Inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in NSW

AUSTRALIAN PET WELFARE FOUNDATION SUBMISSION

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Improving the health and wellbeing of pets, people and their environments

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About us

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) is a peak research and advocacy organisation for pet welfare in Australia and is not-for-profit. APWF uses **rigorous scientific knowledge and research to enhance community well-being and improve the health and welfare of animals and people.** By adopting a One Welfare approach, our research looks for strategies which balance and optimise the wellbeing of animals, people and their environments. This includes investing in evidence-based solutions to prevent euthanasia of healthy companion animals in shelters and pounds and the associated mental health damage to staff and community residents. We share research knowledge with the community, shelters and pounds, state and local governments and veterinarians to create change and save animal and human lives.

Australian Pet Welfare Foundation is led by Chief Scientist Dr. Jacquie Rand, Emeritus Professor of Companion Animal Health at The University of Queensland (UQ) and a registered specialist veterinarian in small animal internal medicine. She has worked extensively in shelter research over the last 16 years, including collaborative studies with the RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and local governments. While at UQ, **Dr Rand** taught Urban Animal Management and since 2013 **has co-authored over 26 peer-reviewed articles on urban animal management including management of semi-owned and unowned cats.**
You can read more about us and our vision on our website: https://petwelfare.org.au.

Submission: Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an evidence-based submission to the Animal Welfare Committee's inquiry into the Management of Cat Populations in New South Wales (NSW). Cats represent one of the most pressing and persistent management challenges for local governments, animal welfare agencies, animal rescue groups and communities across NSW. This inquiry provides an **opportunity for the NSW Government to be a leader in effective domestic cat management based on a One Welfare approach** that optimises the welfare of animals, humans and their social and physical environments, including protecting wildlife.

Executive Summary

Current situation

Cat intake into council pounds has remained stable over the past decade, unlike dogs where it has decreased, and euthanasia rates for cats in NSW pounds remain significantly higher than for dogs. An average of **32% of cats and kittens received by NSW pounds in 2021—primarily young and healthy animals—were euthanised** (CIE 2022)**.** This equates to one in every three cats entering pounds, which is both alarmingly high and largely preventable. In contrast, only 9% of dogs are euthanised (CIE 2022). In NSW, the worst quartile of council-operated pounds receiving more than 50 cats a year **euthanised between 67% and 100% of intake** (Chua 2023). **Most cats entering pounds are classified as 'stray'**, often originating from **low socioeconomic areas.** The majority of these cats are **less than 1 year of age,** and kittens under six months of age constitute at least 50% of cat intake into shelters and pounds (Zito 2016, Alberthsen 2013, Pet Rescue**). Only 3% of cats are reclaimed from NSW pounds (**Chua 2023, CIE 2022).

Human impact of current cat management methods

The current method of cat management leads to poor animal welfare, and also **negatively impacts the job satisfaction and mental health of the staff involved.** Addressing these issues with effective, humane management practices is essential for the well-being of NSW communities and those working within the pound system and animal shelters (Scotney 2017, Nguyen-Finn 2018, Jacobs 2021, Rogelberg 2007). **Individuals tasked with euthanising healthy and treatable cats and kittens are at higher risk of depression, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse, and suicide** (Scotney 2017, Rohlf 2005). Community members also experience significant negative impacts on human wellbeing **when authorities euthanise stray cats that community members have bonded with and feed, with some carers developing posttraumatic stress** (Scotney 2023).

A way forward for more effective domestic cat management

For NSW to implement effective domestic cat management that improves the wellbeing of animals, people and their environments and protects wildlife, key policies and strategies need to be implemented. Our recommended strategies are:

1. Implement evidence-based **legal definitions of cats**, as recommended by the RSPCA.
2. Support **high-intensity desexing and microchipping initiatives,** targeted to areas with highest cat-related calls to councils and/or impoundments to stop kittens being born.
3. **Reduce obstacles to adoption** by removing cat registration, permits for excess cats and breeder permits and **encourage people caring for cats to take ownership** of semi-owned cats.
4. **Shift to a One Welfare approach to cat management which benefits human and animal welfare and the environment** by encouraging a **Pets for Life** approach and offering practical advice on containment, like bedtime feeding, instead of implementing restrictive and discriminatory mandatory measures. **Where necessary, anti-nuisance and animal welfare legislation can be used to address issues,** rather than compliance-driven methods for cat management, such as mandated containment.

Background

The current approach to managing domestic cats in NSW has not succeeded in reducing their population. The **reactive strategies in use**—such as trap/adopt or kill (where cats not adopted or reclaimed are euthanised), trap/kill, or general culling**—are ineffective.** These approaches lead to **low-level, ad hoc population control that is insufficient to overcome the high reproductive rate** of cats, and result in increased survival of juvenile cats as well as immigration of new cats into the area (Boone 2019, Lazenby 2014). Efforts to reduce the domestic cat population through culling or adoption alone have proven ineffective (Chua 2023, Alley Cats Allies 2024, Boone 2019). This is because **30% to 50% of the stray cat population would need to be trapped and killed every 6 months for at least 10 years** (Boone 2019, which is clearly not economically feasible or acceptable to the community. In comparison, approximately 7% of free-roaming cats are currently trapped in cities and towns across Australia (Chua 2023).

None of these strategies are evidence-based or effective for the long-term reduction of domestic cat populations, as they **fail to address the root cause: the lack of reproductive control among domestic cats.** A fundament change in cat management is urgently needed in NSW, which includes a shift toward strategies that prioritise reproductive management. This is essential to achieving meaningful, lasting reductions in semi-owned and unowned cat numbers across NSW. Evidence shows that preventive strategies aimed at decreasing intake are more effective at reducing costs and euthanasia than strategies focused on increasing adoptions (Marsh 2010). Accordingly, **increasing funding for strategies that reduce intake is strongly recommended, as recognised by the NSW Rehoming Review 2022** (CIE 2022).

Approaches which research have proven to achieve these desired outcomes include **Community Cat Programs (CCPs)** involving **high-intensity cat desexing and microchipping programs targeted to areas** with highest impound rates or cat-related calls, coupled with **assistive programs to help vulnerable people** care for their cats rather than surrender them. These need to be **supported by state legislation and local bylaws** which facilitate effective management of domestic cats rather than presenting barriers to adoption, microchipping and desexing of stray cats.

Current state and local government laws relating to domestic cat management reflect a **lack of understanding of the causes of free-roaming cats** in urban areas and hence effective solutions.

To reduce free-roaming domestic cats, **legislation and policy need to reflect an understanding of the true causes of the problem** and must **pursue solutions that are shown scientifically to be effective.** Messaging is needed to help the community and its leaders understand the underlying issues and support evidence-based legislation and policy. **Messaging that demonizes** cats only **leads to legislation and bylaws** that are **barriers to solving the problem**, such as mandated containment and cat limits.

Our recommended strategies

1. Legal definitions of cats

Appropriate and evidence-based definitions of cats is foundational to ensure the management of cats is focused appropriately. It is imperative that these definitions be revised in NSW legislation to ensure effective policy responses, and management approaches which can be delivered efficiently. The following definitions are adapted from the RSPCA's Best Practice Domestic Cat Management (2018):

- **Domestic cats** have some dependence on people (direct or indirect) and live in the vicinity of where people live or frequent, which includes around farm buildings, mining sites and in indigenous communities, and are subcategorised as owned, semi-owned and unowned. Because domestic cats live in the vicinity of where people live or frequent, they are **a cause of nuisance complaints relating to behaviour around humans.**

Domestic cats may be:
  - **owned**, live in a domestic household, are usually named, have a form of identification, and depend on humans for their food.
  - **semi-owned,** are directly dependent on humans and are intentionally fed by people who do not consider they own them. These cats are more abundant in **disadvantaged areas** and where food resources are available. They are **sometimes called stray cats.** Recent research documented **strong emotional bonds** of semi-owners with the cats they care for, and almost identical to the bonds reported by cat owners with their pet cats (Scotney 2023; Neal 2023; Ma 2023; Crawford 2023). These cats are also frequently named (Scotney 2023; ; Crawford 2023
  - **unowned,** are indirectly dependent on humans and receive food from people unintentionally, such as via food waste bins. They are more abundant in areas where food resources are available. These cats are of varying sociability and are sometimes called stray cats.

- **Feral cats** have no relationship with or dependence on humans (neither direct nor indirect), survive by hunting or scavenging for food, and live and reproduce in the wild (e.g., forests, woodlands, grasslands, deserts). Feral cats do not live in the vicinity of where people live, and they do not receive food from humans intentionally (direct feeding) or unintentionally (e.g. via food waste bins, rubbish dumps). Feral cats are not found or trapped in the vicinity of where people live or frequent and are **not the subject of nuisance complaints relating to behaviour around humans.**

Misclassifying domestic cats, including semi-owned cats, as feral cats creates barriers to effective management and resolution of the issue of free-roaming cats in urban and peri-urban areas. To allow for successful, community-based management strategies, **domestic cats should be excluded from the legal definition of feral cats.** This distinction would enable targeted programs that humanely and scientifically reduce the number of urban free-roaming cats over time, and reduce the negative psychological impact on shelter and pound staff as well as community members who support and care for them when inhumane, and ineffective methods are used to manage these cats.

Importantly, **behaviour towards humans is an invalid test of whether a cat is feral or domestic**. Despite this, many local governments and some shelters misclassify cats as feral based on behaviour in the trap cage or shortly after admission and euthanise them immediately or within the first 24 hours.

Cats trapped as a result of a complaint about nuisance behaviours are, by definition, domestic cats because a complaint implies the cat is living around where humans live or frequent. Sociability and adoptability cannot be judged in a highly stressful environment, such as in a trap cage; frightened pet cats may display more aggressive behaviours towards humans than truly feral cats (Slater 2013; Jacobson 2022). A minimum of 3 to 5 days, and up to 14 days or longer, are required for many pet cats to habituate to a new environment and for accurate assessment of sociability

Recommendation 1.1: **Cats should be categorised based on how and where they live.** Accordingly, we recommend that cats should be recognised as feral or domestic, consistent with the RSPCA's Best Practice Domestic Cat Management (2018). In this regard, cats who live in and around where humans live or frequent should not be considered feral cats but classed as domestic cats and may be owned, semi-owned or unowned. This approach is based in contemporary evidence and research demonstrating close bonds between cats and the people who care for them.

