

Submission
No 461

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

I will only support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW.

The Evidence

Wildlife is threatened by humans more than any other species.

Humans taking over or destroying habitat is the only true threat to wildlife.

The blame laying on cats as the main issue for wildlife is misleading and is mostly positioned to distract from the toll that human activity, development and agriculture takes as the leading cause of animal deaths through direct activity polluting and destroying animal habitats.

The idea that killing cats to protect wildlife hasn't worked when done before and of course - and it won't work now either.

It is inhumane and it's cruel and doesn't in any way serve to re solve the problem.

The way to resolve issues is for sanctions and supported Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNR and community education because this has in fact proven to be highly effective at reducing stray cat populations.

Community Cat Programs/ initiatives also fundamentally ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

I know these work, because I have been involved in these community cat programs for most of my adult life. I have personally been involved at the coal face of community cat programs personally managing the populations in my local area via education of myself and others in appropriate, ethical and humane feline population management and control. I personally – along with other likeminded volunteers, found the best way and researched international and national models of management that has proven to work.

This has proven successful and all it takes is care, humanity, knowledge, education, planning and skills that we have gained and shard with others, to do all it took to manage the populations. Desexing, socialising, other appropriate vet care as needed, feeding, watering and shelter as we socialised and rehomed has been part of this successful, compassionate and humane process.

We who volunteer our time, dedicating or efforts – that we back with our own funding currently - are hugely successful – because there are uncounted numbers of individuals and small groups who are all animal lovers (cats & other species) and we dedicate so much of

what we do to preserving those lives – we are all voters – we are all active community members – and we are successful because we care, because we are consistent and human – it is time now for us to get the sanction and support of Government to help us do what we are voluntarily doing – because – that support will go a long way to make this an even wider and successful animal management plan than any killing of animals will ever achieve.

I have researched and acknowledge that the following is important in the consideration and solutions that should be a part of the Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations:

- A NSW Government-commissioned report supports large-scale desexing programs instead, showing that killing programs are ineffective.
- The recent NSW Pound Inquiry has recommended a proactive solution:
 - providing grants to councils and rescue organisations to fund large-scale, targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing in areas with large homeless cat populations, especially disadvantaged communities.
 - o These kinds of programs are a long-term, compassionate solution that reduces stray cat populations without demonising cats.
- The best solution is helping semi-owners and owners in disadvantaged areas by providing free desexing and microchipping through programs like the Community Cat Program.
- Proactive community cat programs have been scientifically proven to reduce stray cat populations, decrease nuisance complaints and prevent wildlife predation.
- The Rand myth of domestic cats & urban wildlife provides a helpful summary of common misconceptions and effective solutions such as desexing for managing cats and reducing the number of homeless cats.
- When creating policies for reducing feral and community cat populations, it's essential to consider the Vacuum Effect, an ecological principle demonstrating that removing animals from an area only results in new animals filling the space. Without addressing the root causes of population growth, removal efforts are unsustainable and ultimately ineffective.

Cat Containment

I have contained all of my personal pets for over 30 years. I have purpose built cat runs for my pets, they do not roam.

I also have helped others to build cat runs – and I constantly recommend others to contain their pets by utilising such products and services as provided by www.catnets.com.au

I run a pet care service team for the last 14 years and the vast majority of our cat clients come from an animal loving background, 90% of the clients have pet cats – and of those the vast majority have indoor only cats.

Many of those people also have a background in animal rescue and community cat carers – working on the same projects as I do. We all vote, we all commit to the things we are passionate about – and as over one third of Australian households (33%) have pet cats, and about half of cat-owning households have two or more cats: the total pet cat population in Australia is 5.3 million – that is a lot of people to upset for absolutely no human or good reason!

I observe that the majority of cat owners already keep their cats confined, but some face barriers like housing restrictions, high costs to modify properties, or lack of information.

Mandatory 24-hour cat curfews, however, often target semi-owned or stray cats, which have no owners to enforce confinement. These curfews can backfire, with some people abandoning cats to avoid fines, adding to the stray population.

