

Submission  
No 174

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

**Organisation:** Australian Plants Society NSW (Nowra group)

**Date Received:** 21 November 2024

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**Nowra Group**  
**PO Box 25, Berry NSW 2535**

**19th November 2024**

Reference:management of cat populations in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

*Note: One of the Australian Plants Society (NSW) Aims is 'Protecting Australian native plants and their natural habitats'. The NSW and Nowra group understands it is this natural habitat that maintains the biodiversity of our bushland and as such supplies habitat and support for Australian birds and wildlife.*

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Terms of Reference

- (a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings.
- (b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers.
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- (e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies
- (f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs.
- (g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system
- (h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories.

## **Disappointment**

As Conservation Officer and on behalf of the members of the Australian Plants Society (NSW) Nowra group, I appreciate this inquiry into cat populations in NSW but members are disappointed as most of the Terms of Reference have been highlighted, and noted over the past 20years or more.

Terms of Reference.

**a. the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings.**

## **The Feral Cat.**

It is well known and accepted that feral cats impact greatly on Australia's wildlife and are decimating many different species across the nation, and this includes metropolitan and regional areas.

There are policies and people who have worked with those policies over many years trying for control of this feral pest. It is believed that all new actions from this inquiry must add greatly to those existing at this time & with adequate funding.

## **The Domestic (pet) cat**

Many plans and policies have been formulated for greater control of the feral cat but unfortunately **not much is happening that will ensure control of the domestic (pet) cat living and roaming free within the suburbs of cities, regional areas and country towns.**

It is also widely known that pet (domestic) cats feed into the feral cat populations with unthinking or uncaring people dumping litters of kittens or unwanted pets.

**For this reason alone control of the domestic pet cat must be a major issue with this inquiry.**

In our local regional area with remnant bushland (the Shoalhaven) there are many free roaming cats owned by householders, some believing their pet does not harm birds, wildlife, frogs or lizards, others uncaring.

While this could be true of some pet cats, it is normal for all cats to attack, stalk or 'play' with small creatures that make movements.

Note: There is no limit to the number of cats that can be kept as pets, where the keeping of the animal is not intended for a commercial purpose.

As stated, It is difficult to understand the lack of plans over many years for control of the pet cat . 24hr curfews are seen as the only way to ensure total protection for our suffering wildlife.

## **Research of the domestic pet cat's impact.**

It is known roaming (domestic) cats kill 390 million animals per year in Australia, including reptiles, birds and mammals. An average of 186 animals, mostly native species, per roaming domestic cat each year. **University of NSW survey 2020\***

Research highlighted in the Sydney Morning Herald 9th June 2023 titled "**The staggering death toll of roaming pet cats finally revealed**" shows 'pet cats kill 30 to 50 times more native animals per square kilometre than feral cats kill in the bush'

[Domestic cat wildlife killings to surge unless tougher regulation introduced: ANU study \(smh.com.au\)](https://www.smh.com.au)

The article also stated the research was carried out by the Australian National University and was conducted for the \* **Biodiversity Council, Invasive Species Council** and **Birdlife Australia** and that in NSW, 14 Councils - including Hornsby Shire Council, Blue mountains and Wollongong City Council supported the introduction of stricter regulations since 2018.

*“Blue Mountains Council Mayor Mark Greenhill said ( NSW) councils had no power when it came to implementing regulations on cat curfews,”*

Nowra group members support Birdlife Australia’s research and other research carried out through the years adding evidence to known facts, the recent publicity and push from NSW Councils shows clearly that now, well into 2024 must be the time to take actions for greater pet cat control than is existing, to ensure full protection for our native birds and wildlife species wherever the pet may be.

#### **(b). the effectiveness of cat containment policies including any barriers**

i While it must be clear cat containment will effectively reduce predation on Australia’s wildlife.

ii Containment of cats would also help in the prevention of the spread of the disease Toxoplasmosis, a disease that can be transmitted to humans and cause ongoing health problems.

Keeping cats on their owners property permanently (24hr curfew) would be a way to ensure safety of their loved pet as well as a solution to losses of wildfire occurring at this time and the threats mentioned.

#### **Barriers**

This could be mostly financial.

A decision to give 12 months for any policy or project to be fully determined with education and financial assistances in place would be positive actions with any council decision to have cat containment laws/policies in place in any shire.

One main barrier seen by APS NSW (Nowra group) would be the necessity to assist some pet cat owners trying to ensure their cat cannot roam.

Also there are pet cat owners who do not believe their pet is a killer and/or the cat should not be contained.

**(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions.**

**Domestic pet cat Safety**

The most positive welfare outcome for cats under contained conditions would be to ensure their safety. Many cats are killed on roads, also attacked by dogs, male cats and other animals.

For many pet cat owners safety would/should be top priority for their pet.

**Threats**

A free roaming cat is susceptible to

- \* cars
- \* dogs
- \* transmission of disease & parasites from native wildlife or other cats
- \* toxins and poison.

**RSPCA Project - Keeping Cats Safe at Home (Indoors) KCSH project.**

APS Nowra group members are also aware of the NSW RSPCA project ‘Keeping Cats Safe at Home Indoors’ (KCSH Indoors) with their Aim to: ‘Encourage cat owners to keep their cats safe at home and reduce cat predation on wildlife’ that was enacted over 2 years ago.

With this project many Councils across NSW applied for \$92,000 to implement actions for local residents to keep their pet cat safe from harm by keeping them indoors. Only 10 Councils were accepted (Shoalhaven included) but their application, to acquire the \$92,000 for the KCSH Indoors project, shows clearly that the free roaming domestic cat is an issue covering many areas of NSW.