Recommendation 1.2: We recommend that the Government ensures that sufficient funding and support is guaranteed to facilitate a coordinated approach to domestic cat management across NSW, with strategies aligned to evidence-based definitions. This should include the development of a **Domestic Cat Management Plan, based on contemporary research** and consultation with **recognised experts in domestic cat management,** and consultation with rescue group representatives.

Recommendation 1.3: **Management options** need to **align with a One Welfare philosophy** and protect the environment while avoiding increasing the number of healthy and treatable cats and kittens killed by veterinary staff in shelters, pounds and veterinary clinics with council contracts**.**

2. High intensity desexing initiatives

This is critically important to address the number of free-roaming domestic cats, because more than 50% of cats entering shelters and pounds in Australia were born in the last 6 months (Albertson 2016; Kerr 2018), and recent modelling from the UK found that owned cats are the substantial contributor to domestic cat populations (McDonald 2023). Australian research suggests that in areas of high cat impoundments and cat-related calls to councils, **owned cats and semi-owned cats contribute similarly to number of kittens being born** (Rand 2024a). Programs for free and highly subsidized cat registration, microchipping and **desexing for owned cats,** especially in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage are essential. However, **stopping litters from semi-owned and unowned cats is also essential.**

Semi-owners

Most carers of 1 to 3 stray cats will take ownership if free cat registration, microchipping and desexing for the cats is made available. As approximately 50% of semi-owners also own a cat (Zito 2015; Rand unpublished data), these semi-owners of 1 to 3 cats are willing to take ownership provided excess cat permits and mandated containment are not required. **These are barriers to adoption of stray cats.**

Multi-cat sites (colonies)

For semi-owned and unowned cats at sites with multiple cats (colonies), management involves working with the carers and **trapping, desexing and then returning semi-owned cats to their carer to continue to support them** (TNR). As soon as possible, friendly cats and kittens are transferred to rescuers, foster carers or permanent homes, or to other larger rescue groups and rehoming organisations, or even to groups intrastate or interstate if they have capacity. Priority is generally given to highly sociable cats, heavily pregnant cats, kittens, and sight or hearing impaired cats. Cats with significant injuries or other health issues affecting their welfare such as severe dental disease should be a priority for veterinary care. Caretakers typically provide food twice daily, shelter and monitoring of the cats. **When done strategically and sustainably, these programs stabilise and reduce populations over time** (Swarbrick 2018; Tan 2017; Levy 2014; Boone 2019, Rand 2024b).

Cats getting food inadvertently from humans such as a waste food source (**unowned domestic cats) are rare** (International Cat Care 2024; Rand 2024b), but when these sites are identified, cats should be **desexed, ear-tipped, microchipped and a carer organised** to provide food and monitoring of their health. When foster or permanent homes are available, kittens and friendly adults are placed for adoption.

Rescue groups or individuals may manage and care for varying numbers of cats across multiple locations. They may provide foster care at their homes and generally have a network of contacts to transfer cats for adoption. **Rescue groups and individuals** may not be approved rehoming organisations but make a **valuable contribution to domestic cat management by assisting with desexing and finding homes for many cats and kittens**.

Community Cat Programs

Community Cat Programs involve **high-intensity free desexing, microchipping and registration of owned, semi-owned and unowned cats targeted to areas of high cat intake and complaints**, combined with **assisting vulnerable people to keep their cats**. Community Cat Programs are proven to be very **effective at reducing shelter and pound cat intake and euthanasia, complaints and costs** (Cotterell 2024; Rand 2024b, RSPCA NSW Report 2023)**.** Community Cat Programs are also very effective at **assisting semi-owners to desex and adopt the domestic cats** they are feeding and continue to feed and care for their cat, significantly reducing the number of unwanted kittens born. Semi-owners represent a large pool of **potential cat adopters, particularly for shy and timid cats**, and are integral to resolving the domestic cat issue and associated high intake and high euthanasia rates of cats in pounds and shelters. Community Cat Programs proactively manage domestic cats in the community, **keeping cats with their owners and carers**. Because they **are non-lethal**, they **do not cause devastating mental health impacts to pound and shelter staff** or community members, consistent with a One Welfare approach which optimises the well-being of people, animals and their environment.

Numbers of cats requiring to be desexed to get measurable decreases in cat impoundments and euthanasia within 3 to 4 years.

If the desexing and microchipping program is available to all cats in targeted suburbs with high cat admissions of domestic cats or high cat-related calls to council, approximately 30 cats/1000 residents need to be desexed for 3 to 4 years and at lower numbers thereafter. However, if the program is **microtargeted within the target areas to cats at most of risk of impoundment and euthanasia and kitten surrender, then 5 to 10 cats/1000 residents per year** can be desexed to get a measurable improvement. This **requires commitment by animal management officers** (AMOs) to community engagement and an **assistive approach** to identify the owners and cat carers who are most requiring assistance. Without AMO involvement, community engagement officers will need to be employed to provide this microtargeted approach.

If the average cost for a male or female cat can be **negotiated to $150/cat, then the cost would be approximately $1.50 per resident per year** including microchipping, with the microchips provided by the state government. This cost estimate is assuming that desexing is **targeted to suburbs** with highest cat impoundments or cat-related calls to council and ***also* microtargeted within those areas** to locations most likely to result in cats being surrendered or impounded and surrendered kittens, If it is targeted to the suburb with highest cat impoundments**, but not also microtargeted** within the suburb, then the cost would be in the order of **$4.50 per resident per year**. **These costs do not include** the administration **costs for booking cats** in for surgery, and where required, **trapping and/or transporting** cats for owners and semi-owners needing assistance (usually semi-owners with multiple cats) and residents without a car, nor the **costs of community liaison officers** if AMOs are not involved in providing community engagement. It also does not include **marketing** of the program to residents most in need of assistance, **nor registration costs for cats.**

It is recommended that **local governments and animal welfare organisations** be funded to start **pilot programs** in areas with greatest impoundments, cat-related calls and/or wildlife of conservation concern. These programs will be most effective when AMOs are fully engaged in assisting and the program is in collaboration with welfare agencies and/or rescue groups. Access to affordable veterinary services will be a limiting factor, in addition to budget limitations. For example, **in a suburb of 10,000 residents, yearly funding of $15,000 for three to four years would be required for desexing costs,** assuming **microtargeting to "hot-spots"** and **veterinary costs were limited to $150 per cat.** To get a measurable decrease in cat intake, **100 cats would require to be desexed each year for 3 to 4** years and lesser numbers thereafter.

Because in most areas it is not possible to get 100% desexing rates for female cats, and there is mobility in the housing market within a region, with a proportion of new tenants and homeowners arriving each year, cat management based on **desexing needs to be long-term, but the costs will decrease over time** if it has initially sufficient intensity.

Desexing Capacity

There is **currently insufficient high-volume desexing capacity in NSW to** address the problem areas effectively, and achieve measurable reductions in cat intake and euthanasia rates across the state

within 3-5 years. Investment from **key stakeholders, including the federal and state governments** and **animal welfare agencies**, is essential to **establish high-volume desexing clinics operated by welfare organizations, veterinary schools, and private entities.** Additionally, **funding should be allocated to veterinary schools** to **train graduates in high-volume desexing techniques**, increasing capacity and reducing the cost per procedure. The new veterinary school at the Lismore campus of Southern Cross University presents a valuable opportunity to incorporate high-volume desexing training into its curriculum while providing a critical service to the region to help manage cat populations effectively. Graduating students with confidence and competence in surgery as a result of **training in high-volume desexing surgeries helps build resilience** in veterinarians, and would be expected to reduce losses in the profession after graduation, a major contributor to the veterinary shortage.

Desexing programs for farm cats

Farmers often **value having farm-cats due to their efficiency in pest control and associated monetary savings**, because uncontrolled rodent populations have a detrimental impact on farms (Crawford et al, unpublished 2024 a). However, farmers' options for managing cat populations are often limited to lethal methods because of financial constraints. **Lethal methods to manage these cats had a negative impact on farmers' wellbeing, and therefore their management of the farm-cat population is usually inadequate to stop overbreeding** (Crawford et al, unpublished 2024b). Farmers struggled to cover the cost of cat care, however, particularly costs like desexing and vaccination, necessary to stop cat over-population, enhance cat welfare and protect native wildlife from disease, especially toxoplasmosis. Farmers strongly supported a farm-cat desexing program that was no cost to them, because it reduced the cat population and their impact on wildlife, improved cat behaviour and welfare and benefited farmers. Recognizing the value of working-cats to farmers, and allowing their **care to be tax deductible**, would **facilitate farmers to provide care such as desexing**, vaccination and food, improve farmers' wellbeing and cat welfare whilst **reducing cats' impact on wildlife** (Crawford et al, unpublished 2024 b). Funding should be provided for desexing programs to reduce farm-cat populations and their impact on wildlife, improve animal and farmer wellbeing and support farmers who value cats for rodent control and companionship (Crawford et al, unpublished 2024 a, b). **All relevant stakeholders including federal and state governments, relevant industry groups, animal welfare agencies and conservation agencies should be engaged** to support this initiative. Once the farm-cat populations are controlled by initial externally funded programs, if veterinary costs are tax-deductible for working cats, then farmers would likely be able to prevent the population from rebounding.

Recommendation 2.1: The Government should provide **long-term funding to local governments, welfare agencies, and rescue groups** to offer **free desexing** for owned, semi-owned, and unowned cats in target areas with high cat admissions or significant cat-related calls to councils. This funding should initially be for pilot programs to ensure sufficient resources are available to desex enough cats to achieve measurable reductions in cat intake, euthanasia, and cat-related complaints in the target area, and as experience grows, be expanded to larger areas.

Recommendation 2.2: Funding should include specific support for desexing programs in indigenous communities

Recommendation 2.3: **Legislation be changed** to allow semi-owned and unowned cats to be desexed and returned home to an identified caretaker/s and rescuers who will provide food daily, shelter and monitor the cats. This approach reduces the reproduction of stray cats, **stabilises cat populations, and mitigates problems** associated with free-roaming undesexed cats (e.g., nuisance behaviours and public complaints). By formalizing caretakers' roles, the welfare of these cats is improved, and the burden on shelters and local governments is alleviated.

