

Submission
No 459

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

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The debate on how best to manage stray and feral cat populations and protect wildlife is ongoing, but history and evidence show that killing cats as a method of control is not only inhumane but also ineffective. Strategies that prioritize community cat programs—emphasizing rehoming, targeted desexing, Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), and community education—are not only more compassionate but yield proven results.

The NSW Government's commissioned report supports the notion that lethal methods are unsustainable. These programs fail to address the core issues that lead to the proliferation of cat populations. Ecologically, the Vacuum Effect demonstrates that when cats are removed from an area, new ones move in, rendering efforts to cull ineffective and costly. Additionally, such practices can encourage unchecked cruelty, with inadequate oversight leading to animal suffering. Community cat programs offer a practical solution by focusing on large-scale desexing and public education. The NSW Pound Inquiry has taken a proactive stance, recommending grants for councils and rescue organizations to fund desexing programs. These programs should include community cat desexing in areas with significant homeless cat populations, particularly in disadvantaged areas where resources are limited.

Implementing comprehensive, targeted desexing programs helps reduce stray cat populations, alleviates the burden on councils and shelters, and supports the mental well-being of those in veterinary care and animal rescue services. The positive effects extend beyond just numbers; they include reduced nuisance complaints and less pressure on wildlife due to a controlled and monitored cat population.

For community cat management to work effectively, public education is crucial. Initiatives that teach responsible cat ownership, safe containment practices like cat patios, and the importance of desexing contribute to a culture where cats and wildlife can coexist more harmoniously. Media campaigns, community workshops, and school programs are effective in spreading this knowledge.

Mandatory 24-hour cat containment laws, while well-intentioned, often miss their mark. Semi-owned or stray cats, which have no owners to enforce such measures, are disproportionately affected. These curfews can lead to an increase in impoundments and euthanasia, as demonstrated by the case studies of Yarra Ranges and the City of Casey in Victoria. Both areas saw significant spikes in complaints and impoundments after containment laws were enacted, underscoring their ineffectiveness.

Blaming cats alone for wildlife decline oversimplifies the issue. Human activities such as deforestation, habitat loss, and urban expansion play a much larger role in threatening native wildlife. Data from the NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard (2022-23) supports this, showing higher incident rates due to habitat changes, vehicle collisions, and dog attacks than cat attacks. Only 37 of over 900 incidents were linked to cats, highlighting the importance of tackling broader environmental issues. To truly protect wildlife, comprehensive conservation strategies are needed. These should include habitat restoration, sustainable urban planning, and wildlife corridors that reduce the risk of collisions and provide safe spaces for native species.

The most effective approach to managing cat populations is through humane, scientifically proven community programs. By supporting initiatives that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, and public education, we can reduce stray cat populations in a sustainable manner. These solutions not only protect wildlife but foster a culture of empathy and responsibility within our communities.

Providing grants for councils and rescue groups to fund large-scale desexing and rehoming efforts, especially in disadvantaged areas, is a step in the right direction. Such policies empower communities to engage in the solution and ensure that cats, wildlife, and people can coexist without harm.

Lily Meier