

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

Name: Ms Soo Balbi
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Using lethal methods to control stray and feral cat populations is not only inhumane but also ineffective. A recent report commissioned by the NSW Government highlights that large-scale desexing offers a far more effective and sustainable long-term solution. Culling fails to address the root causes of stray cat overpopulation and wildlife predation. In contrast, approaches like rehoming, targeted desexing, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), and community education have consistently demonstrated success in managing stray cat populations in a compassionate and lasting manner.

Programs such as the Community Cat Program, which provide free desexing and microchipping, play a crucial role in supporting community members and semi-owners. Research consistently shows that these humane programs effectively reduce stray cat numbers while protecting wildlife. Moreover, they alleviate the burden on councils, shelters, and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of veterinary professionals and volunteers.

Mandatory 24/7 cat containment laws, such as curfews, have shown limited effectiveness in controlling roaming or stray cat populations. Studies, including the RSPCA's 2018 report, reveal that councils enforcing containment laws still report high volumes of cat-related complaints. For example, in Victoria's Yarra Ranges and City of Casey, curfews led to increased impoundment and euthanasia rates, underscoring that containment policies alone fail to address the underlying issues. Such measures can also lead to abandonment and cruelty, especially when enforcement is inconsistent.

It's important to acknowledge human responsibility in wildlife decline. Habitat destruction, deforestation, and urban expansion—key human actions—are the primary drivers of biodiversity loss. While cats contribute to wildlife predation, they are not the leading cause of species decline. Data from the NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard indicates that habitat loss, vehicle collisions, and dog attacks pose far greater threats to native wildlife than cat predation.

Effective wildlife protection requires focusing on habitat preservation, restoration, and addressing broader environmental threats. A comprehensive approach, including wildlife corridors and mitigation of human pressures on ecosystems, is essential to safeguard biodiversity. Yet, such initiatives are often overlooked due to cost or inconvenience, with cats unfairly scapegoated as the problem.

As a society that claims to value animal welfare, it is hypocritical to label animals we find inconvenient as pests and advocate for their eradication. This is evident in the treatment of native species like dingoes and kangaroos, where economic interests often outweigh ethical considerations. Using the guise of protecting wildlife to justify cruelty only perpetuates this disregard.

Addressing stray and feral cat populations requires a commitment to evidence-based and compassionate solutions like community cat programs and large-scale desexing. These measures not only benefit both cats and wildlife but also encourage responsible pet ownership and community involvement. Protecting wildlife means tackling root causes, such as habitat destruction and broader environmental pressures, rather than targeting cats as scapegoats. A truly progressive and humane society should prioritize scientific, compassionate, and effective approaches, avoiding cruelty in all forms.