Recommendation 2.4: **Legislation be changed to allow impounded cats** which are unclaimed and are healthy, but fearful and timid and therefore unlikely to be adopted, to be **desexed, microchipped and returned to their home location** on the premise that if they are in good body condition, someone is feeding them (Return to field, RTF). This is **life-saving**, not only for the cats, but also **for the shelter staff** who would otherwise be **tasked with killing them**, often after they have worked with the cats for weeks to socialise them.

Recommendation 2.5: **Expand high-volume desexing in NSW by funding clinics** through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private entities. Support veterinary schools, including the **new Lismore campus of Southern Cross University,** to train graduates in high-volume desexing and provide regional access to affordable cat desexing services.

Recommendation 2.6: **Funding for desexing farm cats** should be allocated by relevant stakeholders to reduce risk to wildlife and improve animal welfare and farmer wellbeing.

3. Reduce obstacles to adoption and encourage people caring for cats to take ownership

Legislation should be designed to achieve desired outcomes, such as fewer free-roaming cats causing a nuisance and less predation by cats on wildlife. When it comes to cat management, laws that unfairly disadvantage low-income households to the point they cannot comply are self-defeating. Without compliance from all community members, cats will continue to reproduce, roam without restriction, and cause whatever ills the legislation seeks to abate.

a. Cat Containment

There is a belief that free-roaming cats are mainly the result of irresponsible cat owners, and therefore the issue needs to be managed by legislation and its enforcement. However, for enforcement to be effective, there must be an identifiable owner, and the reality is that most free-roaming cats in urban areas live in low socioeconomic areas where the costs of registration, microchipping and cat-proof fencing are often too prohibitive for cat owners and semi-owners to comply with.

> **Mandating containment is not effective** in increasing cat containment. It also leads to unrealistic expectations in the community that they will not see a wandering cat, resulting in increased cat-related complaints. When implemented, **mandated containment increases cat-related complaints, cat impoundments, cat euthanasia, and costs to local governments and shelters** [Yarra Ranges, Hobsons Bay, Casey Council).(Further information Page 23 The effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers**)**

The numbers of **free-roaming cats are greatest in low socioeconomic areas**. Incomes in these areas are below the Australian average, a larger proportion of residents **live in rental accommodation** and a higher proportion of households have **rent repayments greater than 30% of household income** (Rand 2024a; b; Dutton-Regester 2024, Cotterell 2024). Cat containment systems often cost between A$700 and A$2000 or higher, making it highly unlikely a low-income household can afford one if it is needed. For example, in a suburb with a cat intake into the local shelters of in excess of 20 cats/1000 residents (average for Queensland is 7 cats/1000 residents), individual median weekly income was approximately A$636/week (Rand 2024b). Because of lack of affordability, **mandated containment is a barrier to semi-owners taking ownership of a domestic cat, and effectively makes cat ownership illegal for many low-income owners, perpetuating the "it's not my cat" response.**

Cat containment should be encouraged and facilitated, but not mandated. Owners can be messaged to provide their cats with a **last "bed-time" meal indoors**. At little or no cost to the owner, this method trains the cat to come inside at night when the door out-side can then be closed. Night-time containment is effective in protecting wildlife of conservation concern susceptible to cat predation because most are nocturnal in urban areas of Australia (NSW Govt 2023). Other options include **assisting cat owners with the construction or costs of cat-proof fencing** or enclosures. Electronic fencing (hidden fencing) may be less expensive for some properties. It is not subject to restrictions for modifying rental properties, and key components can be relocated to another property. It can also be used around doors or windows to stop "door dasher" cats escaping. If used correctly, electronic fencing is not associated with welfare issues [Kasbaoui 2016)

Recommendation 3.a.1: **Do not have mandated containment** legislation because it makes cat ownership illegal for disadvantaged families and is a **barrier** to semi-owners adopting stray cats. **Instead encourage containment on the owner's property and provide information about simple inexpensive ways to contain a cat**, including bedtime feeding.

Recommendation 3.a.2: **Utilise anti-nuisance laws, not mandated containment** legislation to manage cat-related issues.

Recommendation 3.a.2: Government should **fund containment programs where there are native species of conservation concern** susceptible to cat predation, and prioritise support for low socioeconomic areas.

b. Cat registration

In Queensland, legislation only requires microchipping of cats. Mandatory registration (licensing) of cats was repealed in 2013 "to deliver the greatest net benefit to stakeholders, as it yields the greatest potential red tape reduction, and cost savings to local governments and cat owners, without compromising reunification outcomes and euthanasia rates" (Atfield 2013, Qld Government).

In NSW, the registration and breeder-permit fees are cost barriers to taking ownership. If a domestic cat is acquired that is older than 4 months and is not desexed, there is an annual permit fee payable ($96) as well as life-time registration ($69) These fees apply even if the cat was desexed,

microchipped, and registered immediately at, or soon after, acquisition (NSW Government 2024 a, b.) In NSW**, return to owner rates are almost half those in Victoria and Queensland (3% versus 7%)** (Chua 2023). This might reflect that the state microchip register can be used to identify cat owners who have not paid for registration, creating a financial disincentive to microchipping.

In NSW, costs to local governments for managing cats, not including administration costs for registration, are approximately 7 to 10 times the income to the state government from registration fees (NSW Gov. Pet Registration Fees 2024). Therefore, it makes little fiscal sense to create cost barriers which discourage cat owners from microchipping and thereby reduce return to owner rates. It is recommended instead that mandatory registration be abolished and microchipping made affordable and included with free or affordable desexing. The **effectiveness of microchips for facilitating reuniting cats** with their owners can be increased by sending **regular SMS messages or email messages** reminding owners to **update contact details** if they have changed (CIE 2022).

Recommendation 3.b.1: **Remove cat registration and breeder permits for cats over 4 months of age being desexed and registered** because it is a barrier to desexing and microchipping and increases the cost of desexing programs.

Recommendation 3.b.2: Instead of registration, increase **microchipping rates by including microchipping in Community Cat Programs** and optimise **currency of owner contact information** for increasing rehoming rates through regular SMA and emails.

c. Cat limits and excess cat permits

Cat limits (typically 2–4 per household) and the costly permits required to exceed these limits should be abolished. There is no scientific evidence published that demonstrates that a higher number of cats owned by a household correlates to a higher volume of nuisance calls or public health issues (Rand 2024b). In fact, an irresponsible owner of one cat may generate more complaints than a responsible owner of ten. Any enforcement concerns should focus on the impact of owned cats, not the number of them. **Existing laws prohibiting creating a nuisance or a public health hazard are adequate,** and cat limits are unnecessary. Moreover, cat limits and costly permits will not necessarily stop residents from feeding and maintaining “excess” cats, but may well **deter them from ever taking full ownership.**

If the goal is to reduce the overall cat population in the community, this will be achieved more effectively by providing residents with free or affordable desexing and microchipping of the cats they are caring for. Owners or semi-owners with multiple cats often need support from local governments and animal welfare agencies, not only for cat desexing, but also with transporting the cats for desexing and provision of carriers. **Once this assistance is available, people with multiple cats will feel they can safely ask for help**. In this way, rebound in cat numbers and associated nuisance issues for neighbours can be prevented before they develop.

Recommendation 3.c.1: **Remove cat limits and excess cat permits** and instead **utilise anti-nuisance and animal welfare laws,** where necessary.

d. Mandatory desexing

A mandate that cannot be met as a practical matter will never achieve the goal of the requirement. From a public policy perspective, there is little point in requiring owners to desex their cats if they cannot afford to do so. **All that is created is another disincentive to taking ownership**. With costs at a private veterinarian for desexing and microchipping a female cat ranging on average from $300 to $500, most low-income residents and even many middle-income community members cannot afford cat desexing, especially if there are multiple cats involved. **The cost of desexing is the number one barrier, and household income is the strongest predictor of a cat being desexed** (Chu 2009; Benka 2016).

Mandatory desexing, especially if it is new legislation, is costly for state governments to implement and for local government animal management teams to enforce. A free-roaming cat suspected of not being desexed must be trapped first, then checked for identification. Cats without identification will likely be impounded, incurring **further costs for local governments.**

Instead of mandated desexing and fines for non-compliance, it is **highly recommended free and affordable desexing be provided by local governments** and **animal welfare agencies**. State governments should provide financial incentives to local governments to provide this necessary service, in collaboration with welfare agencies and rescue groups, particularly to residents on low incomes or who are feeding stray cats. Most semi-owners will take full ownership of the stray cats they are feeding, registering their details on the cat's microchip and registration databases if offered free cat desexing and microchipping as part of Community Cat Programs (Rand 2024b; Cotterell 2024) **More cats desexed means fewer free-roaming cats and fewer nuisance or predation issues.**

Desexing of cats should be budgeted for by state and local governments, and areas targeted with high cat impoundments or cat-related complaints. Semi-owners need to be assisted, including those unable to assume full ownership. Return to field of impounded, healthy cats that are unlikely to be adopted because they are timid and fearful of humans should be legalised to protect human wellbeing. **These changes are crucial if cat overpopulation is to be effectively managed and to alleviate the severe negative mental health effects experienced by shelter and local government staff.** These result from inappropriate legislation and enforcement leading to euthanasia of large numbers of healthy cats and kittens. **Ultimately fewer free-roaming cats will also benefit native wildlife.**

Recommendation 3.d.1: **Do not mandate cat desexing** and instead provide **affordable and free desexing** of cats in areas with high numbers of kittens being surrendered and cat-related issues.

e. Cat-Free Suburbs

We strongly disagree with creating cat-free suburbs because **research has shown cat-free suburbs have no benefit in protecting wildlife (Lilith 2010)** and that **habitat quality is more important** (Lilith 2010; Grayson 2007). It also denies residents and their families the benefit from the emotional bond with a cat, while not restricting ownership of **dogs, which are consistently shown to attack substantially more wildlife of conservation concern than cats** (NSW Government Dashboard (2021).

