

Submission  
No 368

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

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Submission to the  
NSW Legislative Council: Animal Welfare Committee's  
**Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations**

I'm a 26-year-old residing in Katoomba NSW since infancy; I am a recently bereaved cat owner. I would be willing to give evidence at a hearing. This submission addresses *TOR d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives.*

I have backgrounds in graphic design (diploma), philosophy and linguistics (BA) which lend themselves to this topic. Educational campaigns should be accompanied with subsidies and support.

### Aims

- **Shift public attitudes and behaviours** towards responsible pet ownership so that it is equally unacceptable to allow cats to roam the neighbourhood freely as it would be to allow the same of a dog.
- **Increase the rate of cat 'rescue' adoptions** to outstrip purchases from retailers and breeders.
- **Make un-desexed pet cats a rarity**

### Problems

- **Misconceptions:** cats cannot be socialised with one-another or around dogs; cats cannot walk on a harness and leash; cats can be trained to not prey on local wildlife or roam further than the property boundaries when they are unsupervised; some cats are 'special' and only kill invasive rodents; purebred cats make better companions / rescue cats cannot be rehabilitated; vaccinations are harmful to cats; cats deserve to roam and/or hunt
- **Financial barriers:** desexing, microchipping and vaccinating; professional training to come when called, come inside at night, walk on a leash and be friendly with other cats, people and dogs; putting up fencing or cat-runs at home
- **Rental rights:** owners often cannot take their pets with them when their lease is up, because so few landlords permit pets (can lead to dumping or surrendering to shelters); renters cannot make alterations to the property to keep cats contained
- **Dissemination:** previous educational programs have not reached their audience. The evidence for this is anecdotal: I did not come across this material (as a cat owner myself) until I got involved in local activism and discovered the issue and previous subsidy programs as part of the research.
- **Inconvenience:** pet owners do not feel they have the time, energy or other resources to train their cats; cats can be incredibly persistent about going outside etc.; keeping cats inside entails keeping and cleaning a litter tray and ensuring they get exercise and sensory stimulation.

## Solutions

Education programs need to be catchy, evocative and placed on geographic and digital sites at which cat owners are likely to be found, regardless of whether they are interested in learning about responsible cat ownership.

Documents and websites packed with information may be useful to cat owners who are already at least partially persuaded to be responsible, or who happen to be bored while they wait at the vets. But **walls of text are not persuasive**.

## Educational programs should be run like a product advertisement

- 1) **profile the person** you are targeting with the message – the sort of person who believes the misconceptions and faces the financial challenges outlined above.
- 2) identify a **problem for the consumer**. Suggestion: two out of three pet owners have lost an animal due to a roaming incident (see RSPCA website).
- 3) **create a solution for the consumer**. Suggestion: subsidies for desexing, microchipping and fencing; renters' rights.
- 4) sum up the product or service you are advertising with a **short, memorable, evocative and simple expression** containing fewer than 10 words. Eg. "Can't get your cat inside at night?" [image of someone trying to catch a cat; QR code linking to a subsidy program for training cats, and local business partners]; "she's cute at home, deadly in the bush" [image of cute cat cuddling human; contrast with image of cat preying; QR code with caption: "fencing subsidy programs"]. "help us help you keep your kitty safe!" [image of a cat silhouetted against car headlights; QR code to training programs and enclosure subsidies].
- 5) place these messages at **sites where cat owners are likely to be found** – ie. everywhere: motorway and rail station and bus banners, telegraph poles, vets, pet stores, community noticeboards, social media sites, tv and YouTube and radio ads, free ad-supported streaming platforms such as Spotify and podcast servers, TAFE and school campuses, etc.

**Establish a NSW State Government informational webpage.** Link subsidy programs in bold. Here is **the page to which those QR codes should lead**. It is appropriate to put details and statistics here, *once the audience is encouraged to take action on the advertisements*.

**Avoid:** patronising and accusatory language; quaint expressions such as rhyming. A negative example of this is the public courtesy campaign on country trains ("it may not be intended, but people are offended" etc. it may be catchy, but it makes the audience feel like a naughty child).

**Include:** emotional cues, evocative imagery, offers of assistance, praise for doing the right thing, quick links to resources.

I am unemployed and interested in this issue, please contact me if you would like me to submit a resume, CV and portfolio of work.

Kind regards.