The RSPCA project covers all aspects of cat containment, working to assist pet cat owners to keep their beloved pets at home and indoors to ensure not only protection for Australia’s wildlife but the pet cat as well.

<https://www.rspcansw.org.au/keeping-cats-safe/the-at-home-lifestyle/>

**(d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives**

**Education**

Actions carried out by the RSPCA and the other Councils have shown the KCSH project to be positive as less kittens were dropped at Animal Shelters.

RSPCA representatives have spoken at conferences across NSW plus putting into place information on social media and a variety of other actions. Shoalhaven City Council rangers have implemented actions - giving veterinarians pamphlets to get the word out that it was safest for pets and wildlife if the pet was kept indoors.

A targeted, funded desexing project was also part of Shoalhaven Council's input into the KCSH Indoors programme.

## **Inadequate**

While all of these actions are positive it **cannot** be taken as sufficient to stop the many free roaming pet cats from predated on birds and wildlife. Regulations for control must be implemented. Some pet cat owners do not agree that their cat would harm wildlife.

## **Cat Virus' and/or vaccination**

During Nov 2023 the RSPCA (NSW) was no longer accepting cats or kittens due to the shortage of vaccine to control either cat flu or Feline Calicivirus.

This is of concern due to the very real probability that people unable to offload a cat to the RSPCA shelter may then have felt they have no other recourse than to **dump the cat or kitten, once again feeding into feral cat populations.**

## **(e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies.**

### **Shoalhaven City Council.**

On behalf of APS members a requests made to SCC highlighting the need for urgent action to adequately control the domestic (pet) cat within their owners property in Shoalhaven Shire. Controls that will permit a Domestic Cat Policy to include a 24hour cat curfew to ensure the cessation of predation on our wildlife.

Given the recent publicity re pet cats, it seems SCC can still only lobby the NSW Government to urgently review, if necessary, the NSW Companion Animals Act or now in 2024 via this inquiry, for the power to ensure total protection for our Australian wildlife, environment and humans.

Hopefully this power can be given to NSW local government councils to ensure 24hr containment of the domestic (pet) cat on the pet owners property can be legalised in Council's Policies without that review.

Members of the Australian Plants Society NSW (Nowra group) had believed that action could only be formulated with a NSW Govt Review of the Companion Animals Act. It is felt whatever is necessary to give local NSW Councils the power they require to control pet cats within their shire should be implemented.

## **Overarching**

Also given the recent Federal Policy that clearly states the pet cat should be controlled with a 24hr curfew it is believed this policy would be an overarching policy on people of all states including NSW to control their pet cat.

In July 2023 at an Ordinary General Meeting. Shoalhaven City Council considered and Carried a Notice of Motion by Councillor John Kotlash to commit to actions for this issue by communications with NSW Ministers.

**(f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs.**

Again the results of Keeping Cats Safe at Home Indoors Project of the RSPCA NSW could be utilised.

This inquiry would ensure that implementing large scale desexing programs while positive, can never take the place of containment policies for the pet cat. There will always be pet owners who will refuse to desex their animal and who could also permit their pet to roam.

**(g) the impact of potential cat containment measure on the pound system**

Surely this containment could permit local animal pounds to work toward greater efficiency and not cause problems within those local pounds.

**(h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories.**

In some states of Australia control of the domestic cat has been permitted via local council, Western Australia and NSW are the only states of Australia that are not ensuring the domestic cat can be prevented from its predation on wildlife.

The ACT all cats born after July 2022 must be contained on their owners property, meaning all cat regardless of age must be contained.

This would be the way for NSW.

**Background**

In 1996 the NSW Companion Animals Act combined cats and dogs within the one Policy. This Act did not give local councils the ability to act for their own requirements to control the domestic pet cat a fact that remains today.

**Bushfires**

- \* The 2019 bushfires are estimated to have burned over 97,000 sq km of habitat for native species.
- \* Over four billion animals were killed, harmed or displaced including a myriad of native Australian birds.
- \* 17 species of birds have been identified as requiring urgent management action.

***While our wildlife is struggling to survive in our own remnant bushland and unburnt havens, the domestic pet cat is permitted to roam free.***

**Final Summary - Illawarra Mercurys article 9/6/2023**

*Cats have played a leading role in most of Australia's 34 mammal extinctions since 1788 and are central to the ongoing decline of more than 200 threatened native species.*

*Please find attached*

*1) This covering letter (APS Nowra group)*

*2) Copy of the 17th July recommendation on the agenda of the Shoalhaven City Council Ordinary Meeting in response to a request from APS NSW (Nowra group) and Basin Villages Forum - the Community Consultative Body (CCB) for St Georges Basin in the Shoalhaven.*

*3) Attachment from Birdlife Shoalhaven (BLS) Winter 2023 newsletter - an in depth article re the domestic cat and its impacts.*

*Birdlife Australia is Australia's largest bird conservation organisation. For over a century its members have protected birds and their habitats through practical conservation and advocacy based on the best available science.*

*Birdlife Shoalhaven (BLS) is a branch of Birdlife Australia with over 700 members and supporters. As part of the BLS 2023 Auction Plan the commitment is to advocate for birds and habitat conservation locally and alongside Birdlife national campaigns.*

*Note: Rob Dunn CEO of Birdlife Shoalhaven and the members understand the urgency to domestic cat controls. BLS supports these actions. Rob may be contacted*