

Submission
No 477

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

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

SUBMISSION - 2024 NSW inquiry: "Management of cat populations in New South Wales"

I am a cat rescuer and an executive committee member of an ACNC registered cat rescue charity. I support humane, science-based solutions for cat welfare and wildlife protection in NSW.

Killing cats to protect wildlife hasn't worked before and it won't work now, it's cruel and doesn't solve the problem.

Community cat programs that focus on rehoming, targeted desexing, TNR and community education have proven highly effective at reducing stray cat populations.

These initiatives also ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups (whether they are Approved Rehoming Organisations or ACNC registered cat rescue charities), while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

- 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. 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.

TOR (j) any other related matters

NSW should embrace the cat terms: feral or domestic, and domestic owned, semi owned or unowned. Stray cats are NOT feral cats. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/.../Identifying-Best-Practice...>

I DO NOT SUPPORT THE AUSTRALIAN DRAFT THREAT ABATEMENT PLAN (TAP) FOR PREDATION BY FERAL CATS. The draft TAP proposes to reclassify stray cats under the feral cat class with intentions for ALL STRAY CATS ARE TO BE POISONED, SHOT, TRAPPED AND CULLED LIKE FERAL CATS - this will halt ALL rescue efforts for stray (semi owned/ colony) cats.

1. Stray cats are domestic cats and not feral cats, and stray cats are commonly found in urban or peri urban areas as they have a dependency on humans/people for food either directly (in semi owned colonies or group) or indirectly (e.g. rubbish left behind near takeaways).
2. The draft TAP is not transparent that the feral cat term in the draft TAP refers to both feral cats and the intended stray cat subclass. This is a significant change from the 2015 TAP and should have been explicitly stated.
3. Currently there are few protocols for "destroying" feral cats in a NSW protocol, for which it appears there is no adequate monitoring / verification of humane treatments.

The draft TAP "has started off on the wrong foot by classing stray cats as feral cats. These populations are very different and the solutions are very different... Feral pest species are to be destroyed (not rescued and rehomed). Throughout the draft TAP, wherever the feral cat term is used, the same responses and actions would then appear to apply to stray cats." <https://petwelfare.org.au/response-to-draft-tap/>

<https://www.rspca.org.au/.../feral-cat-plan-targets-the.../>

NSW should establish a domestic cat committee & cat management strategy with domestic cat expert stakeholders, including RSPCA, APWF, AVA, AIAM, & community cat rescuers. Recognise community cat rescuers / carers to include their scope of cats saved and rehomed in estimating resources and funding (not just NSW rehoming organisations).

It is strongly recommended that community cat rescuers are recognised as: 1) their collective efforts save thousands of cats each year across NSW; 2) they complement and relieve the council pound systems, and should receive government funding support; and 3) any future pound assessments for capacity and funding and the management of cat populations must take into account the numbers of cats and kittens for which these volunteers and Good Samaritans are unfairly burdened, and provide care, desexing and rehoming solutions.

Community Cat Rescuers work alongside and take the burden of abandoned domestic cats from council pounds

These rescues may be vet practices, and/or registered charities (with Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission) and registered businesses (with Australian Business Numbers under the Australian Taxation Office). Many are small-home based volunteers. These rescuers take in animals from "the streets", or as surrenders from the public.

It is strongly recommended that community cat rescuers are offered support for free desexing and vaccinations through initiatives such as:

- a) the RSPCA NSW Weddin, Campbelltown and Hornsby councils' initiatives; and

b) with grants for councils and vets who have historically and directly rescued abandoned animals and may then help rescuers with reduced vet charges.

Both the NSW Companion Animal Act and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act require improvements to ensure desexing programs and the efforts of community cat rescuers can proceed without impediments or constraints, e.g. threats of abandoning cats, biodiversity risks not being adequately assessed to specific areas, and CAA clause 32 where a cat may be seized for harming any single animal (other than vermin) which includes pest animals, other introduced animals or native animals where the population is not at risk.

Devastating impact on Community Cat Rescuers when community cats are cruelly culled

The trap and culling/killing approach not only may be seen to be cruel to community cats, it also raises a significant likelihood of having a devastating impact to the community members or community cat rescuers who have been taking care of these cats/ kittens.

It is strongly recommended that the Australian research into the Newcastle breakwater cats culling is taken into consideration for the advice that authorities considering potential legal ramifications based on the devastating impacts to the community cat rescuers which were considered worse than the negative impacts of the cats.

The relationships between the community cat rescuers (cat care givers) has also been researched and shows the significant bond between the rescuers, who were extracting social cats to desex and rehome, and the cats with whom they had invested time, effort and financial resources.

It appears that community cat rescuers / care givers do not so much choose not to be formal owners of the semi owned and unowned cats, it can easily be seen that these rescuers are limited by their own resources and finances to formally take on ownership of many cats abandoned by others.