A more balanced approach would involve **assisting cat owners with low-cost or free containment** systems in areas of threatened and endangered wildlife. In addition, **require residential developers in new housing areas** adjacent to wildlife species of conservation concern to provide cat-proof fencing for properties or erect effective barrier fencing around these areas. Research highlights that **habitat quality** has a **measurable impact on wildlife population density and diversity.** This is in contrast to **no measurable impact of cats** being detected in urban areas on birds or mammals. Therefore, the frequent **practice of clear-felling vegetation in areas of new housing** or industrial developments **should cease** and a more targeted approach be implemented which retains as much wildlife habit as possible.

Recommendation 3.e.1: **Do not create cat free suburbs** because research has shown that there is **no benefit to wildlife**, and it denies individuals and families the **well-being benefits of cat ownership**

4. Shifting to a One Welfare approach

For cat management in NSW **to effectively reduce the number of free-roaming cats** in urban and peri-urban areas over time, humane and sustainable methods of managing free-roaming cat populations need to be embraced that are **aligned with a One Welfare approach which aims to optimize the wellbeing of humans, animals, and their environments.**

The cost of companion animal management in NSW by local governments is estimated to be approximately $43m annually, which only covers the costs to local governments, including costs for pounds, AMOs and programs (CIE 2022). There are additional costs to rehoming organisations and animal welfare organisations. However, **the expenditure on cat management is ineffective because intake of cats and cat-related complaints to councils are not decreasing.**

Animal Management Officers in NSW receive limited training regarding cat management, including **assessing cat behaviour**, and while some local governments actively enforce management of nuisance and wandering cats in their communities, many do not impound domestic cats or record cat-related complaints in their daily responsibilities, **highlighting a gap in addressing issues** involving cats. An **example of training for AMOs** is the **National Animal Care and Control Association in USA,** who provide animal control-specific qualifications, including mental health first aid, so AMOs can be prepared and succeed in their jobs (NACCA 2024).

Management of cat containment and nuisance issues by local government AMOs should be first based on an assistive approach, and enforcement only used if there is no resolution of the issues. For example, if a cat-related complaint is made, it may be resolved simply by asking neighbours and door-knocking or using flyers to find the owner or carer, and providing free cat desexing and microchipping which reduces the cat's desire to wander searching for undesexed females. If the problem remains, the solution may lie in assisting with fencing or screens for windows, or cat deterrents like motion-activated water-sprays for the affected resident's property. Individually or combined, in most cases, **these assistive approaches resolve most nuisance issues.**

The current reactive, punishment-based model of domestic animal management should be replaced with a proactive, support-based model **aligned with a One Welfare approach** to achieve cost savings and better outcomes.

Pets for Life Strategies

The challenges faced by pounds and shelters in managing cat intake, reducing euthanasia rates, and minimising operational costs highlight the need for proactive, community-focused solutions. **By addressing the root causes of pet relinquishment** and providing **targeted support to pet owners,** many animals can be kept in their homes rather than entering the shelter and pound system. This not only benefits the animals but also reduces the financial burden on shelters and pounds.

Keeping pets with their owners is a **cost-effective strategy** because the **primary cost driver for** pounds and shelters is the **expense of holding animals in facilities**. **Preventative strategies**, such as **'Pets for Life,' which support cat owners in keeping their pets rather than surrendering** them to pounds or shelters, are strongly recommended alongside Community Cat Programs (HSUS 2012; HSUS 2024). These initiatives reduce intake, lower euthanasia rates, and decrease operational costs for pounds and shelters (Rand 2024b, Cotterell 2024, RSPCA NSW 2023;).

Pets for Life strategies should include funding to assist **disadvantaged pet owners by assisting** with **expenses** for veterinary care, pet registration, microchipping, cat fencing to prevent straying, pet food, and guidance on managing behavioural issues. Additionally, lost **cats should be returned to identified owners promptly**, with options for flexible payment plans for any impoundment fines and fees, rather than holding the animal until payments are made. This proactive approach, as opposed to requiring owners to pay fines upfront, can help reduce euthanasia rates for healthy, treatable animals and decrease overall costs to local governments.

Recommendation 4.1: It is recommended that **all new AMOs undergo training** in community engagement and effective strategies for public participation that are **aligned with a One Welfare approach**.

Recommendation 4.2: **Certification courses** should also be developed by the NSW state government and this training should be provided for all existing and prospective AMOs.

Recommendation 4.3: **Management of cat containment and nuisance issues** by local government AMOs should be first **based on an assistive approach,** and enforcement only used if there is no resolution of the issues.

Recommendation 4.4: The NSW government, local governments and animal welfare agencies should **adopt and fund Pets for Life strategies** to reduce shelter intake, euthanasia, and costs by supporting disadvantaged pet owners with assistance with costs for veterinary care, microchipping, containment, and food. Implement flexible payment options or waiving of fines to ensure pets stay in homes and reduce shelter burdens.

Appendix: Addressing the Terms of Reference in detail

(a) The impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings.

While the impact of feral cats on Australian native wildlife populations in natural environments is well-documented, **there is no scientific evidence that domestic cats (cats that live in the vicinity of people), have any viability or conservation impacts at a population level on native wildlife**. In fact, Australian population studies have not found a measurable effect of domestic cats on native wildlife (Barratt 1998, Grayson 2007, Lilith 2010, Maclagan 2018). An ongoing issue is that feral cat impacts are often wrongly attributed to domestic cats, even though these are two distinct and geographically separate populations of cats with different behaviour and ecology. In addition, the estimates of pet and stray cat predation of wildlife are based on flawed theoretical calculations that assume all pet cats predate similarly, even if contained inside, and that stray cats being fed by people predate similarly to cats in rubbish dumps in small rural towns or in parks with bushland (Woinarski 2017, Coman 1972).

Australian research findings

Australian studies were unable to detect a measurable impact in urban areas of domestic cats on native mammals (Maclagan 2018, Lilith 2010), or birds (Barratt 1998, Grayson 2007), but found that **vegetation quality, housing density, distance from bushland and size of bushland were significant factors** (summarised below). Other studies demonstrate the positive impact cat predation has by reducing the numbers of rats that predate bird nests (Matthews 1999).

Importantly, the **NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Government Dashboard (2021) shows that in 2019-20, 402 threatened species were reportedly rescued as a result of loss of habitat, 290 as a result of collisions with motor vehicles, 127 as a result of dog attacks and 31 because of cat attacks.** Additionally, domestic cats that are obtaining food intentionally or unintentionally from humans predate significantly fewer animals than feral cats, which have to hunt to supply all their nutritional needs (Murphy 2019, Woinarski 2017).

The following section summarises the Australian studies investigating the association between cats in urban areas and wildlife populations. **Collectively, these findings from Australian research studies do not demonstrate a negative effect of cats on native wildlife population**, in contrast with the well-documented adverse effects of feral cats on native wildlife populations in undisturbed natural environments.

Study 1: Do cat restrictions lead to increased species diversity or abundance of small and medium-sized mammals in remnant urban bushland? City of Armadale WA (Lilith 2010)

This Australian study analysed cat regulations enacted within differing suburbs, to test the hypotheses that the species diversity (measured by the Shannon-Weiner index) and abundance of small and medium-sized mammals should be higher in native bushland within or adjacent to subdivisions where cats are restricted, compared to similar areas where cats are not restricted. There were three different cat regulation regimes at the three different experimental sites, and these were compared and assessed for impact on native mammals:

- **no-cat zone** (strict prohibition of cat ownership)
- compulsory bells on cats and **night curfew of cats,**
- **no cat-related regulations**

These different cat regulations were in place for approximately 10 years prior to the study. The researchers also measured structural and floristic features of the vegetation at each site that might influence the species diversity and abundance of small and medium-sized mammals, either independently, or interactively with cat activity.

Findings:

- **No significant differences in species diversity were found across the sites** and KTBA (known -to-be-alive) statistics for Brushtail Possums and Southern Brown Bandicoots, the two most abundant medium-sized mammals present, were similar across all sites.
- The smaller mardo (**Antechinus** flavipes), which the authors suggested could be regarded as the most susceptible to cat predation of all the native species trapped because of its size, was trapped **mostly at an unregulated cat site.**
- **Total mammals** trapped **at the unregulated cat sites exceeded those caught at the two sites with restrictions**, but these unregulated sites also had significantly denser vegetation.

Conclusion: The authors concluded that **pet cats did not negatively impact the species diversity or abundance of small and medium-sized mammals** at these sites and that vegetation characteristics are likely more important. In addition**, cat related by-laws, including prohibition of cat ownership, had no measurable benefits on wildlife**.

Study 2: Species richness and community composition of passerine birds in suburban Perth: is predation by pet cats the most important factor? Perth WA (Grayson 2007)

This study was conducted across 57 sites in metropolitan Perth. The researchers investigated factors affecting passerine bird community composition. Bird data were collected at each site, and a questionnaire distributed to surrounding neighbours to determine cat and dog density.

Findings:

- **No link was found between cat or dog density and passerine bird species richness** (abundance and diversity).
- However, a **negative correlation was found between richness of bird species and both housing density and increasing distance from bushland** (and decreasing size of bushland).

Conclusion: These findings led the authors to conclude that habitat destruction and degradation were the critical factors affecting richness of bird species, rather than cats or dogs.

Study 3: Do Pet Cats Deserve the Disproportionate Blame for Wildlife Predation Compared to Pet Dogs? NSW, Queensland and Victoria (Franklin 2021)

This Australian study analysed pet cat and dog predation and challenges longstanding assumptions and beliefs about the impacts of pet cats on native wildlife.

Findings:

- Not all pet cats were observed to catch prey which concurs with previous research. Of the pets observed to catch prey, the median numbers of native animals caught per dog or cat over 6 months were actually low (3 native animals per cat that predated).
- Only a very small minority of cats were prolific hunters countering common claims that all cats are efficient and prolific hunters that kill many animals. This finding also potentially invalidates often-used calculations estimating the number of native animals predated by pet cats.
- Most prey animals in the study were common native or introduced species suggesting that cats may not be having a significant negative effect on these populations.

