

Submission  
No 417

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

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Partially  
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Killing cats as a strategy to protect wildlife is not only cruel but has also been proven to be ineffective, as underscored by the recent NSW Government-commissioned report, which instead recommends large-scale desexing as a more effective, long-term solution. Killing cats fails to address the underlying issues of stray cat populations and wildlife predation. By contrast, strategies focused on rehoming, targeted desexing, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and community education have demonstrated clear success in reducing stray cat numbers in a humane and sustainable way.

Programs like the Community Cat Program, which offer free desexing and microchipping, provide vital support to semi-owners and residents in these communities. Scientific evidence has repeatedly shown that such programs—grounded in compassion—are the most effective way to manage stray cat populations while also protecting wildlife. Additionally, these programs alleviate the strain on councils, shelters and rescue groups and support the wellbeing of veterinary professionals and volunteers.

Mandatory 24/7 cat containment laws, such as curfews, have not proven effective in reducing roaming or stray cat populations. Reports, such as the RSPCA's 2018 study, show that councils with containment laws still experience high levels of cat-related complaints. In places like Yarra Ranges and the City of Casey in Victoria, the introduction of curfews led to increased impoundments and euthanasia rates, showing that containment policies alone do not address the core problems. Additionally, such measures often result in harm to the animals, including abandonment and cruelty, particularly when enforcement is inconsistent.

We also have a convenient habit of forgetting our own complicity when looking at issues such as these: rather than targeting cats, we must recognise that the primary threats to wildlife are HUMAN ACTIONS, including habitat destruction, deforestation, and urban sprawl. While cats may contribute to wildlife predation, they are NOT the primary cause of species decline. Data from the NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard highlights that habitat loss, vehicle collisions, and dog attacks are far greater threats to native wildlife than cat predation.

To effectively protect wildlife, efforts must focus on preserving and restoring habitats and addressing broader environmental threats. A holistic approach that includes habitat conservation, wildlife corridors, and reducing human-induced pressures on ecosystems is essential for safeguarding biodiversity. Yet, these are the very challenges we consistently avoid because it's either too expensive, too inconvenient, or both. Instead, we use cats as a scapegoat.

Moreover, can we please, as a nation, stop claiming to be animal lovers if we're going to deem any animal we come into conflict with a pest and seek to eradicate it, whether native or otherwise? See dingoes and kangaroos as a prime example of our contempt for our own wildlife when it benefits people materially. Yet, we're using the protection of native wildlife as justification for even more cruelty.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of stray and feral cat populations requires a shift towards evidence-based, compassionate solutions such as community cat programs and large-scale desexing. These approaches not only provide lasting benefits for both cats and wildlife but also promote responsible pet ownership and community engagement. To protect wildlife, we must focus on the root causes of habitat destruction and species decline, rather than scapegoating cats.

Surely, a country that considers itself a modern, civilised nation of animal lovers should not only seek the most humane solution to a problem, but also avoid ignoring evidence that suggests cruelty is, in fact, the least scientific approach.