

**Submission  
No 390**

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

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This is in regard to the Animal Welfare Committee's Terms of Reference to cats. Below please find my comments which are drawn from a life-time of own experiences and from those of many others. As a committee member of the recent Clarence Valley Council Biodiversity Advisory Committee and Conservation in Action Inc, a Landcare group which deals with pest management (cane toads and Indian/common myna birds), I have dealt with many other similar agencies and the public, not only in my LGA, but inter and intra state for over a decade. I am a land manager on my rural property which is registered with Land For Wildlife. I also trapped cats in the early 1990's in the Hornsby Shire which had a well organised and humane system of dealing with caught cats to determine if they were pet, stray or feral cats.

- a) Approximately 96 million native mammals, birds and reptiles are killed by roaming pet cats every year – with about 110 native animals killed by each roaming, hunting pet cat (Invasive Species Council, ISC). These numbers of killed native wildlife increases for stray cats, and then increases again for feral cats. Cats have played a key role in the extinction of 26 mammals (eg species of bandicoot, bilby, bettong, hopping mice). Cats also compete with native wildlife for food. Residents should have the right to enjoy their own backyard by not having a cat roam into their yards/living space attacking and/or killing their loved pets (eg Guinea pigs, birds, cats, etc) or wildlife (eg birds and lizards, etc).

Therefore, we urgently need to amend the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to empower and enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats at a local level, bringing NSW into line with almost every other state; and to change the culture of cat owners by implementing a State-wide education campaign for Responsible Pet Ownership with clear rules targeting cats.

- b) The effectiveness of cat containment is currently the onus of the cat owner being a responsible pet owner who understands the health and safety benefits for their pet cat to be contained 24/7 inside and the benefits to the native wildlife and surrounding neighbours. The regulatory approaches in NSW are non-existent/ineffective for the control of domestic/pet cats and does nothing to protect our fauna and their habitat. Therefore to improve the effectiveness of cat containment it is critical for the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to be amended to empower and enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats at a local level. Financial assistance may be necessary to assist councils to police and educate cat owners regarding 24/7 cat containment. It should be mandatory for all pet shops and cat breeders to provide information and discuss the responsibilities with a potential pet cat owner prior to purchase. Pet shops, cat breeders and vets should also register any unregistered cat and receive a small financial payment. Initial cost of providing the cat(s) with their own space inside such as a cat tree and/or building an outdoor cat could be a barrier. However a healthier and safe cat can save vet bills so the initial outlay could be recouped. Grants could be offered to assist cat owners or grants to be supplied to Mens' Sheds to build cat tree/homes to be purchased at low prices or for Councils to offer these free to qualifying cat owners. Cost of cat litter can be an issue together with cleaning it. Responsible dog owners pick up their dog's poo from their backyard or in public areas so cat owners shouldn't be any different to cleaning their cat litter tray.

- c) The welfare outcomes for cats being contained 24/7 on the owner's property are:
- i] it keeps pet cats safe and healthy (the cat can be just as happy inside and can live up to 10 years longer (ISC) than roaming cats, and containment reduces injury from fighting, car accidents, disease, and accidental breeding thereby reducing vet bills, (in a cat house/run, there is no fighting as each cat has and knows each other's space);
  - ii] it allows the right for other residents' to enjoy their own backyard by not having the impacts of a cat roam into their private living space:
    - attacking and/or killing their loved pets (eg Guinea pigs, birds, other cats, etc) or wildlife (eg birds, lizards). When evidence is shown that a roaming cat is guilty

then it must be mandatory for the owner to confine the cat permanently or surrendered it and this should be included in the NSW Animals Companion Act;

- spreading diseases onto humans by defecating in their gardens, entertainment/play areas or children's sandpits;
- impacting on a right to a peaceful sleep without night cat-fights and prowling noises. When evidence is shown that a roaming cat is guilty then it must be mandatory for the owner to confine the cat permanently or surrendered it, and this should be included in the NSW Animals Companion Act;

iii) greatly decreases the effects of roaming cats on native wildlife and habitat;

iv) reduces the number of cats being added to the feral cat numbers as a contained cat is unlikely to become pregnant and can't become a stray or feral.

- d) There needs to be State-wide community education to increase the effectiveness of and responsible pet ownership as it currently is dependent on individual Councils to outlay spending and initiate such programs. The effectiveness would increase on the type of media used and how often. If it is to reach the masses, then there should be a TV campaign – ads, news, current affair programs. Introduce an education program at schools for responsible pet ownership. Education programs would cover different topics/reasons/benefits for responsible cat owners advising amendment to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats and would include all the above previous points plus:
- i] legally cats must be de-sexed, microchipped and registered (detail benefits); advise when discounted or free de-sexing is available;
  - ii] legally cats must not enter a Reserve or National Park unless permitted and on a leash;
  - iii] cat owners should pick up cat poo in public places (just like dog owners)
  - iv] request people to please stop feeding stray cats and ask people to report locations of stray cats to Council Rangers so the cats can potentially find a loving safe home;
  - v] encourage the surrender of unwanted cats/kittens to the Pound, etc instead of dumping them to then become additional fertile feral cats.
  - vi] A high percentage of cat (and dog) owners think it is ok to allow their pets to roam as it is the animal's natural behaviour. A pet cat [or dog] is a domesticated animal for companionship and cat (and dog) owners should be reminded of this - the main key word is "domesticated". Pets must be contained/controlled and cared for. Cats and dogs (except dingo which has been classed as a native dog) are introduced animals and should be contained by their owners. Being a cat (or dog owner) should be a privilege and not a right.

