

Submission
No 418

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

I write regarding the Animal Welfare Committee on the management of cat populations in NSW. I won't cover all points but do have observations on some.

Impact of cats on native species is often overstated and over simplified, I've seen the alarmist cat breeding triangle, which seems to assume that every cat will have a full litter and each of that litter survives and breeds, then we supposedly have over 30,000 cats in five years' time. The reality is much more brutal – most do not survive. I grew up on a farm, where we used to have lots of cats being dumped in the area. We weren't overrun with cats, as most died. A few lucky ones were able to be coaxed into coming to our home and becoming pets again. The rest were killed by foxes, birds of prey, died in birthing or starved. I will note that we also had a healthy native bird population which managed to thrive despite the presence of the stray cats. We also had a healthy population of ground dwelling species, such as lizards around. I now live in suburbia. While my cats are contained, I do get other cats that roam into my yard. Yet I still have wildlife [including a regular bowerbird], small lizards and birdlife in my yard, as it still has trees and space for habitat. Likewise, when I walk in the nearby bushland reserves and transmission easements there are both cats and wildlife present.

It would be interesting to compare how much cats have filled the ecological void left by the decline of other native predatory species, such as quolls in terms of the impacts on native species. If the government was really concerned about the decline in native species, they may want to consider the continual habitat loss [especially the vast amounts of clearing for the “housing, housing, housing” which the government continually pushes for] which leave both native and introduced species with fewer places to live and forage to survive. I get to see wildlife near me as there is habitat for them. Cats are the least of the problems. Human activity is the main reason other species are struggling to survive.

How will cat containment policies actually work? They are a good idea in theory – I keep mine contained as it's safer for them. This is achievable if one is a homeowner & can keep cats in the house or has sufficient space in their yard for an enclosure. It's more difficult for renters who may not be able to have pets indoors and may not be able to modify their homes to provide enclosures. Many new housing lots don't have much yard area for enclosures. While encouraging cat containment is a good idea, what will happen to cats' whose owners can't or don't contain the cat? It's the cats that will suffer.

How will cat containment be policed? My local council doesn't have the resources/willingness to effectively police their current obligations with regard to roaming dogs. If they can't fulfil this aspect of animal control, how do we expect them to be able to additionally police roaming cats? It's not going to work in reality. Cats are generally more elusive and harder to catch than dogs. As a volunteer who tries to reunite lost pets with their families, I know how hard it is and how long it takes to gain a cat's trust. Most councils don't have the resources to police this.

I have a number of rescued street cats – many of these cats which I still have as a result of my local pound refusing to accept stray animals. I have found that the pounds are full, the official rescues are full, so I've been left with those cats. This has imposed increasing costs on myself having to do council's job of caring for abandoned cats. While I carry out this role, I am not officially recognised as a rescue and receive no funding or donations. Council doesn't have the resources or space to take them. What will realistically happen if cat containment laws are enacted?

Other than giving an excuse for cat-hating people to be cruel to or kill abandoned cats, I don't see what realistic goals would be achieved for stray cats. What will happen to cats lost, stolen, dumped as the pounds don't have room & the rescues are full?

What will happen to cats belonging to Trap, Neuter & Release (TNR) colonies? These cats don't have homes and it's not practical to achieve containment for those colonies. It's not the cats' fault humans have abandoned them.

Cat registration penalties for desexing over the age of 4 months – this discourages people for adopting older cats or alternately encourages people not to actually register if they take on responsibility for cats older than 4 months. There should be no penalty if someone adopts a street cat and gets it desexed after 4 months age – the focus should be on getting the animal desexed, not at what age it gets done. It is better late than never in getting an animal desexed.

It's relatively easy to find homes for kittens. Older cats are much more difficult, even more so now that there are penalties if the cat is desexed past 4 months of age. It's not the cats' fault if it wasn't desexed as a kitten. It's not a rescuer's fault if they rescue a street cat and it's already over the age of 4 months. What are people going to do – leave them on the street because they're too old to take in?