

Submission
No 255

INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Blue Mountains City Council

Date Received: 19 November 2024



21 November 2024

Office of the Chief Executive Officer

F13932: 24/225349

NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

SUBJECT **Submission from Blue Mountains City Council to the NSW Parliament Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales.**

Executive Summary

This submission from Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) outlines critical recommendations for the NSW Parliament Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales. As a unique local government area located within a World Heritage listed National Park, BMCC holds a vital responsibility to protect threatened native species, including the Blue Mountains Water Skink and the Giant Dragonfly, from the significant threat posed by both feral and domestic cats. We also wish to maintain and enhance the health and wellbeing of all the domestic companion animals within our LGA.

Summary of Key Issues and Recommendations

1. **Impact of Cats on Threatened Native Animals**

Cats are a significant driver of biodiversity loss, with each roaming cat estimated to be killing an average of 186 native animals annually. BMCC supports collaborative approaches involving councils, conservation organisations, and state agencies to mitigate this impact.

2. **Effectiveness of Cat Containment Policies**

BMCC advocates for a phased, state-funded implementation of cat containment policies over ten years, encompassing education, desexing subsidies, regulatory frameworks, and the eventual introduction of a 24-hour containment requirement. Adequate state funding will be critical to the effective implementation of cat containment policies as current local government companion animal resourcing are already significantly overstretched.



3. **Welfare Outcomes for Contained Cats**

Proper education and resources for cat owners can ensure contained cats enjoy improved welfare, with reduced risks of injury, disease, and predation.
 4. **Effectiveness of Community Education Programs**

BMCC highlights the importance of consistent, state-led public education campaigns to drive cultural change and promote responsible cat ownership. The Council's previous initiatives, in partnership with RSPCA, demonstrate the success of targeted education and incentive programs.
 5. **Implications for Local Councils**

Implementing cat containment policies will significantly increase demand on council resources, including shelters, enforcement personnel, and funding. Adequate state funding and legislative support are essential to manage these challenges.
 6. **Effectiveness of Large-Scale Cat Desexing Programs**

Subsidised desexing programs are foundational for controlling stray and feral cat populations. BMCC's recent initiatives, supported by the RSPCA, provide a replicable model for statewide programs.
 7. **Impact on the Pound System**

Increased impoundments will strain existing capacity without substantial investment in infrastructure and staffing. Collaboration with rescue organisations and clear licensing protocols are necessary to mitigate these effects.
 8. **Lessons from Other Jurisdictions**

Policies in the ACT and WA offer valuable insights, including phased containment, mandatory desexing, microchipping, and multi-cat licensing, all of which can inform a tailored approach for NSW.
 9. **Options for Reducing the Feral Cat Population**

BMCC opposes Trap, Neuter, and Release programs in ecologically sensitive areas. Instead, the Council supports targeted, humane trapping and euthanasia measures, underpinned by accessible veterinary services for large-scale desexing programs.
 10. **Other Related Matters**

Legislative clarity is critical for distinguishing domestic, feral, and community cats. Long-term cultural change, fostered through education and collaboration, is essential to embed responsible pet ownership norms. Animal Rescue Groups should uphold standards and policies for rescued animal's wellbeing.
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Detailed Response to Terms of Reference

Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Parliament Inquiry into the management of cat populations. The following submission outlines BMCC's perspectives and recommendations on the terms of reference provided.

a) The Impact of Cats on Threatened Native Animals

The Blue Mountains Local Government Area (LGA) is globally unique, as one of only two cities comprising urban centres embedded within and surrounded by a World Heritage listed National Park. Further to this urban area and natural World Heritage interface context, Council managed land has numerous threatened species, including the endangered Blue Mountains Water Skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*) and Giant Dragonfly (*Petalura gigantea*). Cats, both feral and domestic, pose a threat to both these species as well as many other Blue Mountains threatened species. Predation by the feral cat, *Felis catus*, is listed as a Key threatening process on the Schedules of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. According to the Invasive Species Council's 2023 report, an individual roaming domestic cat kills an average of 186 native animals annually.

Cats pose a direct threat on native animals which result in quantifiable impacts across at both the local and regional scale. BMCC recognises the critical need to protect biodiversity and advocates for policies and actions to mitigate cat predation on native wildlife. Collaborative efforts involving National Parks, conservation organisations, and local councils are vital to ensuring effective management.

b) The Effectiveness of Cat Containment Policies

Cat containment policies can greatly reduce unnecessary wildlife predation by domestic cats. However, adequate resourcing from State Government will be critical to ensure cat containment policies are effectively regulated and managed at a local government level. Local government resourcing constraints are likely to render cat containment policies ineffectual as many councils would be unable to resource their effective implementation in the absence of state government support.