Conclusion: The authors stated that, as others have concluded, **hunting by domestic dogs and cats appears to be of relatively minor conservation concern compared with issues such as habitat loss and urban development.** Therefore, efforts directed at habitat preservation are likely to be the most effective strategy to protect wildlife, as opposed to pet control regulations.

Study 4: Don't judge habitat on its novelty: Assessing the value of novel habitats for an endangered mammal in a peri-urban landscape. Melbourne Victoria (Maclagan 2018)

Novel ecosystems are increasingly common across the world, particularly in areas heavily impacted by people such as urban and peri-urban landscapes. As a result, interest in their potential contribution to biodiversity conservation is increasing, including their ability to sustain populations of threatened species. Few studies have explored whether novel habitats can support viable populations over time and how they compare to less modified, remnant habitats.

This Australian study investigated the capacity for novel habitats to support an endangered mammal, the southern brown bandicoot (Isoodon obesulus obesulus: Peramelidae), in a highly

modified landscape near Melbourne. The study compared bandicoot abundance and body condition between five novel sites that were highly modified by human development, and two remnant sites that were bushland reserves, and examined whether novel sites support residency and key demographic processes necessary for bandicoot population persistence.

Findings:

- **Bandicoot abundance was higher at novel sites where cats were common, than at remnant sites (cats were uncommon), with the highest abundance at the novel site with the most urbanised surroundings**.
- Female body condition was similar between novel and remnant sites. The majority of bandicoots at novel sites were resident, and breeding activity, recruitment of first-year adults, and survival of mature adults were observed at all novel sites.
- It remains unclear how sufficient numbers of bandicoots at novel sites were avoiding predation by invasive red foxes, cats and other predators.
- The results demonstrate the potential significance of novel urbanised habitats for conserving threatened species within heavily modified landscapes. The quality of habitats should not be judged on their novelty alone. Broadening appreciation of the potential value of novel ecosystems could increase off-reserve species conservation opportunities - a key priority area in modern times.

Conclusion: The authors concluded the study showed novel urbanised habitats (where cats were common) can offer new conservation opportunities for species that have the adaptive capacity to exploit them. Traditional assumptions that human-modified habitats are automatically poorer in quality to remnant bushland habitats – such as the Human Threat Hypothesis - need careful re-examination. The capacity of habitat to support species of concern should be assessed without bias regarding its degree of novelty. As novel ecosystems become increasingly prevalent worldwide and off-reserve conservation becomes more important, conservation approaches should exploit novel conservation opportunities.

Study 5: Domestic cat stomach content analysis study (Brisbane, Qld)

Analysis of the stomach contents of trapped urban stray cats (domestic cats) in the City of Brisbane revealed that the only prey species consumed were introduced black rats (BBC Invasive Times Newsletter).

Conclusion: Stray cats in urban areas are **not a significant cause of native wildlife predation** but predate introduced rodents.

Study 6: Domestic cat stomach content analysis study (Southern Downs Shire, Qld)

Cats impounded by the Southern Downs Shire (Qld) found predominantly cat food, house mice and carrion (eastern grey kangaroos) and no species of conservation concern in cat stomach and colon samples (Leis 2021).

Conclusion: There was no evidence that stray cats **in a regional town** were predating native wildlife to provide their energy needs but were **predating introduced rodents**.

Highly inaccurate estimates of domestic cat impacts on Australian native wildlife populations are driving domestic cat management

Highly publicised impacts of cats in highly disturbed environments (domestic cats) on birds (Woinarski 2017), mammals (Murphy 2019), reptiles (Woinarski 2018) and amphibians (Woinarski 2020) are based on extrapolating the findings from stomach and faecal samples and surveys of pet cat hunting behaviour. This has resulted in highly inaccurate conclusions regarding implied population effects of domestic cats in urban areas.

Flawed data collection and calculations

For example, the effects of domestic cats are extrapolated from just 5 studies, 3 of which were from rubbish dumps in small rural towns, and the other two explicitly stated they only analysed stool samples that contained evidence of wildlife remains and excluded those that had evidence of cat food. The authors then calculated that all 0.7 million unowned cats living in highly modified environments domestic cats) predated similarly to those samples analysed. Clearly these results are in **no way representative of urban domestic cats**, the vast majority are fed intentionally by humans (Rand 2024b).

Similarly, the effects of pet cats were **extrapolated from 25 to 40-year-old studies of cats** that were observed to predate and the authors then **assumed that all 3.88 million pet cats predated similarly**. For example, the authors **estimated that every pet cat, regardless of whether it was contained inside or never seen to predate, killed 15.6 birds a year**. This has resulted in a gross overestimation of pet cat predation, given that many pet cats are confined solely inside, and not all cats predate, particularly older cats.

Other confounding factors

In compounding these errors, the authors then imply this data translates to a population effect. For birds, for example, this is erroneous, because **birds killed by cats in urban areas are significantly less healthy than birds killed by cars or flying into windows** (Baker 2008, Møller & Erritzøe 2000), leading these authors to conclude that **cat predation in urban areas represents a compensatory rather than an additive form of mortality**. In other words, cat predation does not cause a secular change in the overall mortality of bird populations.

Therefore, the inherent biases, inaccuracies, and limitations of the study design of these highly quoted studies by Woinarski and Murphy mean that **there can be little to no confidence in the implied population effects.** In contrast, actual **Australian population studies have not found a measurable effect of domestic cats on urban wildlife.**

Furthermore, as concluded by Barratt (1998), estimates of predation by house cats, particularly extrapolated estimates, should be treated with caution. Predation estimates alone do not prove that prey populations are detrimentally affected, especially in highly disturbed and modified environments such as urban areas.

False blame directed at domestic cats

False blame for wildlife impacts directed at domestic cats is harmful because it **contributes to the implementation of ineffective domestic cat management strategies** and can be used as a justification for lethal approaches to domestic cats. This **perpetuates the unnecessary and pointless killing of many healthy cats and kittens under the ineffective Trap, adopt or kill model**, which causes **devastating psychological damage to staff involved** and community cat carers (Bennett 2005, Whiting 2011, Scotney 2023). It does not reduce the overall number of wandering cats overtime as the population quickly replenishes to original levels due to the high cat reproductive rate, immigration of new cats into the area and increased survival of juveniles (Lazenby 2015, Miller 2014, Boone 2019, NSW Animal Seizures – Pound Data Reports).

Australian shelter staff are often required to repeatedly kill large numbers of healthy cats and kittens, resulting in a significant human cost. Many workers directly involved with the euthanasia of healthy animals **develop post-traumatic stress**, which is associated with depression, substance abuse, high blood pressure, burnout, sleeplessness and **increased risk of suicide** (Australian Veterinary Association 2022, Baran 2009, Reeve 2005, Rohlf 2005, Rollin 2011, Tiesman 2015, Whiting 2011).

Two quotes from shelter staff support research showing that killing healthy and treatable animals can result in severe mental health damage and increases the risk for suicide.

> *"The effect on mental health is a very real problem, and veterinarians were the most affected – it was terrible to see the impact on them" (senior shelter staff member)*
>
> *"I have seen so many people's lives damaged by having to kill a never-ending stream of kittens and cats" (senior shelter veterinarian)*

False blame can also promote the use of inhumane killing methods; be used as a **justification for cruelty towards cats**, increasing pain and suffering; and be used as an argument for mandatory cat containment which is not an effective strategy for reducing free-roaming cats or associated issues such as potential wildlife predation.

Habitat loss is recognised as the main threat to Australian native wildlife populations (Australia State of the Environment Report 2021). In contrast to domestic cats, population studies have found that habitat loss does have a measurable effect on Australian native wildlife populations. Habitat preservation and prevention of land clearing for human use such as urban development and agriculture is likely to be the most effective strategy to protect Australian native wildlife.

Habitat preservation should be combined with Community Cat Programs, i.e., high-intensity free desexing of owned and semi-owned stary cats targeted to areas of high cat intake or complaints. These programs significantly reduce the number of unwanted kittens born, free-roaming cats and associated issues such as nuisance or potential wildlife predation.

Additional **effective strategies include; Bed-time feeding – feeding pet cats their evening meal inside after securing them inside for the night, wildlife road safety measures, and targeted protection of threatened and endangered species. Examples include, erecting exclusion fencing around natural habitat, containment fencing in residential areas or around individual houses, providing free-desexing for pet cats and inside confinement at night for both dogs and cats**. This approach is especially important for nocturnal species at risk of predation by cats and dogs.

We strongly recommend that all areas, including in urban and peri-urban areas, that **a list of susceptible species is updated and published, *and* that detailed mapping occurs to document where these species are being found,** to facilitate targeted and microtargeted strategies for their protection that are based on a One Welfare approach. We recommend funding be provided to enable citizen science backed up with camera trap data be used to develop detailed maps across urban areas of Australia to guide strategic protection of species of conservation concern.

Cat free zones are not supported as there is no evidence that this is effective in protecting native wildlife (Lilith 2010). We recommend alternative measures to mitigate cat predation risks. This ensures residents can continue benefiting from emotional support from cats without phasing out pet ownership**.**

The **highest priority voiced by residents for local government management of cats were to prevent kittens from being born (94% of respondents**) followed by stopping cats from preying on native animals (91%); reducing disease spread to pets (89%), wildlife (89%), and humans (87%); decreasing stray cat numbers (75%) (Rand 2024 c). **Desexing was preferred to euthanasia (65% vs 35% respondents).** Therefore, the community wants strategies to reduce kittens being born. **Only Community Cat Programs have been shown** to **decrease number of kittens being born** at the suburb or city level, not the traditional trap, adopt kill programs used for the last 30 or more years. Notably unpublished **camera trap data over 4 years** demonstrate a **reduction of free-roaming cats by more than 50% after implementation of a Community Cat Program** following years of traditional trap, adopt kill methods of cat management (Dutton-Regester 2024 unpublished).

Recommendation A.1: **Reduce the number of free-roaming domestic cats** to reduce potential wildlife predation. by **implementation of Community Cat Programs** instead of ineffective and costly *Trap, adopt or kill* or mandated cat containment.

Recommendation A.2: **Map locations of threatened and endangered wildlife** in urban and peri-urban areas using existing data sets (eg. Bird Life Australia, NSW Government Dashboard), combined with funding citizen science projects backed up by camera-trap data to facilitate targeted protection.