I understand that community education and responsible pet ownership were issues the 11 Council areas targeted as part of OLG's 4-year 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' grant. One of the participating Councils, Tweed Council, said that it was very successful including \$500 grants towards building cat runs. However, without continual funding all the initiatives have stopped.

- e) All Australian States except NSW and WA have 24/7 pet cat containment legislation so there is plenty of data available on implications and enforcing such policies from other LGA's. Regardless of the implications for NSW local councils implementing and enforcing cat containment policies, the amendments to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to introduce anti-roaming laws for pet cats is vital to stop extinctions of our native wildlife; to enhance the life style of others who wish to be cat free; and for the welfare of the pet cats. Funding and additional incentive grants must be available to NSW councils who have or will have policies in place to manage roaming cats.

Clarence Valley Council in 2014 attempted to address the issues of pet and stray cats in their draft Keeping of Animals policy. However, Council removed the draft policy soon after as it was deemed illegal due to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 which allows cats to roam.

Currently, if/when Clarence Valley Council pound receives cats, they will try to return the cat, if microchipped, to its owner; try to re-home cats or re-house cats with animal shelters; and then lastly euthanase any cats with behavioural problems such as ferals.

Brisbane City Council have a cat-trailer trap (attached video) to address the problem of roaming cats in public places such as shopping centres.

Enforcing cat containment should be the same as dog containment.

- f) Implementing large scale cat desexing programs would be very effective. One veterinary hospital in South Grafton that regularly participates annually in offering 15% discount will do 96 desexings in one month. Currently a standard de-sexing fee is \$170 for male cats and \$298 for female cats. If this program was extended for a longer period or a free program which includes microchipping, and registration was offered perhaps targeting low-socioeconomic suburbs/areas with the highest cat-related complaints and microtargeted at “hot-spots”, together with free transport of cats offered to community members if needed, then the uptake would greatly increase. This would benefit the wildlife by reducing the amount of unwanted litters of cats and thereby not adding any further fertile cats to the feral or stray categories.

There would be plenty of data available regarding the success and great number of up-take with discounted and/or free desexing – Victorian Council LGAs; Vets who offer such a service; and the 11 NSW Councils that participated in the ‘Keeping Cats Safe at Home’ grant.

There should be mandatory desexing of pet cats by 4 months of age.

When cat desexings are low in number, then cat pet owners should be contacted to be offered free desexing of their cat, and cat owner details can be obtained from the registration of the cat. It should be mandatory for all registered cat breeders, pet shops, animal shelters and vets to register cats which they have sold or serviced. These agencies could receive a small financial payment for each registration.

- g) With regard to the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound: again Councils should provide this data including the 11 NSW Councils that participated in the ‘Keeping Cats Safe at Home’ grant and from other States. As mentioned above, Brisbane City Council has a method that catches/traps roaming cats in public areas with an air-conditioned automated trailer so consequently they should have a well-structured pound system. Local NSW councils would require funding for up-grading pounds to accommodate an increase in number of cats; plus additional funding for on-going expenses such as food, vet bills, euthanasing, additional ranger(s) to enforce anti-roaming. However, once increased number of pet cats are micro-chipped then some of Council’s expenses could be recouped when the cat owner pays the fine, and possibly the system could become self-funding to cover costs of enforcement, and care for, and the return of the cats who are impounded.
- h) As mentioned above, there is a lot of data from all other States (except WA) or Territories on outcomes of 24/7 cat containment policies eg in Qld - Brisbane City Council, Bundaberg Council; Vic LGA’s and results/comments from the 11 NSW local Councils who participated in the NSW ‘Keeping Cats Safe at Home’ grant.
- i) Reducing feral cat populations needs to use integrated control methods and efforts of eradication could be initially concentrated in hot-spots and high conservation areas. Control methods are shooting, leghold trapping, cage trapping, fencing, poison baiting and a grooming trap (Felixer).
- Fencing off areas to concentrate on eliminating all cats (and other feral animals such as foxes) within its boundary.
  - Educating and empowering the community to participate and lead on recovery efforts.
- This will require:
- i) financial support to enable Council’s to provide a controlled cat trapping program.
- Apart from supplying cat traps, an euthanasing service is an essential part of such a

program and this should be part of council pound operations. An established program can stop cruelty of residents who are currently trying to control a cat problem in their own limited way.

- ii] financial assistance for cat owners to desex by age of 4 months, microchip and register; needs clear rules for cat ownership; needs thorough advertising of rules and benefits of responsible cat ownership;
- Reduce the amount of unwanted litters of cats and therefore not adding any further fertile cats to the feral or stray populations by amending the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to include mandatory desexing of pet cats by 4 months of age.
- Reduce the number of unloved cats which can become part of the feral or stray cat population by amending the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to include anti-roaming laws for pet cats.

Without these amendments, the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 prohibits Councils to implement cat containment and restraint in line with responsible dog ownership.

j) Other related matters:

- i] To stop/decline all future import applications for new domestic cat breeds into Australia.
- ii] NSW Govt agencies such as Local Land Service should have a protocol/memo of understanding with local councils to work co-operatively in pest management (to prevent 'buck passing' and quicker response times to deal with situations that require native wildlife to be protected from pet, stray or feral cats).

This issue on controlling roaming CATS has gone on for far too long, with continual destruction and dire consequences for our native wildlife; the impact of peoples' lifestyle to choose to be cat-free in their own living space; the well-being of cats and firm action taken for pet owners to be responsible and accountable. Cat ownership should have the same governance as Dog ownership. I please ask that Animal Welfare committee support the above mentioned amendments to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 and please request the NSW Government to make these amendments urgently.

Laura Noble  
19/11/24