

Submission
No 328

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Cat Enquiry

Submissions close 22 November

Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

I address my comments to the management of cats in urban areas and particularly to cats that potentially have outdoor access in urban areas. For the most part this means cats that live with their owners in single-family homes, duplexes or villas. (I assume that cats that live with their owners in multi-storey apartment buildings are contained 24/7.)

For context: I have had 4 cats in the last 30 years, 2 sets of neutered females, rescues from the RSPCA. They have all been micro-chipped, fully vaccinated, regularly treated for fleas, worms, ticks and other parasites and they have received annual veterinary checkups. They have been kept indoors from dusk until dawn and allowed access to outdoors through 'cat-flaps' during daylight hours. I live in a quiet urban area, with little traffic and few other things that pose a threat to my cats during daytime. I consider myself a responsible cat owner and I contend that my actions are a reasonable compromise given the risk to wildlife and the welfare of my cats.

I will now address some of the TERMS OF REFERENCE for the Animal Welfare Committee.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the Animal Welfare Committee inquire into and report on the management of cat populations in New South Wales, and in particular:

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

Any serious attempt to protect native animals must address the destruction of native habitat. The impact of cats is insignificant compared to the impact of urban development, logging of native forests, clearing land for farming and mining. The impact of climate change on native animals via bush fires and floods is worth a separate inquiry by your committee. My cats' impact on native animals has been minimal, far less than the impact of clearing the land for my house and the cutting down of trees in my neighbourhood.

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

Introducing a cat containment policy poses huge problems for cat owners like myself. It is extremely difficult to confine to a house a cat that had previously had access to outdoors. The cat would gleefully 'escape' when teenagers forget to close the door, the elderly don't close the door fast enough, adults struggle through the door laden with groceries etc. A cat who had been indoors since kitten-hood is one thing, a cat that is deprived of a previous liberty is another thing entirely.

(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Cats need stimulation. If they are left alone in a confined space for long periods they get bored, depressed or worse - much like humans in solitary confinement. While there are large enclosures where cats can enjoy the outdoors within the confines of the owner's property, they are very costly (\$\$\$s) and most cat owners do not have a suitable place to install them.

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

Education programs both in schools and in the community are important in the long term for managing cat populations. These programs should emphasize the expense involved in caring for a cat: food, vaccinations, parasite control, neutering and other veterinary procedures are all costly. People should be aware of these costs when deciding whether to adopt a pet. Impulse buying, on-line or in-person, has no place in responsible pet ownership. I am particularly concerned with the practice of buying a kitten, sight-unseen, on-line. The issue of kitten farms is of relevance here. Like puppy farms, kitten farms are cruel, profit-driven enterprises that should be illegal (ideally) or, at least, highly regulated.

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

I doubt whether local councils have the resources to effectively implement cat containment policies. If my neighbourhood is any guide, councils struggle to deal with barking dogs. I predict that among the effects of a cat containment policy would be a lot of non-compliance, more cats being surrendered to shelters, cats being contained in small, internal rooms, garages etc..

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

Many cities throughout the world operate programs that neuter street cats then return them to the streets. For example, I visited Malta a few years ago where I was told that programs of this type operate. I observed local people feeding the cats. There were lots of cats around and they all looked pretty healthy to me.

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

As stated above, I predict that among the effects of a cat containment policy would be a lot of non-compliance, more cats being surrendered to pounds, the RSPCA and other shelters.

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

I have no knowledge of this area.

(i) options for reducing the feral cat population

The feral cat population needs to be reduced but not by cruel methods. A better option is to catch and neuter feral cats and return them to their original habitat.

(j) any other related matters.

I am tired of cats being demonized. Of my four cats only one is still living and she will turn eighteen next March. Prior to retiring eight years ago, I worked full-time away from home. Had a confinement policy been in place I would not have adopted my cats. I ruled out adopting a dog while I was working because the dog would have been left alone for long hours.

I have had no trouble containing my cats at night. They respond to my call because I immediately feed them yummy, wet food when they come inside. On only two occasions in 30 years did one of my cats not respond to my call: Phoebe once got locked inadvertently in my neighbour's garage and Carmen once sat on top of my patio roof all one summer night (or I presume she did - she was there at midnight when I went to bed and she was there at 6am the next day). Since retiring, I have observed that, as my cats have aged, they voluntarily spend more and more time indoors, particularly in winter. I tell you this to demonstrate that cats are intelligent animals, who are easily trained by consistently rewarding desired behaviour. The impact of my cats on native animals has been minimal. Their impact on my welfare and that of my family has been immense.