TOR (a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings

The widely used and often quoted generalised extreme numbers of wildlife impacts should be considered misinformation as based on inappropriate studies with flawed numbers and wildlife populations effects implied rather than investigated. <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../Rand-Myth-cats-Wildlife...>

“...there is no scientific evidence that domestic cats... have any viability or conservation impacts at a population level on native wildlife. Australian population studies have not found a measurable effect” <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../position-statement-on.../>

Evidence-based research is needed that mandated cat containment can achieve objectives for cats and wildlife and if introduced, then effective monitoring provides evidence that the potential negative impacts are eliminated or mitigated. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/.../PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

It's easy to blame cats for the problems we face with wildlife, but the truth is, human actions have a much bigger role in creating these issues. Things like deforestation, clearing land for farming and urban sprawl are 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.

- 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:](#)**
 - *Unsuitable environment:* 413 incidents
 - *Collision with motor vehicles:* 310 incidents
 - *Habitat changes:* 52 incidents
 - *Dog attacks:* 98 incidents
 - *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 collisions.

TOR (b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers

Mandated cat containment is not effective. APWF has findings from a number of Australia councils which show it does not achieve aims and is not cost effective / value for money. <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../australian-pet-welfare.../>

Most cat owners already keep their cats confined, but some face barriers face many cat owners that are unable to contain their cats e.g.: housing limitations on leased properties by landlords, body corporates, and complaints from neighbours; homes do not have air conditioning, nor are owners able to afford air con operating throughout the very long and more humid summers; not being able to afford outdoor cat enclosures; the lack of acceptance of cat enclosures by neighbours putting owned cats at risk in their own backyards; concerns about the welfare of cats as not all accept being in small enclosures, high costs to modify properties, or lack of information.

Mandated cat containment becomes a barrier to those assisting stray cats. It may be interpreted that all roaming cats are "illegal" which may also mean the community members and specifically community cat rescuers are also seen to be "illegally" assisting. This can halt all efforts to save, desex and rehome/ adopt abandoned cats. <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../Inquiry-into-pounds-in-NSW...>

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 especially by those with psychopathic personality traits, with mandatory curfews sometimes leading to unchecked cruelty, as there's often little oversight on trapping practices or what happens to the cats afterward. I have experienced the devastating impact first hand of cats being poisoned and abused/killed.

- Strict [mandated 24/7 cat containment](#) 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.
- For example, the RSPCA's 2018 report shows that councils with containment laws have not seen reductions in cat-related complaints or wandering.
- 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.
- Studies on information from Hobson Bay, Hume, Casey and Yarra Ranges councils has been assessed. It is also recognised that mandated containment also contributes to risks for increased cruelty to cats for stray and pet cats. <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../key-issues-to-consider.../>
- "Animal cruelty is strongly related to violence toward humans" [Psychopathy and animal cruelty offenders - ScienceDirect](#). Providing a government sanctioned policy that supports these individuals with psychopathic personality traits to act out and encourage/"groom" their violent behaviour further is disturbing and a deep concern for the safety of our

community. “Historically, animal cruelty has been considered an isolated issue, but recent research shows a well-documented link that it is a predictive or co-occurring crime with violence against humans (including intimate partners, children, and elders) and is associated with other types of violent offenses” [The Link Between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence – LEB \(fbi.gov\)](#)

TOR (c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions

“...there is growing evidence of environmental contamination from home furnishings and dust affecting cat health... Keeping cats indoors can cause frustration and unwanted behavioral challenges leading to stress and compromised health, especially in multi-cat homes” <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7829302/>

“There are some circumstances under which a cat’s physical and mental needs will not be successfully met in containment due to a range of factors including the presence of other animals, space available, human factors, and ability to modify the property. There are also some cats who are unable to cope with containment... Mandatory 24/7 containment may increase the potential for negative impacts on animal welfare and the community, compared to voluntary implementation of 24/7 containment on an individual basis, by imposing it on people and cats who are not suited or capable of implementing it appropriately” <https://kb.rspca.org.au/.../PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

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

Education and obligations for responsible pet ownership on webpages, brochures, and social media is fairly static and low on engagement levels. Educating communities (across multiple ethnicities/cultures) 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, media campaigns and school programs teaching pet care, the importance of spaying/neutering and safe indoor environments.
- Supporting local initiatives that help manage community cat populations through rehoming programs, targeted desexing and fostering.

It is recommended the NSW government lead, and each council delivers face-to-face cultural education and change management programs to respect and care for companion animals. The councils and their animal management officers (AMOs) may work collaboratively with community cat rescuers and community leaders on solutions for the vulnerable / low incomes and for cultural groups where respect for animals is currently not a priority nor meeting our NSW legal obligations.