Effectiveness and success are driven by consistent enforcement, and community support. Without state government funding, councils will struggle to implement these policies effectively.

Key challenges include:

- Community resistance to cultural shifts around pet ownership.
- Public expectations of councils to manage increased enforcement responsibilities.
- Risks to animal welfare due to poorly implemented trapping programs.

BMCC supports a staged implementation of cat containment over a ten-year period, including community education, state-funded subsidies for desexing and microchipping, pound capacity building and gradual introduction of regulations like curfews and mandatory containment.

The cat containment policy will need to incorporate state funded cultural and social change programs to continue to alter existing social norms. State funding will also be required to expand council pound capacity to house and rehome stray and non-contained cats which are brought or surrendered by members of the public and to assist with cat regulation and trapping programs

BMCC has undertaken substantial work on cat and domestic animal management in the past 5 years, and through a process of internal and external stakeholder engagement we can recommend the following outline for delivery of an effective cat containment policy and program:

Stage 1 – Years 1-4

- State government to create education programs regarding responsible cat ownership.
- State government to source funding for cat containment policies and their implementation.
- Introduce state-wide cat desexing and microchipping subsidy program, particularly focused on supporting low income households.
- Increase pound capacities and ensure adequate funding is supplied for pounds.

Stage 2 – Years 4-7

- Introduce mandatory cat containment for all cats born after January 2024.
- Introduce night-time cat curfew
- Introduce strict animal rescue group licencing, protocols and controls.
- Introduce strict regulations, licencing, and protocols regarding cat breeding.
- Introduce mandatory desexing, microchipping and registration of all other cats.

Stage 3 – Years 7-10

- Introduce 24 hour cat curfew for all cats where cats must be contained on their property unless in a carrier or on leash.

The legislation regarding cat containment will need to clearly define the differences between feral cats and domestic cats and between owned and unowned cats. Unowned “community” cats will need to be regulated and managed to ensure these cats do not go under the radar and continue to expand their populations.

Provisions are needed to grant local councils the power to perform euthanasia when deemed necessary, particularly for feral cats which have significant negative welfare outcomes in captivity and cannot be practically rehomed.

Cat containment policies should not be a one-size-fits-all situation for local government areas (LGAs) across NSW. The cat containment policies will need to ensure LGAs have the power to have special considerations and implement best practices for their areas.

c) Welfare Outcomes for Cats Under Contained Conditions

Contained cats often experience improved welfare, including reduced risk of disease, injury, and road accidents. However, it is critical to provide resources and education to cat owners about enriching the indoor environment to support the physical and mental health of contained cats.

d) The Effectiveness of Community Education Programs

Funding by state or federal government regarding responsible cat ownership community awareness campaigns would be useful to drive the social and cultural change in the community. This would assist directing attitudes towards responsible cat ownership, in particularly around domestic cat owner's responsibility to protect the welfare of their pets and actively prevent the predation on native wildlife by their cats.

Dogs and other domestic animals are restricted to their property boundary, either inside the home or within in the backyard by a property fence. However, cats are excluded from this social standard. Education will be essential to drive a cultural shift in cat containment and emphasise the wellbeing benefit for contained cats.

Community education programs will need to reach a wide audience and appeal to minority groups. Australia is a diverse country with different groups and ages adopting cats for companionship. Community education programs will need to appeal to a wide range audience to be effective including across multiple medias and from trusted sources such as veterinarians and the RSPCA.

Consistency messaging regarding responsible cat ownership across NSW and Australia is essential in driving the cultural change towards cat ownership. State constructed education materials and resources would assist local councils' educational projects regarding responsible cat ownership and reduce councils funding and resources required to reproduce the same materials.

BMCC highlights the success of the NSW Environmental Trust funded and RSPCA delivered *Keeping Cats Safe at Home* project, which provided incentives for responsible pet ownership, such as cat enclosures and subsidised desexing. Local programs achieved notable participation and demonstrated a positive shift in community behaviour. The project delivered from 2021 to 2025 with the support of 11 councils across New South Wales provided up to \$90,000 in incentives over 4 years and aimed to incentivize cat containment and motivate residents in preventing cats roaming.

Blue Mountains City Council was able to achieve significant progress in responsible cat ownership with funding provided by RSPCA. In 2023, BMCC ran a cat enclosure subsidy program to encourage cat containment and had a total of 22 participants. The program allowed residents to apply for up to \$400 for materials to create their own cat enclosure or purchase free-standing enclosures.

From March to May 2024, residents were able to win one of 32 cat enclosure price packs valued over \$500. The price packs included 1.8m freestanding cat enclosure, waterproof cover, and cat hammock. The competition was very successful with a total of 80 applications received.

RSPCA offered low-income earners in the Blue Mountains the opportunity to desex and microchip their cat for free. RSPCA have conducted a total of 157 cat desexing treatments since November 2024 for Blue Mountains region.