Recommendation A.3: **Targeted protection of threatened and endangered wildlife** by, where appropriate, erecting exclusion fencing around natural habitat, containment fencing in residential areas or around individual houses, providing free-desexing for pet cats and promoting inside confinement at night for both dogs and cats (bed-time feeding of cats).

Recommendation A.4: **Habitat preservation and rehabilitation should be a priority** and road safety measures implemented where there are species of conservation concern

Recommendation A.5: **Cat management programs should be guided by robust scientific evidence** to support the conservation of threatened and endangered wildlife, ensuring that objectives and **key metrics are clearly defined and measurable to evaluate program effectiveness** and inform the selection of the most appropriate strategies.

(b) The effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers.

The APWF is strongly opposed to mandated cat containment (night curfews and 24/7) because it is ineffective in preventing free-roaming cats and therefore unsuccessful at protecting wildlife, and is a barrier to reducing free-roaming cats and associated issues.

Mandated 24/7 cat containment (also known as a 24-hour cat curfew) is generally proposed because of a **belief that it will reduce wandering cats and associated issues** such as nuisance complaints or potential wildlife predation, and protect cats from potential harm. While it seems logical and compelling that mandated 24/7 cat containment would reduce the number of wandering cats and associated issues, this assumption is not supported by the evidence.
The evidence in Australia and internationally clearly shows that **mandated 24/7 cat containment is not an effective strategy to reduce wandering cats or associated issues** such as nuisance complaints or potential wildlife predation.

In Australia, mandated 24/7 cat containment is already proven to be a failure at reducing wandering cats in both the short, medium and long-term. This is supported by the following data:

RSPCA Australia *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia* 2018 report acknowledges:

> *"Overall, local governments with cat containment regulations have not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations".*

In the **City of Yarra Ranges** (Victoria), **in the 3rd year** after mandating 24/7 cat containment:

- Cat-related **complaints increased by 143%**
- Yarra Ranges Council acknowledged that the significant increase in cat complaints, was likely to be a result of the introduction of a 24-hour cat curfew in 2014.
- **Impoundments increased by 68%**
- Euthanasia increased by 18% (human population only increased by 2%) (Yarra Ranges 2021).

Yarra Ranges Council data

Measure	2012/13	2016/17	Difference	% Change
Resident population	149, 026	152,246	+3,220	**^ 2.16%**
Cat Nuisance complaints	237	576	+339	**^ 143 %**
Cats impounded	440	738	+298	**^ 67.7 %**
Cats euthanised	232	273	+41	**^17.67 %**

In the **City of Casey** (Victoria), **20 years after introducing mandated 24/7 cat containment**:

- the number of **cats impounded was still 296% higher than baseline** (from 264 cats in 1998 to 1,047 cats in 2019/20), more than double the rate of the human population increase.
- In 2000, Casey received 349 cat nuisance and related complaints which had increased to 376 complaints in 2020/2021 (Casey Council 2001 & 2021a, b).

Casey Council data

Measure	1998	2019/ 20	Difference	% Change
Resident population	156,128	364,600	208,472	**^134%**
Cats impounded	264	1047	783	**^296%**

The number of cat-related nuisance complaints and impoundments are important parameters because they reflect the size of the wandering cat population in the surrounding area.
The **City of Hobsons Bay** (Melbourne, Victoria) has publicly acknowledged that mandated 24/7 cat containment is **not an effective strategy** for reducing the number of wandering cats or associated issues and has **rejected cat curfews** (Hobsons Bay 2014).

Some **USA jurisdictions** introduced mandated 24/7 cat containment known as cat "leash laws" which have proven to be ineffective and impossible to enforce. When these laws are passed, animal control impound more stray cats because they do not have an "owner" to contain them. This results in **more cats being impounded and then killed but without reducing the overall number of roaming cats** in the area, because the number trapped and killed is **insufficient to overcome the reproductive capacity of the remaining cats** (Boone 2019). Most **USA jurisdictions** have repealed their cat leash laws because they found they were unenforceable (Smithfield Virginia USA 2003, Edmonds City Council Washington USA 2012, Gretna City Council LA USA 2014, Hughes 2002, Alley Cat Allies 2022).

Based on data from councils, 24/7 cat containment regulations would not provide any measurable benefit in reducing complaints, cat impoundments, potential wildlife predation or cat-related costs and would instead increase costs to local governments.

Why is mandated 24/7 cat containment not effective at reducing wandering cats?

Mandated 24/7 cat containment is not an effective strategy to reduce wandering cats because most wandering cats are domestic (semi-owned or unowned) with no owner to contain them. For

the remaining cats with an owner, **containment is often not achievable due to property limitations** (for e.g. rental properties), **lack of financial resources** and concerns about **welfare** of a contained cat (McLeod 2015, van Eeden 2021).

Stray cats, that is free roaming cats that are **unidentified owned cats not traceable to an owner or semi-owned** and unowned cats, are usually overlooked when mandated 24/7 cat containment is proposed, even though **stray cats represent the majority of wandering cats.** Most cats entering animal welfare shelters and local government pounds are classed as strays, originate from low socio-economic areas and were born in the preceding 6 to 12 months (Kerr 2018, Alberthsen 2013 & 2016, Miller 2014, Ly 2021, Rinzin 2008, Zito 2016).

Most free-roaming cats in urban areas are semi-owned domestic cats being fed by people who do not perceive they own the cat but have an emotional attachment to the cat (Rand 2021). When mandated cat containment is introduced it **creates a significant barrier to semi-owners being willing or able to take full ownership and responsibility for the stray cat they are feeding** due to the imposition of an added responsibility and potential penalty associated with cat ownership. Transforming cat semi-owners to full owners represents the **key solution** to reduce the number of wandering cats and associated issues (Cotterell 2021, Cotterell 2024; Rand 2024b), but mandated cat containment actively prevents this resolution.

Mandated cat containment perpetuates the failed Trap, adopt or kill approach

Mandated cat containment results in more stray cats being trapped, impounded and then killed because they do not have an "owner" to contain them. However, this ***Trap, adopt or kill*** **approach does not reduce the overall wandering cat population in the area overtime because it results in low-level *ad hoc* culling, insufficient to override the high cat reproductive rate**, immigration of new cats into the area and increased survival of juveniles (Lazenby 2015, Miller 2014, Tan 2017 & RSPCA Australia 2018). The result is a **repetitive cycle of trapping, impounding and killing** cats, followed by new cats being trapped, impounded and killed, over and over again, but without reducing the number of wandering cats over time (Boone 2019, NSW Animal Seizures – Pound Data Reports, RSPCA Australia 2021, Hughes 2002).

High-level culling of 30% to 50% of the stray cat population every 6 months or high level desexing (70% or more of the population) is required to produce a sustained decrease in wandering cats. However**, high-level culling is cost prohibitive for local governments** and **unacceptable to the majority of the community** (Rand 2019), and there are no published reports of high-level culling at the suburb or city level being successful (Boone 2019). This contrasts to many reports of successful outcomes of high-level desexing programs (Cotterell 2023, Rand 2024, RSPCA 2022, Levy 2014, Spehar and Wolf 2019),

Why is mandated 24/7 cat containment unfeasible?

Enforcement of mandated 24/7 cat containment is problematic and essentially impossible for several reasons including:

- Enforcement can only be undertaken by cat trapping programs and cat-trap loan schemes.

- The **majority of trapped and impounded cats are not owned or traceable to an owner** so there is no possibility of taking any enforcement action because an owner cannot be identified (Lancaster 2015, RSPCA Australia 2018). The experience of councils that have introduced mandated 24/7 cat containment shows that limited infringement notices have been issued (Hobsons Bay 2014).
- Trapped unidentified cats then need to be rehomed or euthanised**, increasing costs for cat management** and **increasing the number of cats euthanised,** which negatively affects the mental health of staff involved.
- **Enforcement is costly**, requiring expansion of cat-trap services, purchase of additional traps to reduce waiting times, and additional staff to deal with the increased nuisance complaints, trapping and impoundments that occur after mandated cat containment is introduced.
- Trapping by AMOs is **very time-consuming** because multiple trips to the site are often required including a trip to set up the trap and then trips to check the trap each morning (for animal welfare reasons) and to reset the trap each evening until the cat is caught. Times required to trap cats can range from an average of **8.9 days to 29 days per cat to trap 90% of the target cats** (Nutter 2005, Lazenby 2015).

Based on the evidence in Australia and internationally, mandated 24/7 cat containment is essentially **unenforceable, rendering mandated 24/7 cat containment impractical and unfeasible**. Hume City Council in Melbourne Victoria stated in 2018 that 'cat impoundment statistics and learnings from other local governments demonstrate that a cat curfew would be largely unenforceable' (Hume Council 2018). The City of Hobsons Bay (Victoria) also acknowledged in 2014 that introduction of mandated cat containment would lead to community **expectations about enforcement that cannot be delivered** (RSPCA Australia 2018, Hobsons Bay 2014). This is consistent with findings from USA (Smithfield Virginia USA 2003, Edmonds City Council Washington USA 2012, Greta City Council LA USA 2014, Police Chief Rowland Payson City Council Utah USA 2003, Alley Cat Allies 2022).

What are the negative consequences of mandated 24/7 cat containment?

Based on the evidence, mandated 24/7 cat containment has many negative consequences including:

- **Increases nuisance complaints** because of community expectations that cats should not be seen, which leads to **increased cat trapping and impoundment** (Yarra Ranges 2021, Casey Council 2021, RSPCA SA 2022b).

- **Significantly increases costs for local governments**, with expenses for trapping, impounding, rehoming, or euthanizing cats averaging $500 per cat. This amounts to approximately $500,000 annually for just 100 additional cats.

- This has **failed to reduce wandering cat numbers** over decades (Boone 2019; NSW Animal Seizures – Pound Data Reports; RSPCA Australia 2021; Yarra Ranges Council 2021; Casey Council 2021; RSPCA SA 2022b).

- **Increases euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and kittens** in local government pounds, shelters and veterinary clinics because the more cats impounded, the more cats euthanised (Kreisler 2022, Marsh 2010).

