

Submission
No 291

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

Name: Ms Janice Haviland

Date Received: 22 November 2024

NSW Inquiry into Cat Populations

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

This inquiry will examine how NSW can better manage and care for cats and cat populations in the state by considering the effectiveness of cat containment policies, community education programs about caring for companion cats, the effectiveness of large scale desexing programs to reduce the number of homeless cats, and any impacts cats may be having on threatened native animals. **Regardless we must prioritise cat welfare and support humane management practices, including desexing and education. Every cat deserves protection. Every cat deserves care. Cats are loving, intelligent, and social animals who deserve kindness, not persecution.**

The welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions, has implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies. This also will have an impact of cat containment measures on the pound system that local councils run. Throughout we must remember that cats are sentient beings who still need to be treated with compassion. Their situation is a result of our failures as a government and community to address the issues in a timely manner, allowing the negative impacts to get out of control.

The Invasive Species Council is intensifying its attacks on cats, rallying supporters that promotes lethal controls and call for mandatory cat containment, despite lacking evidence that these measures work. Lethal control is inhumane, especially when it relates to homeless stray cats that have simply been abandoned by us!

We lack 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. Let's not deflect from the real issues of biodiversity loss and ecosystem breakdown. That problem belongs to government policy that always prioritises development and industry over nature loss. The widely used and often quoted extreme numbers of negative impacts by cats on wildlife should be considered misinformation, as it is based on **inappropriate** studies with **flawed numbers** and wildlife population effects implied rather than investigated. Generalised statements are of no benefit. We need accurate data to make informed decisions that do not simply vilify cats. Surveys applied to brumbies and kangaroos use helicopters to visual count, then apply mathematical calculations to estimate the same number in other areas. This has been proved as estimates of numbers only not the real number. It exaggerates the population numbers to give licence to eradicate species. This is wrong as the population number is highly inflated and incorrect. Targeted cruel methods like baiting, trapping, and mandatory containment are applied to homeless cats based on population estimates only. These practices are ineffective and cause unnecessary suffering of stray, innocent cats.

It's easy to blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, as they are voiceless. Human actions have created these problems. Human inaction with the wrong solutions has allowed it to escalate. Man-made deforestation, native forest logging, clearing land for farming and urban sprawl are wiping out habitats for native wildlife, while making it easier for introduced species like cats to thrive. Unlike native animals, cats don't rely on specific ecosystems to survive, which means they can adapt and thrive in these altered environments. Instead of just pointing fingers at cats, the NSW government **MUST** focus on fixing the root causes to restore habitats and bring back biodiversity. The NSW government has a lot to answer for in the decline of our native wildlife. The continued degradation of wildlife habitat and increased logging of our native forests is the main cause of native wildlife decline in NSW. It is not because of cats! As an example, within the boundaries of the proposed Great Koala National Park (GKNP) 15,000 hectares of prime koala habitat has already been logged this year alone. This is the driver of species extinction, and the root cause

are the wrong policies of the NSW government. Ending native forest logging will free up millions of public funds that heavily subsidise this industry annually just to keep it going. Taxpayers also pay more subsidies to the industry directly for the undercharging of logs that were the habitat of our wildlife. We are paying for species extinction. Ending native forest logging will save native wildlife and also provide funding to initiate across the state an intensive desexing program of cats and support Councils in other initiatives.

b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

I support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW. The recent *NSW Pound Inquiry* has recommended a proactive solution: providing grants to councils and rescue organisations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing in areas with large homeless cat populations, especially in disadvantaged communities. These kinds of programs are a long-term, compassionate solution that reduces stray cat populations without demonising cats.

Controlling the cat population is essential to reducing stray cats. Along with this strategy there must be a concerted effort to rescue stray cats. These 2 strategies MUST be ongoing working hand in hand with direct increased funding from the state government to local councils to increase and intensify this program in their local area. Shelter housing and pound facilities must also have increased funding to accommodate the increase in homeless cats.

However, mandated cat containment may become a barrier to those assisting stray cats. It may be interpreted that all roaming cats are "illegal" which may also mean the community members and specifically community cat rescuers are also seen to be "illegally" assisting. This can halt all efforts to save, desex and rehome and adopt abandoned cats. <https://petwelfare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Inquiry-into-pounds-in-NSW-APWF-submission-final.pdf>

These caring community members need to be applauded for the work that they do, which is trying to address a man-made government problem in a humane way. They need to be supported.

c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Cats are intelligent, social, playful and loving animals who deserve kindness. Cats are being demonised and targeted by baiting, trapping and other inhumane methods, methods that are both cruel and ineffective.

