

**Submission  
No 500**

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

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I wish to comment on the Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations as a member of the public as I believe that comprehensive policy reforms in cat welfare are required to both protect wildlife and address the issue of homeless cats.

Killing cats to protect wildlife hasn't worked in the past, is cruel and doesn't solve the problem. 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.

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. Cat attacks also account for the least number of wildlife deaths and therefore 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 not just reducing stray cat populations and containing domestic cats.

Legislative reform regarding strict caps on cat breeding with mandatory desexing and proactive local community cat programs that focus on fostering and rehoming, large-scale targeted desexing and community education have been scientifically proven to be more effective at reducing stray cat populations, decreasing nuisance complaints and preventing wildlife predation, and are more humane. Such initiatives ease the burden on councils, shelters and rescue groups, while supporting the well-being of vets, nurses and volunteers involved.

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 reduce stray cat populations without cruelty.

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.

Regarding the issue of cat containment, most responsible cat owners already keep their cats confined, but some face barriers like housing restrictions, high costs to modify properties, or lack of education. Mandatory 24-hour cat curfews often target semi-owned or stray cats, which have no owners to enforce confinement anyway. These curfews can backfire, with some people abandoning cats to avoid fines, adding to the stray population and there is also the potential for abused and neglected cats to be confined without escape. 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. 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.

Accordingly, educating communities and both current and prospective pet owners about responsible pet ownership, discouraging cat breeding and encouraging fostering and rescue cat ownership is essential.

I would like to see the following as part of the recommended solution:-

1. A ban on the sale of animals by breeders (or alternatively, strict caps on breeding numbers), in pet stores and online
2. A ban on kitten farms
3. Continuation of mandatory microchipping
4. Increased public education about the importance of cat desexing, at-home confinement with environment enrichment for mental health, fostering, and adoption
5. Increased state government funding of adoption groups and shelters to better house impounded animals and enhance rehoming efforts
6. Government funding of desexing programmes
7. In cases where it is necessary for the killing of stray cat populations, trapping and euthanasia by a vet with a ban on cruel and inaccurate lethal methods such as shooting and poisoning.

Thank you.