- **Increases exposure to risk of severe mental health impacts for staff** and community members, including depression, traumatic stress, and **increased suicide risk associated with euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and kittens** . These impacts contribute to heightened rates of staff burnout, turnover, and attrition. Additionally, semi-owned stray cats, often cared for by emotionally attached individuals, face a significant risk of impoundment and euthanasia, with 42% of impounded cats in Australia being euthanised (Baran 2009, Reeve 2005, Rohlf 2005, Rollin 2011, Tiesman 2015, Whiting 2011; Australian Veterinary Association 2022, Rogelberg 2007; Chua 2023).

- **Mandated cat containment creates a significant disincentive for cat ownership, reducing adoptions and increasing euthanasia rates**. It hinders the resolution of wandering cat issues by **discouraging semi-owners from taking full ownership** of the stray cats they feed—a critical step in reducing unwanted litters and the number of roaming cats. In Australia, 3% to 9% of the adult population regularly feed a stray cat (semi-owners) and they represent a vital pool of potential adopters for shy and timid cats at high risk of euthanasia in shelters and pounds. However, containment mandates pose a major barrier, as **many semi-owners live in low-income households or rental properties,** unable to afford containment systems costing $700–$2000+, with 20% of Australian households living on less than $650 per week (Cotterell 2021; APWF 2021; Rand 2019; Zito 201; ABS 2021).

- **Criminalizes cat ownership for low-income households** and people with ‘door-dasher’ or “runner” cats. Mandated 24/7 cat containment ignores the social justice of legislation and the inability of low-income households and those with difficult-to-contain cats to comply. Even an expensive containment enclosure does not prevent door-dasher cats from escaping.

- Mandated cat containment **increases the risk of pet cats being trapped and euthanized**. **One-third of cat owners lose their pet at least once in its lifetime, with 41% of lost cats being indoor-only cats** that escape through accidental openings of windows, doors including garage doors. Even microchipped cats are not fully protected, as microchips may not be detected on the first scan and require multiple scans over consecutive days to locate. Faulty or migrated microchips can further prevent identification, resulting in the unnecessary euthanasia of lost pet cats (Lord 2008, Lancaster 2015).

- **Mandated cat containment increases cat relinquishment and abandonment** due to the added **responsibility and potential penalties imposed on owners** (RSPCA SA 2021-2022a). It can also negatively impact the welfare and health of some contained cats, leading to issues such as obesity, immobility, lower urinary tract disease, and behavioral problems, which further increase the risk of relinquishment or abandonment (RSPCA Australia 2018, Palmer & Sandoe 2014).

Recommendation B.1: **Mandated cat curfews should not be implemented** because they are **shown to be ineffective** in reducing the number of free-roaming domestic cats and they

perpetuate traditional trap-adopt- kill methods of cat management which have many **negative outcomes** including increased costs to councils and increased dissatisfaction with council management of cats.

Recommendation B.2: **Fund Community Cat Programs** which are proven to **significantly reduce the number of unwanted kittens born and the number of free-roaming cats**. These include **assisting cat carers with the desexing** and microchipping of their semi-owned cat and **support them to take full ownership**. Community Cat Programs, based on **high-intensity free desexing programs targeted** at areas of high impoundments or complaints are the key solution to the problem of wandering cats and the associated issues such as nuisance complaints, costs to local governments and potential wildlife predation. (Cotterell 2024, Rand 2024b)

Recommendation B.3**: Share information** with cat owners and semi-owners about the benefits of **bedtime feeding** to assist night-time confinement. This reduces nuisance issues leading to unnecessary impoundments and euthanasia. Bed-time feeding of cats also benefits wildlife, especially threatened and endangered species.

Recommendation B.4: **Utilise anti-nuisance laws** to manage issues that arise from wandering cats rather than mandated containment, which is a barrier to solving the problem and **disadvantages tenants and low socioeconomic households.**

(c) Welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions.

Mandatory containment of cats can have **significant adverse welfare implications**, impacting both their physical health and overall quality of life.

Increased health risks

Confinement often limits a cat's ability to roam, climb, and engage in physical activities, which **contributes to obesity and associated conditions such as diabetes and arthritis** (Scarlett 1994). Studies show that indoor-only cats are more likely to be overweight than those with outdoor access, due to reduced opportunities for exercise (Buffington 2004). These conditions can not only **reduce a cat's lifespan, but also negatively affect its quality of life**. These health problems can lead to secondary complications, including **diabetes and joint disorders** (Slingerland 2009, Appleton 2001). Cat containment can increase the likelihood of **urinary tract disease**, which is often exacerbated by stress or reduced water intake in confined cats (Buffington 2004). These health issues not only reduce a cat's lifespan but also negatively affect its quality of life, making containment a strategy for many cats that **may not align with optimal animal health standards**.

Increased behavioural issues.

Behavioural challenges are also a notable concern for contained cats. Cats are naturally exploratory and curious animals, and **restricting their movement can lead to boredom, frustration, and stress-related behaviours**. The inability to engage in natural behaviours has been

linked to the **development of stereotypic behaviours**, such as **overgrooming and pacing**, as well as other signs of stress (Ellis 2009). For example, a lack of adequate enrichment to simulate hunting and play can result in diminished mental stimulation, adversely affecting their emotional well-being (Ellis 2009, Vitale 2015). Other common problems include **destructive scratching, excessive vocalization, and inappropriate elimination.** For many cats, the lack of environmental enrichment under containment conditions can lead to a decline in mental well-being, **increasing the risk of behavioural issues** that may ultimately **lead to surrender or abandonment** (RSPCA Australia 2018, Palmer & Sandoe 2014). **Cats require a complex and stimulating environment to thrive**. In confined homes, a lack of vertical spaces, hiding areas, and varied textures can lead to environmental monotony, further exacerbating stress (Rochlitz 2005). Providing sufficient environmental enrichment, including scratching posts, elevated perches, and puzzle feeders, is essential to mitigate these negative effects (Herron 2010). Addressing these behavioural needs requires considerable resources and commitment from owners, which **may not always be feasible**, especially in **households facing financial or spatial limitations**. Some cats are not suited to confinement indoors or in a small enclosure and their welfare is severely compromised.

While cats can form social bonds, they are solitary by nature and may experience stress when confined with other animals, particularly in small spaces. Increased proximity can lead to social tension, competition for resources, and aggression between cats (Amat 2016). This **stress is often expressed through behavioural issues, such as inappropriate elimination and vocalization, which are frequently cited as reasons for relinquishment** (Casey 2008).

Additionally, containment may expose cats to increased risks of **cruelty and neglect**. Confined cats may be more vulnerable to harm in environments where containment is enforced without adequate owner support or education on meeting the animal's welfare needs. For instance, **unaddressed behavioural or health issues can lead to a breakdown in the human-animal bond**, increasing the likelihood of **punitive punishment of the cat by the owner for unwanted behaviours and/or relinquishment or abandonment.**

Containment policies, therefore, must consider the potential welfare outcomes for cats and ensure that cat owners are supported with resources to provide adequate care, reduce risks of neglect, and promote positive welfare outcomes for contained animals. **It is critical to recognize that some cats may not adapt well to a fully contained lifestyle**. If mandatory 24/7 containment is implemented, these cats may face limited viable options and could experience compromised welfare, negatively affecting both the cats and their owners. In such cases, these cats may face euthanasia because rehoming or transitioning them to a contained environment might not be feasible.

Although **containment of cats reduces accidents** with motor vehicles and the incidence of fighting-associated cellulitis, **abscesses** and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), **the negative impact of containment balances these positive aspects** because of the reduced **quality of life for many contained cats** and the **increased risk of diseases** associated with obesity and physical inactivity such as **diabetes** and urinary tract disease, which **negatively impact both the owner's and cat's quality of life and the cat's longevity.**

Recommendation C.1: The APWF strongly recommends and **encourages inside containment of cats at night**, and **where possible, contained to the owner's property during** the day in a comfortable environment which meets the cat's physical and mental needs.

Recommendation C.2: **Mandated containment is not recommended** because confinement indoors or in restricted environments **increases the risk of health and behaviour issues** and reduces the quality of life for many cats, negatively impacting their welfare.

(d) The effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives.

Current responsible pet ownership education programs are not effective in addressing all socioeconomic scenarios, particularly in areas where resources and financial means are limited. For many years, these programs have largely remained unchanged, yet the cat overpopulation issue continues to grow. Traditional education initiatives primarily target pet owners who have the financial capacity to address common issues such as registration and microchipping. However, **this approach overlooks those in low-income communities, individuals who care for stray cats, rescue groups, and semi-owners**—those who feed and care for cats but do not perceive themselves as their owners.

To address the cat overpopulation crisis meaningfully, **responsible pet ownership programs must be adapted to support a broader range of community members.** Programs should **offer practical resources and support for individuals with limited financial means,** as well as guidance tailored for those who informally care for cats. By broadening the scope of education, assistance and community outreach these programs could better reach underserved populations and contribute to reducing the stray cat population.

In New South Wales, responsible pet ownership programs and material are mainly **provided by designated rehoming organizations** like Cat Protection, Animal Welfare League (AWL), and RSPCA NSW. The Office of Local Government (OLG) NSW initiatives, such as "We Are Family" and "Living Safely with Pets," focus on educating children about interacting safely with pets, while **OLG also addresses the legislative responsibilities of cat ownership and enforces these.** Major animal welfare organisations finance and produce most of the desexing and welfare resources for promotion and education, which are linked on councils' websites and distributed by local government officers.

While **local governments** are responsible for promoting responsible pet ownership and community education, their primary focus remains on **community health and safety and legislative enforcement, such as pet registration,** microchipping, **handling complaints,** and managing trapping programs. **Animal welfare organisations**, on the other hand, **proactively lead responsible pet ownership initiatives,** such as offering discounted desexing, such as the most recent program offered to select local governments ran by RSPCA NSW combining desexing and basic veterinary care. **Despite shared goals, local government officers and animal welfare organisations often operate in silos.** Animal management officers typically address issues by trapping and impounding cats, while animal welfare organisations aim to reduce cat intake

through preventive strategies. This **silo approach highlights the need for a more collaborative approach** to effectively address cat management and animal and human welfare outcomes.