*"...there is growing evidence of environmental contamination from home furnishings and dust **affecting cat health**... Keeping cats indoors **can cause frustration and unwanted behavioural challenges** leading to stress and compromised health, especially in multi-cat homes"*

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7829302/>

Mandated home containment might not fit all cats. Contained conditions may be detrimental to some cats physical and mental needs. The presence of other animals, space available, human factors, and the ability to modify the property to provide a safe and secure outside cat run that cats can easily access and choose throughout the day may pose problems for some cat owners-eg those who live in apartments where access to the outdoors is not available. Where possible cat home containment should be encouraged and supported. If outside cat runs are possible and cats suit this environment funding from the government or Council should be made available for owners to claim back the cost. This will encourage owners to keep their cats secure where their emotional, physical and mental needs are still met with their exposure to the outdoors in cat-runs, whilst still allowing native wildlife to be protected.

Some cats can cope with containment. The effectiveness of cat containment policies and welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions often means that cats can happily live indoors or in secure outdoor cat

run or a combination of the two. 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. Most cats can tolerate containment. The individual needs of the cat must be recognised, and adjustments made or modified, like widening and lengthening the cat run, providing enrichment, multiple scratching posts, toys, a feline companion if possible, human-interactive games that encourage exercise, and shelves to lie on at varying levels, puzzle feeders, and small trees within the cat run to climb and explore.

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

Public awareness and education should be sensitive to all 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. Individual councils know their community and their specific needs.

Media, government and powerful organisations like the Invasive Species Council are pushing inhumane measures that threaten more violence, persecution and suffering for cats. It is not the fault that cats have been abandoned and are now homeless trying to survive. If the government employs these violent measures to deal with cats, they are in fact modelling inhumane and violent behaviours to the public that say it is okay to treat our companion animals like this, which is not acceptable.

It is recommended the NSW government lead, and each individual council delivers face-to-face cultural education and change management programs to respect and care for their companion animals in their local council area. This program will differ between councils and especially between metropolitan and regional councils as based on specific needs. The councils and their animal management officers (AMOs) may work collaboratively with community cat rescuers and community leaders on solutions for the vulnerable and low income groups and for cultural groups in their LGA where respect for animals is not prioritised. Appropriate state funding for each individual council to deliver specific community education programs that contribute to responsible pet ownership is recommended.

“Person-centred and culturally competent policies and programs that focus resources on addressing root causes of pet health and welfare issues as opposed to an emphasis on code enforcement can create more positive and sustainable improvements in human, other animal, and environmental health and welfare outcomes.” Punishment to Support: The Need to Align Animal Control Enforcement with the Human Social Justice Movement <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902>

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

Implications for councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies include the following (these summary points are supported by 16 evidence-based points from the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation -APWF): escalating cat nuisance and new roaming cat complaints; additional costs, effort and resources to manage a higher number of captured roaming cats; additional monitoring and reporting to be able to measure results, which to date have not provided value for money in several councils who have just basic information; escalating euthanasia rates; traumatic impacts to council and pound staff due to very high rates of euthanising healthy adoptable animals; traumatic impacts to the communities, community cat rescuers, also care givers, and feeders seeing their cats in colonies decimated by either authorities or cat haters; and taking responsibility for, and managing cat haters falsely interpreting cat containment legislation and regulations to empower themselves to trap and harm/ cull cats with inhuman methods - all state and council communications (and the NSW Companion Animal Act with focus on clause 32, and

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act) need to be improved and provide clear interpretation of clauses.
<https://petwelfare.org.au/2022/09/02/key-issues-to-consider-related-to-mandated-24-7-cat-containment/>

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

Societal acceptance means that the onus is on humans to minimise the impact of cats' predation on wildlife, in a humane way, by minimising the number of cats that exist across all NSW environments.

NSW Government-commissioned report supports large-scale desexing programs instead, showing that killing programs are ineffective. Large scale (mass / high intensity) desexing programs for owned, semi owned and unowned cats are supported for their effectiveness in minimising cat populations. This is achieved by significantly limiting the breeding of cats, which also benefits each cat and the communities, and are cost justified in reducing council and pound efforts and cost overheads. By having a targeted high desexing level in each Council funded and mandated by the state government that is ongoing we will start to see a rapid decrease in population levels. One cat in their lifetime can produce hundreds of cats. Australian examples of successful desexing programs include: APWF Community Cat Programs in QLD, Banyule Council in Vic, and the KCSAH NSW desexing programs in Weddin, Parramatta, Campbelltown, and Hornsby councils where semi owned cats and community cat rescuers were also involved.

Large scale desexing programs will always help to prevent an overpopulation of cats that leads to an increase in abandoned cats. This increase cannot be always met by local shelters and pounds- hence euthanising rates of cats and kittens are up as many cannot be rehomed. By implementing a strategic desexing program across the state at a local level by councils that is funded by the state government this will address the problem quite quickly. **Solve the problem initially before it escalates, and the government will not need to financially support an inhumane cruel culling program of baiting and trapping increased abandoned cats.** Poisonous baiting left out can also have our native wildlife.

Helping semi-owners and owners in disadvantaged areas by providing free desexing and microchipping through programs like the [Community Cat Program](#) is the best solution. We must prioritise cat welfare and support humane management practices, including desexing and education.