“Person-centered and culturally competent policies and programs that focus resources on addressing root causes of pet health and welfare issues as opposed to an emphasis on code enforcement can create more positive, scalable, and sustainable improvements in human, other animal, and environmental health and welfare outcomes.” Punishment to Support: The Need to Align Animal Control Enforcement with the Human Social Justice Movement <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902>

TOR (e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

Implications for councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies include the following (these summary points are supported by 16 evidence-based points from the APWF): escalating cat nuisance and new roaming cat complaints; additional costs, effort and resources to manage a higher number of captured roaming cats; additional monitoring and reporting to be able to measure results, which to date have not provided value for money in several councils who have just basic information; escalating euthanasia rates; traumatic impacts to council and pound staff due to very high rates of euthanasing healthy adoptable animals; traumatic impacts to the communities, community cat rescuers, also care givers, and feeders seeing their cats in colonies decimated by either authorities or cat haters; and taking responsibility for, and managing cat haters falsely interpreting cat containment legislation and regulations to empower themselves to trap and harm/ cull cats with inhuman methods - all state and council communications (and the NSW Companion Animal Act with focus on clause 32, and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act) need to be improved and provide clear interpretation of clauses. <https://petwelfare.org.au/.../key-issues-to-consider.../>

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

Large scale (mass / high intensity) desexing programs for owned, semi owned and unowned cats are supported for their effectiveness in minimising cat populations. This is achieved by significantly limiting the breeding of cats, which also benefits each cat and the communities, and are cost justified in reducing council and pound efforts. Australian examples include: APWF Community Cat Programs in QLD, Banyule Council in Vic, and the KCSAH NSW desexing programs in Weddin, Parramatta, Campbelltown, and Hornsby councils where semi owned cats and community cat rescuers were involved. It is noted that RSPCA SA intends to run a form of TNR, including “Reduce strays taken to shelters by helping community members understand that sometimes cats are better left where they are. Promote the approach of “leave a healthy cat where they are and monitor” to stray cats.”

<https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-faq/>, <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-program-news-2/>

<https://petwelfare.org.au/.../Aust-Community-Cat-Program...>

Banyule Council desexing program <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/11/1615>

<https://weddinlandcare.com.au/milestone-for-keeping-cats...>

KCSAH RSPCA NSW <https://acrobat.adobe.com/.../urn:aaid:sc:AP:4d1d5b58...>

RSPCA KCSAH presentation at AIAM <https://aiam.org.au/page-18158>

<https://www.rspcasa.org.au/cat-plan-explainer/>

TNR with stray cats in Australia <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/7/6/46>

TOR (g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system

It is strongly recommended that council pound systems and resources will need to be significantly increased based on an assessment of the additional needs from the number of: the estimated un-microchipped yet owned cats allowed to roam and b) the domestic semi owned and unowned cats (strays), including funding:

- to support and increase rehoming, and temporary care,
- euthanasia rates and additional resources needed to humanely process higher numbers of unwanted pets, and to ensure council pound staff are supported through compassion fatigue;
- communication with stakeholders and the whole community, including community cat rescuers, care givers, and feeders seeing their cats in colonies decimated who need support through compassion fatigue and potential primary trauma themselves;
- additional effort, information, guidelines and engaging with the community for repressing cat haters trapping and surrendering cats to ensure cats are treated humanely, meeting social licensing and governmental obligations,
- increased administrations, customer service representatives, AMO and Ranger roles for the above.

https://www.researchgate.net/.../272212677_Euthanasia_in...

<https://thewoof.org/.../understanding-euthanasia-in...>

<https://petwelfare.org.au/.../key-issues-to-consider.../>

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

A number of councils in ACT, WA, SA, Vic, Qld have mandated cat containment, but where is the evidence of measured impacts and improvements on wildlife? APWF summarises several councils showing negative outcomes. Even the total ban in Halls Gap for 30 years has no evidence, nor any positive impact on the feral cats. In LGAs where cat containment has been implemented it appears the number of cats being abandoned is not decreasing, and there still remains a need for community cat rescuers who take on the burden of abandoned cats assisting desexing and rehoming, without involving current council pounds.

"Due to the ambiguity surrounding the risks and effectiveness of 24/7 containment, the RSPCA advocates that further research is undertaken to provide evidence of the positive and negative outcomes of cat containment before 24/7 containment can be adequately assessed."

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/.../PP-A8-Cat-Containment-2024.pdf>

<https://petwelfare.org.au/.../key-issues-to-consider.../>

<https://www.abc.net.au/.../mayor-says-halls-gap.../102337372>

TOR (i) options for reducing the feral cat population

It recommended it is timely to review the 2014 NSW bill in relation to feral cats: a) as cat terms need to be more tightly classed in line with the RSPCA 2018 definitions etc, b) new evidence-based science is gathered on feral cats near urban areas (peri-urban areas), c) new evidence-based research is gathered on impacts to wildlife in specific LGAs and locations, and d) communities expecting humane methods for feral cats who most recently were domestic cats and it is difficult to assess if they are generation-old feral cats or recent domestic abandoned cats. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/.../Feral%20cats%20do...>

The use of 1080 poison needs to cease. 1080 is not a humane approach to killing any animal (RSPCA, Animal Liberation, APWF, Animal Justice Party) and was banned in other countries decades ago, the impacts of 1080 include convulsions likened by a vet to be electrocuted for up to 2 days, and it kills many non-targeted native animals. <https://www.al.org.au/ban-1080>

<https://kb.rspca.org.au/.../what-is-the-rspcas-view-on.../>

Conservation fencing areas and "training" zones are supported

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/conservation-fencing.../>

Gene technology for suppressing feral cat breeding is supported

<https://www.australianwildlife.org/.../feral-cat-and-fox...>