Without the continuous funding to support these initiatives, the ongoing project now relies principally on education to encourage responsible cat ownership and the benefits of cats staying indoors.

BMCC recommends state-led campaigns with consistent messaging and diverse outreach strategies to ensure accessibility and inclusion for all communities. Partnering with veterinarians, animal welfare groups, and media outlets will amplify these efforts.

e) Implications for Local Councils in Implementing and Enforcing Cat Containment Policies

Enforcement of cat containment policies presents logistical, financial, and operational challenges for councils. BMCC anticipates increased demands on shelters, pounds, and council staff. Provisions are required to manage the financial aspects of enforcing cat containment including increasing staff resources to enforce cat containment and increase animal shelter capacity.

Funding will be required for:

- Community education
- Subsidised desexing and microchipping
- Increase pound capacities to house the anticipated increase of seized cats
- Cat management training and dedicated staff to enforce cat containment policies, seizing cats, and managing cat trapping programs.
- Euthanasia of feral cats and stray cats unable to be rehomed.

f) The Effectiveness of Large-Scale Cat Desexing Programs

BMCC endorses large-scale desexing initiatives as a foundational strategy to reduce stray and feral cat populations. Subsidized desexing programs, particularly for low-income households, have shown measurable success in the Blue Mountains region. Access to veterinary services and ongoing funding will be essential to sustain these programs.

g) The Impact of Potential Cat Containment Measures on the Pound System

Cat containment will likely increase the number of cats impounded, exacerbating existing capacity issues in pounds and shelters. Without significant investment in infrastructure and staff, the welfare of impounded animals will be compromised. A coordinated approach involving the State government, rescue organisations and councils is necessary to mitigate this impact.

Animal Rescue Groups contribute to the community by assisting Local Government pounds with rescuing animals and providing education. These groups require assistance with funding and are essential to local communities. Local Animal Rescue Groups must adhere to strict licensing, protocols and policies to ensure the safety and wellbeing of rescued animals is of high standard. These standard controls are necessary to ensure cat containment policies are effective and enforced. Currently some rescue groups use unlawful practices such as Trap, Neuter, and Release.

h) Outcomes of Similar Policies in Other Australian States and Territories

Policies in the ACT and WA demonstrate that phased implementation of cat containment, combined with mandatory desexing and microchipping, is effective. These jurisdictions provide useful frameworks for NSW to consider, particularly around:

- Stage-based containment regulations.
- Licensing for multi-cat households.
- Enforcement provisions to support councils.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the [Domestic Animals Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#) states cats born after 1 July 2022 must be contained on their owner's property. Seventeen (17) new suburbs in ACT have been declared cat containment areas for nature conservation reasons and requires all cat owners to contain their cats regardless of age. If a person in ACT wishes to keep 4 or more cats on residential premises, a multiple cat licence is required. This may be an effective way to reduce welfare issues regarding multi cat households that do not have resources for all the cats at the property. Additionally, ACT has conducted a stage approach which allows the community to adjust and adapt to the new lifestyle of keeping their cat indoors.

[Western Australia Cat Act 2011](#) requires all cat owners to register, microchip, and desex their cats. Penalties apply if cat owners do not register, microchip, and/or desex their cat. This gives Local Councils the ability to enforce responsible cat ownership by having legalisation backbone. Cats are required to wear a collar and registration tag to ensure they are returned to the correct owner if lost. This can help reduce the number of stray cats roaming. Additionally, the act specifies restrictions regarding cat breeding. This is a beneficial component to reduce the number of stray cats.

i) Options for Reducing the Feral Cat Population

Feral cat management requires humane and effective approaches. BMCC does not support Trap, Neuter, and Release (TNR) in ecologically sensitive areas like the Blue Mountains, where predation on native wildlife is a significant concern. Instead, targeted trapping programs, combined with euthanasia when necessary, are essential.

An additional consideration for large scale desexing programs is vet access. Vet access is critical for a desexing program to be efficient and effective. Multiple vets need to be part of the project to allow the public access to desexing.

j) Other Related Matters

BMCC emphasises the importance of fostering collaboration between councils, the state government, state agencies, and community groups. Legislative clarity on definitions of domestic, feral, and "community" cats will be critical for policy enforcement. Additionally, cultural and social change is necessary to embed responsible cat ownership as a societal norm.

The management of cat populations is a complex and emotive issue requiring significant investment and cooperation. BMCC remains committed to protecting our World Heritage-listed natural environment and promoting responsible pet ownership.



With adequate State government funding and strategic implementation, cat containment policies can benefit both native wildlife and domestic cats.

We thank the Committee for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Dr ROSEMARY DILLON
Chief Executive Officer
Blue Mountains City Council