for cats and their owners. I have no issues with organisations sharing successful cat management strategies (eg Banyule Councils desexing program) as long as these are humane, and do not use poisons or shooting. By having a variety of stakeholders, you obtain different points of view, and different methods for addressing issues.

7. IMPROVE LAWS & PROCESSES

Cat owners get nothing for their cat registrations, except for a registration tag, whereas dog owners have dog parks, and doggie bags (only at some councils). Anyone on a Centrelink card should have half price pet registration fees, so it is more affordable to them, and will make them less likely to surrender their pet due to financial constraints. It is very important for the community to know how

our pet registrations/impound fees are used. I doubt whether many people in the community actually know revenue raised from pet registrations and impound fees, and how they are used. For example, does all the revenue raised from pets get used for animal related initiatives in a municipality? I know for a fact that my council, siphons off profits from our pets elsewhere within the council. Hence there should be transparency on all costings, with all revenue raised from pet fees used solely for pet initiatives such as pound operations, subsidised desexing, microchipping, cat enclosures, dog parks, and doggie bags.

Funding for mass sterilisation of cats, needs to be urgently addressed. Rescue groups should not have to spend hours applying for a desexing grant, as they are volunteers who often have jobs as well, and have to do fundraisers to provide vet work for pets in their care. Rescue work is a 7 days a week job that is exhausting, with no government funding unless they apply for a grant.

Make Trap, Neuter, Release or Adopt legal in NSW. That way rescues can legally desex cats on the streets, which will lead to reduced cat numbers. Some rescues or individuals have colonies that they feed daily, and this would be very helpful to them. Provide funding for the desexing/vaccinating of these cats, so the rescues only have to provide food.