

**Submission  
No 377**

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

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I support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW. Below is my submission and I have addressed some of the terms of reference.

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

We shouldn't blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, as human actions have a much bigger role in creating these issues. Things like deforestation, 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.

I live in a rural area which has seen a big influx of new residents and subdivisions of land and new roads and much more traffic. Kangaroos, wombats, echidnas, birds and other animals are hit by cars and killed every day.

In metropolitan areas, trees have been cut down and houses fill all the spaces. Some birds have managed to adapt but many more have had to leave the areas.

We need to focus on fixing the root causes, like projects to restore habitats and bring back biodiversity and community awareness programs.

- b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Many cat owners already keep their cats confined for the safety of the cat. Some people face barriers like housing restrictions, high costs to modify properties, or lack of information.

I don't believe that mandatory 24-hour cat curfews will work as they haven't in council areas that have implemented this policy. The policy often target semi-owned or stray cats, which have no owners to enforce confinement. These curfews can backfire, with some people abandoning cats to avoid fines, adding to the stray population. Council pounds can become overfull leading to big increases in the number of animals which are euthanized.

Demonising cats can also encourage harmful actions, with mandatory curfews sometimes leading to unchecked cruelty, as there's often little oversight on trapping practices or what happens to the cats afterward. This teaches some humans that it is OK to be cruel and the feelings of animals don't matter. People who are cruel to animals learn to be cruel to everyone.

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

Educating communities about responsible pet ownership is essential. Media campaigns and school programs could teach pet care, the importance of desexing and keeping cats (and other pets) contained in safe indoor or enclosed areas.

In my area, many cats are dumped once they become pregnant or kittens are born. People need to realise they are creating the problem – not the cats. We should support rehoming programs and educate people so that it becomes socially unacceptable to dump your cat when it becomes inconvenient.

**i) Options for reducing the feral cat population.**

I don't believe that killing cats to protect wildlife will work. It is cruel and doesn't solve the problem. Removing feral cats will leave empty areas which will then be filled with another species, perhaps rats or foxes. Will we then poison those animals as well? Poison and/or trapping is cruel to the animals but also teaches humans that it is OK to be cruel.

Discouraging backyard breeders of cats (and dogs) should be a priority. People who pay hundreds of dollars for a kitten or puppy often think they can recoup their costs by letting the cat have a litter which then add to the overall cat population and reduces the number of homes available for rescued animals.

Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNR and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations. Many dedicated volunteers help manage these programs with little or no funding.

I believe we must prioritise cat welfare and support humane management practices, including desexing and education," can make a difference.

Community education programs and free desexing will help to reduce the numbers of unwanted, uncared for kittens.

I hope the committee will consider my views on this Inquiry into management of cat populations.

Karen Bebbington