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

It is strongly recommended that council pound systems and resources will need to be significantly increased based on an assessment of the additional needs of a) the estimated un-microchipped, yet owned cats allowed to roam and b) the domestic semi owned and unowned cats (strays), including increased funding:

- to support and increase rehoming, and temporary care,
- for euthanasia rates and additional resources needed to humanely process higher numbers of unwanted pets, and to ensure council pound staff are supported through compassion fatigue;
- to support communication with stakeholders and the whole community, including community cat rescuers, care givers, and feeders seeing their cats in colonies decimated who need support through potential primary trauma themselves;
- for additional effort, information, guidelines and engagement with the community for repressing cat haters. Trapping and surrendering cats to ensure cats are treated humanely, meeting social licensing and governmental obligations,
- for increased administrations, customer service representatives, animal management officers (AMO) and Ranger roles for the above.

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

A number of councils in ACT, WA, SA, Vic, Qld have mandated cat containment. Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) summarises several councils showing negative outcomes. In LGAs where cat containment has been implemented it appears the number of cats being abandoned is not decreasing, and there still remains a need for community cat rescuers who take on the burden of abandoned cats assisting desexing and rehoming, without involving current council pounds. These individual community cat rescuers are to be praised and recognised by the state government as solving a state problem. They should also be given some financial relief to do this amazing work.

If the NSW government focussed more on preventing the problem FIRST through a state funded desexing program across the entire state by local councils, we would not be having this discussion of containment, supposed threats to native wildlife, potential strain (mental, physical and financial) on animal charities, community and individual cat rescuers and pounds to care, rehome or euthanise exploding populations of cats and kittens.

The NSW government always allows a problem to escalate and then reacts to the problem with extreme cruel measures instead of PREVENTING THE PROBLEM FIRST WITH A FINANCIAL COMMITMENT OF APPROPRIATE FUNDING - that is an INTENSIVE desexing program across the whole state properly funded and supported by LGA's through their Councils. Only with drastically reduced cat populations in the whole state will we start to see a decrease in abandoned stray cats and feral cats.

"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

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

Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations.

These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

It recommended and it is timely to review the 2014 NSW bill in relation to feral cats: a) as cat terms need to be more tightly classed in line with the RSPCA 2018 definitions b) new evidence-based science is gathered on feral cats near urban areas (peri-urban areas) c) new evidence-based research is gathered on impacts to wildlife in specific LGAs and locations, and d) communities expecting humane methods for feral cats who most recently were domestic cats. It is difficult to assess if they are generation-old feral cats or recent domestic abandoned cats.

Other issues of concern are-

The use of 1080 poison needs to cease. 1080 is not a humane approach to killing any animal (RSPCA, Animal Liberation, APWF, Animal Justice Party) and was banned in most other countries decades ago.

Australia is one of the few countries in the world still using this poison because the impacts of 1080 include convulsions likened by a vet to be electrocuted for up to 2 days, and it kills many non-targeted native animals as well.

During this time, the victim experiences severe suffering and stress. They endure prolonged seizures, bleeding from bodily orifices, including the eyes, mouth, and anus. There is no antidote to 1080 poisoning. Scientists from the RSPCA have concluded that 1080 is not a humane poison. It is dangerous to companion animals as well. Some Councils in NSW are starting to recognise the flow on affects to native wildlife. It is toxic to all living things including microbes, plants, insects, birds, mammals and humans. The Blue Mountains Council has banned the use of the 1080 baiting poison because of its danger to native wildlife and I applaud this decision.

<https://www.al.org.au/ban-1080>

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-using-1080-for-pest-animal-control/>

Conservation fencing areas are supported

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/conservation-fencing-provides-hope-for-threatened-wildlife/>

Gene technology for supressing feral cat breeding is supported

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/our-work/feral-cat-and-fox-control>

j) Any other related matters

Cats are being demonised and targeted by baiting, trapping and other inhumane methods, methods that are both cruel and ineffective. **Every cat deserves protection. Every cat deserves care.**

Cats play an important role in so many people's lives, bringing companionship, joy and purpose to those who care for them. Stray cats are NOT feral cats.

NSW needs to establish a domestic cat committee and cat management strategy with domestic cat expert stakeholders, including RSPCA, APWF, AVA, AIAM, & community cat rescuers. Recognise the individual community cat rescuers and carers to include their scope of cats saved with their valuable input and numbers rehomed in estimating resources and funding (not just NSW rehoming organisations).

Both the NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act require improvements to ensure desexing programs and the efforts of community cat rescuers so that they can proceed without impediments or constraints.

Cats face uncertain futures every day, from lack of shelter to the dangers of life on the streets.

We need stronger protections and humane management of cats.

We also need urgent reforms in cat welfare, highlighting the pressing issues faced by homeless cats and the need for **comprehensive policy changes** to protect them. We need necessary urgent reforms. I support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW.

Thank you

Janice Haviland