

Submission
No 383

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

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Honorable Members,

We call on you to take urgent action to prevent the continued rapid extinction of our endangered native species due to free roaming pet cats across New South Wales.

Without immediate intervention, pet cats will continue to kill 2.92 million mammals, 1.67 million reptiles, 1.09 million birds, 0.26 million frogs and 2.97 million invertebrates every 24 hours.

Research by the ANU shows the vast and devastating impact each and every roaming cat has on our native wildlife. In the greater Sydney area, there are approximately 1,086,676 pet cats. Around 71% of these are allowed to roam by their owners, which equates to a shocking 66 million native animals hunted and killed each year in Sydney alone. It's especially alarming since a single cat can stray more than 10 km from its home.

On average, each roaming pet cat kills 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year, most of them native. Collectively, that's 4,440 to 8,100 animals per square kilometre per year for the area inhabited by pet cats.

Individual pet cats have already driven the decline and complete loss of populations of native animal species in our local area, such as the feather-tailed glider population in south-eastern New South Wales.

We and others in our community have noticed native blue tongue lizards, bandicoots and native bird populations becoming scarce and even absent in our gardens since neighbouring cats have taken up residence.

It's heartbreaking that, as ordinary Australians, and residents of NSW, we cannot offer sufficient refuge to local endangered wildlife in our own backyards while our yards (and nearby public spaces) are infiltrated by unwelcome roaming cats from in and around our suburbs.

In our neighbourhood, we have so many cats from other people's properties come to prey on animals in our backyard at all hours of the day and night. Curfews are ineffective in preventing harm because roaming cats are a threat to wildlife at all hours of the day and night. Cats hunt and kill as much during the day as they do at night, it's only that during the day they are more likely to prey on species of birds, reptiles and amphibians, while at night they hunt primarily small mammals and other nocturnal creatures).

Along with our neighbours, we are also kept awake at night by regular disturbances from domestic cat fights in nearby yards and streets.

The time is right for change. Two-thirds of Australians now support banning pet cats from roaming.

New South Wales is ready for widespread reform in how we manage pet cats, but clearly has been lagging behind other states and territories, especially with regards to cat containment. A ban on roaming pet cats would not only save millions of native animals, but also billions of dollars to the economy.

Clear laws are needed now to ensure pet cats are kept safe at home. Keeping cats contained in suitably engaging indoor spaces provide several benefits to the wellbeing of domestic cats and their human companions. For example, cats that are kept indoors have been shown to be better socialised to humans than those that are left to roam.

Unlike in just about every other state, NSW councils cannot implement basic cat curfews and restrictions due to archaic state laws.

These laws allow cats in NSW to spend their evenings hunting and killing native animals in our backyards, suburbs and surrounds, and also prevent local councils from mandating that cats are contained.

The outdated laws mean local communities are powerless to institute one of the easiest and highest impact policies available to protect our local ecology.

By simply removing the barriers to local councils instituting cat containment, you'd save millions of native animals.

Failing to act would see Sydney lose another quarter of a billion native animals killed by roaming pet cats over the next four years.

Honorable Members, we call on you to listen, work collaboratively with one another, and with the experts to resolve this.

Amending the law in NSW to permit local councils to implement 24/7 cat containment rules is a simple step that would have profound benefits for our native wildlife.

Local communities across NSW are crying out for this amendment. We want to protect our local bushland and backyard habitats from the devastating impacts of roaming pet cats.

Australian native animals simply have not evolved to survive the predatory hunting style of cats, nor the diseases cats spread (like toxoplasmosis gondii) which continue to result in dramatic declines in native animal populations.

More funding for responsible pet ownership, initiatives like subsidised desexing and a state-wide education campaign are also needed.

As residents of NSW, and voters, we call on the NSW government to:

1. Amend the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 to enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for pet cats at a local level.
2. Allocate funding required for much-needed compliance, education, desexing, identification and registration programs.
3. Encourage local governments to develop companion animal management plans.
4. Develop a state-wide web resource for pet owners.
5. Streamline pet identification and registration processes.
6. Make desexing mandatory state-wide.

Law in the ACT now requires residents to contain their cats, and in Victoria almost 50% of all councils have already introduced cat containment rules. Another 48 species have been added to the endangered species list.

As citizens of NSW, we need our government to take immediate action to protect our precious natural environment and the native species which depend on it for their survival.

Thank you for your time, efforts and attention to this important matter.