

Submission
No 88

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

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Management of cat populations in New South Wales

Inquiry into and report on the management of cat populations in New South Wales.

21st November 2024

Dear Committee Members,

The document recommends key actions and considerations for managing domestic and feral cats in NSW:

1. **Terminology and Stakeholder Involvement:** Clarify cat classifications (e.g., feral, domestic, owned, semi-owned) and create a domestic cat committee involving experts like RSPCA, APWF, AVA, AJP, Animals Australia and community cat rescuer groups to guide cat management strategies.

It is absolutely unacceptable to learn that your pet cat, who accidentally got out, has been killed—whether by an individual with malicious intent or by government authorities. No companion animal should suffer or lose its life due to cruelty or negligence, especially when they are simply lost or seeking safety. Such actions are both inhumane and unjust, and it is essential that our communities and policies protect animals from harm, ensuring they are treated with the compassion and respect they deserve.

2. **Legislation Improvements:** It is essential to amend the NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act to better support effective desexing programs and safeguard community cat rescuers from unnecessary legal obstacles. These amendments should ensure that rescuers can continue their vital work without the threat of penalties or accusations related to the care of stray or unowned cats. Additionally, the legislation should include **strong penalties for animal cruelty**, ensuring that individuals who harm or neglect animals face significant legal consequences. This would provide a deterrent against abuse and further reinforce the commitment to animal welfare across the state. These changes would help create a more supportive and protective legal framework for both animals and those working to care for them.
3. **Wildlife Impact & Cat Containment:** Challenge exaggerated claims about cats harming wildlife, call for evidence-based research on the effectiveness of containment policies, and address barriers to implementation, such as housing constraints and lack of acceptance.
4. **Ban the Majority of Cat Breeders and Kitten Farms.** To address the overpopulation of cats and reduce the number of unwanted animals, it is crucial to implement a ban on the majority of commercial and backyard cat breeders and kitten farms. These operations often prioritize profit over the well-being of the animals, leading to poor living conditions and the overproduction of cats. By halting the breeding of cats, we can significantly reduce the number of kittens being born into an already saturated system, where shelters and rescue organizations are struggling to find homes for stray and abandoned animals.
Focusing on adopting and rehoming the thousands of lost and unwanted cats already in the system should be a priority. Many of these cats are healthy, adoptable, and in need of loving homes, yet they are often overlooked in favor of breeding more kittens. By shifting the focus to rehoming and supporting desexing programs, we can start to address the root cause of the problem: the continuous cycle of breeding and abandonment.

Stopping unnecessary breeding would also alleviate pressure on animal shelters, which often face overcrowding, and reduce the need for euthanasia of healthy cats. This, combined with strong desexing programs and community support for responsible pet ownership, would be a significant step toward a sustainable and humane solution to the cat overpopulation crisis. Ultimately, reducing the number of cats born into the system will allow shelters and rescue groups to better manage the animals in their care, giving every cat the chance to find a forever home.

5. **Community Education & Pet Ownership:** Promote cultural education on responsible pet ownership through face-to-face programs, especially targeting vulnerable or culturally diverse communities.
6. **Cat Containment Policy Challenges:** Highlight the challenges councils face in implementing cat containment, including increased nuisance complaints, higher euthanasia rates, and community backlash, emphasizing the need for clear communication and support for rescuers.
7. **Desexing Programs:** Support large-scale desexing programs, including TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return), as effective in controlling cat populations and reducing the burden on councils and shelters.
8. **Pound System & Resources:** Prepare councils for increased demand on pound systems due to roaming and unowned cats, with massive additional resources for rehoming.
9. **Impact of Policies in Other States:** Review the results of mandatory cat containment policies in other Australian states, noting that they often fail to show measurable benefits and increase the workload for community rescuers.
10. **Humane Methods for Feral Cats:** Call for a review of the 2014 NSW feral cat bill, adopting more humane methods like conservation fencing and genetic control, while banning inhumane practices such as 1080 poison.

In summary, the document advocates for evidence-based, humane, and community-focused approaches to cat management, emphasizing responsible pet ownership, large-scale desexing, and the need for clear and supportive policies.

Regards,

Kirsten Darling