Demonising cats can also encourage harmful actions, with mandatory curfews sometimes leading to unchecked cruelty, as there's often little oversight on trapping practices or what happens to the cats afterward. This demonising of cats and cat curfews only make the problems worse for all!

- NO to: Strict mandated 24/7/ cat containment because they have shown to increase impoundments and lead to higher euthanasia rates without actually solving issues like roaming. Cat containment laws didn't reduce complaints about roaming cats or make a noticeable difference.
- Containment laws DO NOT help as an example, the RSPCA's 2018 report shows that councils with containment laws have not seen reductions in cat-related complaints or wandering.
- Those only make things much worse in fact – for example in In Yarra Ranges(Victoria), three years after introducing a 24-hour cat curfew, cat-related complaints rose by 143%, impoundments by 68%, and euthanasia by 18%, while the population grew by just 2%. Similarly, in the City of Casey(Victoria), 20 years after implementing a cat containment policy, impoundments were up by 296% and complaints had also increased.
- Other councils, like Hobsons Bay(Victoria), have rejected cat curfews, acknowledging their ineffectiveness at addressing cat population and related issues.

Educating Pet Owners

Education is a huge step in the right direction!

I have done this in my own local area – doing letterbox drops about low cost desexing programs – offering to help neighbours to access vouchers, low cost desexing, transport and other helpful ways of gaining community engagement and building trust alongside education – I can vouch directly for the facts and that educating communities about responsible pet ownership is essential.

- Encouraging people about how to keep their cats safely indoors or contained within property boundaries, such as in cat patios, can help keep both cats and wildlife safe.
- Community outreach, with the aid of local and state and also federal government bodies media campaigns and school programs teaching pet care, the importance of desexing (spaying/neutering) and safe indoor environments.
- Supporting local community initiatives that help manage community cat populations through rehoming programs, targeted desexing and fostering.

Wildlife

It is an easy and ill informed and often driven by more greed based human projects that deflect blame away from human based habitat destruction and to blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, but, well informed and knowledgeable persons, without hidden agendas can see that the truth is, human actions have a much bigger role in creating all of these issues.

Cats do not have the means to cause the wider, faster and more devastating destruction of native wildlife – that is all mankind induced problems – no cat has cause the following – only humans:

- deforestation,
- clearing land for farming
- Clearing land for urban sprawl
- clearing forested and coastal habitat for the above and for infrastructure projects and more man-made issues for wildlife including roads, vehicles like cars, trucks and trains ALL cause deaths and damage to wildlife.

It is human efforts that are the problem - wiping out habitats for native wildlife, while making it easier for introduced species like cats to thrive. Unlike native animals, cats don't rely on specific ecosystems to survive, which means they can adapt and thrive in these altered environments. Instead of just pointing fingers at cats, we need to focus on fixing the root causes, like projects to restore habitats and bring back biodiversity.

Further to the above:

- Wildlife rescue data shows that cats aren't the primary risk to many threatened species. Key threats include habitat loss, vehicle collisions and dog attacks.

- NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard 2022-23 Data:
 - o Unsuitable environment: 413 incidents
 - o Collision with motor vehicles: 310 incidents
 - o Habitat changes: 52 incidents
 - o Dog attacks: 98 incidents
 - o Cat attacks: 37 incidents
- We should protect at-risk wildlife with well-rounded, scientific and humane approaches. Efforts should be focused on habitat conservation and address threats like habitat destruction and collision

When you stop apportioning blame to cats – and start to involve humane humans in community cat care and educational programs – you start to address the problems at the root of the issue.

Stop blaming cats – start to look at what we humans can do to help ALL animals, wildlife, cats & humans and we will all be better off!

Please understand that many millions of families of pet owners, are watching this - watching what you are doing.

This observation is by those who love cats and ALL other animals - including our native wildlife do not fail all of the humans and animals who are deserving of better outcomes.

Make better decisions, in the knowledge, that you will be judged for your decisions and your actions now and into the future.

Thank you,