

Submission
No 423

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

Name: Ms Simone Cooper

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Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission for the inquiry into the management of cat populations. I'm a massive cat lover with 4 rescue cats of my own, and I regularly donate to local cat rescues. I am angered by what is happening to these beautiful felines. Cats are being demonised and targeted by baiting, trapping and other inhumane methods, methods that are both cruel and ineffective.

The Invasive Species Council is intensifying its attacks on cats, rallying supporters to make submissions that promote lethal controls and call for mandatory cat containment, despite lacking evidence that these measures work. **This will lead to terrible suffering for cats.**

Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNR and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations. These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

- A NSW Government-commissioned report supports large-scale desexing programs instead, showing that killing programs are ineffective.
- The recent *NSW Pound Inquiry* has recommended a proactive solution: providing grants to councils and rescue organisations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing in areas with large homeless cat populations, especially disadvantaged communities. These kinds of programs are a long-term, compassionate solution that reduces stray cat populations without demonising cats.
- The best solution is helping semi-owners and owners in disadvantaged areas by providing free desexing and microchipping through programs like the [Community Cat Program](#).
- Proactive community cat programs have been scientifically proven to reduce stray cat populations, decrease nuisance complaints and prevent wildlife predation.
- The [Rand myth of domestic cats & urban wildlife](#) provides a helpful summary of common misconceptions and effective solutions such as desexing for managing cats and reducing the number of homeless cats.
- When creating policies for reducing feral and community cat populations, it's essential to consider the [Vacuum Effect](#), an ecological principle demonstrating that removing animals from an area only results in new animals filling the space. Without addressing the root causes of population growth, removal efforts are unsustainable and ultimately ineffective.

I would now like to specifically like to address the terms of reference

I. The impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

It's easy to blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, but the truth is, 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. Unlike native animals, cats don't rely on specific ecosystems to survive, which means they can adapt and thrive in these altered environments. Instead of just pointing fingers at cats, the government needs to focus on fixing the root causes, like projects to restore habitats and bring back biodiversity. Wildlife rescue data shows that cats aren't the primary risk to many threatened species. Key threats include habitat loss, vehicle collisions, and dog attacks.

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- **[NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard 2022-23 Data:](#)**
 - *Unsuitable environment:* 413 incidents
 - *Collision with motor vehicles:* 310 incidents
 - *Habitat changes:* 52 incidents
 - *Dog attacks:* 98 incidents
 - *Cat attacks:* 37 incidents
- We should protect at-risk wildlife with well-rounded, scientific and humane approaches. Efforts should be focused on habitat conservation and address threats like habitat destruction and collisions.

II. The effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Most cat owners already keep their cats confined, but some face barriers like housing restrictions, high costs to modify properties, or lack of information.

III. Welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

Mandatory 24-hour cat curfews 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. 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.

IV. The effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives

Educating communities about responsible pet ownership is essential. Encouraging people about how to keep their cats safely indoors or contained within property boundaries, such as in cat patios, can help keep both cats and wildlife safe. Community outreach, media campaigns,

and school programs teaching pet care, the importance of spaying/neutering, and safe indoor environments are crucial. Supporting local initiatives that help manage community cat populations through rehoming programs, targeted desexing, and fostering is also important.

V. Implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

Strict mandated 24/7 cat containment has shown to increase impoundments and lead to higher euthanasia rates without actually solving issues like roaming. For example, the RSPCA's 2018 report shows that councils with containment laws have not seen reductions in cat-related complaints or wandering.

VI. The effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs

Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return), and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations. These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters, and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses, and volunteers involved. A NSW Government-commissioned report supports large-scale desexing programs instead, showing that killing programs are ineffective. The recent NSW Pound Inquiry has recommended a proactive solution: providing grants to councils and rescue organisations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing in areas with large homeless cat populations, especially disadvantaged communities. These kinds of programs are a long-term, compassionate solution that reduces stray cat populations without demonising cats.

VII. The impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system

As I've already mentioned, strict mandated 24/7 cat containment has shown to increase impoundments and lead to higher euthanasia rates without actually solving issues like roaming. If the government spends the time in implementing an effective and humane cat management plan, including free desexing, and grants to cat rescue shelters who are struggling financially, is a much better way to reducing the impact of stray cats on the pound system

VIII. The outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories

In Yarra Ranges (Victoria), three years after introducing a 24-hour cat curfew, cat-related complaints rose by 143%, impoundments by 68%, and euthanasia by 18%, while the population grew by just 2%. Similarly, in the City of Casey (Victoria), 20 years after implementing a cat containment policy, impoundments were up by 296% and complaints had also increased⁹. Other councils, like Hobsons Bay (Victoria), have rejected cat curfews, acknowledging their ineffectiveness at addressing cat population and related issues⁰

IX. Options for reducing the feral cat population

The government should also not consider lethal methods, like shooting and 1080 poison baits, to manage the stray cat population, should never be considered. 1080 poison baits are cruel and leave the poor animal suffering, convulsing, vomiting, writhing in extreme pain for up to 24 hours. Instead the government needs to focus on community cat programs that focus on rehoming and targeted desexing, TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return), and community education. All of these humane methods have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations. Proactive community cat programs have been scientifically proven to reduce stray cat populations, decrease nuisance complaints, and prevent wildlife predation. When creating

policies for reducing feral and community cat populations, it's essential to consider the Vacuum Effect, an ecological principle demonstrating that removing animals from an area only results in new animals filling the space. Without addressing the root causes of population growth, removal efforts are unsustainable and ultimately ineffective.

X. Any other related matters

I support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW. Cats should not be scape-goated, blamed for killing wildlife. As I've already mentioned, but am reinforcing here, **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.**

The government should provide financial assistance to struggling local cat shelters and struggling local cat rescue groups, so they can provide more assistance to the community who find unwanted, dumped stray cats and need help to get them rehomed/adopted. Financial assistance from the government to these struggling, local cat rescue groups and shelters, would mean more help can be provided to the community, and give people and groups who rescue cats the financial support they need to look after the cats in their care until they can find their loving forever homes.

I urge the government to show compassion, and stop demonising cats, and instead implement the humane management methods that I've already mentioned.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Simone Cooper