In Australia, our responsible pet ownership and education programs are outdated compared to innovative community-driven models in the United States, such as The Humane Society's Pets for Life (PFL) program. Pets for Life adopts a long-term approach to **address inequities** and the **lack of access to pet resources in underserved communities**, using door-to-door outreach and comprehensive pet owner support. By providing free veterinary care, supplies, services, and information, Pets for Life fosters trust and builds positive relationships within the communities it serves.

The program focuses on three key areas:

- **Direct Care** – delivering information and services for affordable and accessible pet care directly to underserved communities.
- **Training and Mentorship** – equipping local organizations and veterinary clinics with the skills to develop and sustain their outreach programs; and
- **Policy and Enforcement Reform** – shifting national dialogue among animal control, law enforcement and policymakers **from punitive measures, to supportive, community-based engagement models**. Rooted in principles of social justice, **Pets for Life actively works to address institutional discrimination and systemic inequities** that prevent many individuals from accessing essential pet resources (HSUS 2024).

Recommendation D.1: The APWF strongly recommends the **implementation of innovative community-driven models such as Pets for Life programs** be utilized to reach underserviced communities instead of traditional education material and channels being used to communicate the importance of desexing, microchipping, registration and cat containment. In general, **it is not lack of knowledge but lack of resources that are the barrier to "responsible" cat care.**

(e) Implications for local governments in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies.

Some local governments recognize that mandatory 24/7 containment is not an effective strategy for reducing the number of roaming cats and have therefore decided against implementation, such as city of Greater Geelong Council in Victoria. As quoted by Cr Cadwell **"The financial cost burden the policy would have imposed upon residents on low fixed incomes may have required them to give up their cat, which in many cases may be their only companion,"** Cr Cadwell said. **"That's not something I could support, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis.** There was a **lack of detail in regard to how this would work for registered cat owners living in rental accommodation**, given that there would have been a substantial investment on the part of the tenant to comply with the policy and still allow for their cat to have time outside."

In the United States, where mandatory containment laws (referred to as "leash laws") have been tried, they **have proven ineffective and difficult to enforce**. When these laws are implemented, animal control authorities impound more stray cats due to a lack of identifiable "owners" to enforce containment, leading to increased euthanasia without reducing the overall number of

free-roaming cats. As a result**, most U.S. jurisdictions, have repealed their cat leash laws after finding them unenforceable** (Smithfield, Edmonds City, Hughes 2002, Neighbourhood cats, Alley Cats Allies).

Mandated 24/7 cat containment is ineffective in reducing wandering cats, as most of these cats are strays with no identifiable owner to enforce containment. For owned cats, containment is often unfeasible due to property restrictions (e.g., rental limitations), financial constraints, and concerns over cat welfare (McLeod 2015, van Eeden 2021). Stray cats, which represent the majority of free-roaming cats, are frequently overlooked in containment proposals, even though they make up most of the cats entering shelters and council pounds. These cats typically come from low socioeconomic areas and are often young, born within the last 6 to 12 months (Kerr 2018, Alberthsen 2013 & 2016, Miller 2014, Ly 2021, Rinzin 2008, Zito 2016). Most stray cats are semi-owned domestic cats fed by individuals who feel emotionally attached but do not see themselves as the cat's owner (Rand 2021). **Mandated cat containment creates a barrier for these semi-owners, discouraging them from taking full responsibility due to added obligations and potential penalties**. Encouraging semi-owners to assume full ownership has been shown to be a key solution for reducing the wandering cat population (Banyule City Council 2020, Cotterell 2024, Rand 2024b) but mandated containment policies hinder this process.

Approximately one-third of cat owners experience the loss of their pet at least once**, with 41% of lost cats being described by their owners as indoor-only.** Escapes can occur through windows or doors left open accidentally, and even microchipped cats are not always safe. Microchips may not be detected on the first scan and may require multiple scans over consecutive days. Faulty or migrating microchips further increase the risk of lost pet cats being euthanised if their identification is missed (Lord 2008, Lancaster 2015).

Mandatory containment policies can negatively impact the welfare and health of some cats, leading to obesity, reduced mobility, urinary tract disease, and behavioural issues, which increase the likelihood of surrender or abandonment of cats (RSPCA Australia 2018, Palmer & Sandoe 2014).

These policies can also result in **increased cruelty risks associated with members of the public** removing wandering cats from their property or public spaces. Therefore, in urban areas, **trapping should be conducted exclusively by authorized and trained personnel utilizing appropriate equipment** to ensure the welfare of the animals and minimize potential negative outcomes.

Recommendation E.1: The APWF **strongly recommends that mandated containment not be implemented** because it **is not an effective strategy** for reducing the number of roaming cats and **increases complaints and costs to local governments**, and instead assistive approaches to solving cat--related issues be utilised, and where indicated, anti-nuisance laws when assistive approaches fail.

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

Community Cat Programs are **based on high-intensity free cat desexing, microchipping and registration**, targeted to areas of high cat impoundments and cat complaints, coupled with an **assistive approach to help vulnerable people keep their cats** (Rand 2024; Cotterell 2024).

Community Cat Programs do effectively reduce the number of free-roaming cats in the target area (Dutton-Regester, unpublished data 2024), and therefore also reduce cat-related issues including cat impoundments and euthanasia, nuisance complaints and potential wildlife predation (Rand 2024b, Cotterell 2024)**.** Community Cat programs are science-based, proactive, non-lethal and humane. Community Cat Programs **prevent unwanted kittens being born** (Rand 2024b, Cotterell 2024) reducing unnecessary euthanasia and rehoming costs, and **facilitate the adoption of adult cats and kittens** already born into new homes which increases responsible pet ownership rates. Australian research has found that **semi-ownership of cats is common** with 3% to 9% of Australian adults feeding an average of 1.5 cats daily they do not perceive they own and they are a **huge pool of potential adopters** (Rand 2019; Zito 2015). Community Cat Programs also **facilitate higher return to owner rates (reclaim rates**) because of increased numbers of microchipped cats (Cotterell 2024).

Scientific evidence, including from Australia, repeatedly demonstrates that Community Cat Programs effectively **reduce the number cat-related complaint**s overtime when they are targeted to areas of high complaints or cat impoundments, and performed with high intensity (Cotterell 2021, APWF 2021, City of Banyule 2020, Spehar & Wolf 2019, Gunther 2021, Boone 2019, Kreisler 2019, Swarbrick 2018, Levy 2014, Tan 2017 and Levy 2003). Recent unpublished **data over 4 years from camera-traps (motion-detecting cameras) demonstrate a decrease of 37% to more than 50% in the numbers of free-roaming cats over time in suburbs with Community Cat Programs,** consistent with the decrease in number of cat-related calls to council (Dutton-Regester, unpublished data 2024) A number of Australian local governments have implemented Community Cat Programs for example, Banyule City and Brimbank City in Melbourne, Victoria.

Recent Australian data demonstrate that Community Cat Programs are cost effective and result in a **30-50% decrease in local government pound cat impoundment, more than an 80% reduction in cat euthanasia and a 30-50% decrease in cat nuisance complaints over 3 to 4 years**, with these parameters reflecting the decrease in the surrounding free-roaming cat population (Cotterell 2024, City of Banyule 2020, RSPCA NSW 2023, Rand 2024).

Community Cat Programs are effective at the city level in urban areas to decrease cat impoundments and cat-related complaints. For example, between 2013 and 2021 **the City of Banyule**, Victoria used **a micro-targeted approach for the desexing strategy**, and over that 8-year period, **impoundments decreased by 66% and euthanasia by 82%.** Banyule **spent $77,660 on desexing but saved $303,490 from reduced cat intake** alone (Cotterell 2024). The program has also further saving of $**137,170 to council for reduced cat related calls**, the **total estimated saving $440,660** (Cotterell 2024). The program successfully transformed semi-owners into full owners as part of a Community Cat Program, being a highly effective intervention strategy which is

currently under-utilised and thus represents a significant opportunity to increase rehoming and reduce unnecessary euthanasia, at a lower cost. **This contrasts with the 143% and 296% increase in cat impoundments associated with implementation of mandated 24/7 cat curfew in the Yarra Ranges and Casey, Victoria.**

In Greenacre, the City of Canterbury Bankstown, **RSPCA NSW** introduced a high intensity, free desexing program targeted to locations of high cat intake. After just one year, **intake was reduced by 31%, whereas** in the same time, cat admissions increased by 7% for the rest of the shelter. This saved RSPCA NSW approximately $100,000 in sheltering costs (RSPCA NSW Report 2023).

In the city of Ipswich, Queensland, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) initiated in 2020 a Community Cat Program based on offering free desexing , microchipping and preventative health care for all cats in three suburbs with a total population of 38,000 residents. Data from a small rural town (Rosewood) with approximately 3000 residents within the local government (council) area of the city of Ipswich, has just been published (Rand 2024b). The data analysed showed that 308 cats were desexed representing 94 cats/1000 residents **over 3.4 years. In the third year, this was associated with a 60% decrease in cat intake, an 85% reduction in numbers euthanised and 39% fewer cat-related calls to the local council at a cost of $2/resident per year for desexing costs.**

In contrast, in the City of Yarra Ranges, in the 3rd year after mandating 24/7 cat containment, cat-related complaint calls, cat impoundments, numbers euthanised and costs were all still increased. For example, in the **3rd year impoundments were 68% higher.**

In NSW, with 76.21% of the 8,186,000 residents over 18 years of age (and using 5% of adults being semi-owners feeding an average of 1.5 cats each) means that **more than 311,900 adults are feeding over 467,800 semi-owned cats each day in NSW**. Approximately half of these cats are female producing an average of 5 kittens a year, or nearly 1.2 million kittens, of which 75% die before 6 months of age. However, the **approximately 400,000 surviving kittens are sufficient to maintain the stray cat population**.

Most of these 311,900 plus adults will take full ownership of the cats they are feeding, registering their details on the cat's microchip and registration databases if assisted (Cotterell 2024, Banyule City Council 2020, Rand 2024).

Collectively, these findings suggest that high-intensity, targeted desexing programs significantly benefit cat welfare, rehoming organizations, the animal care sector, volunteers, and veterinarians, and have been proven to reduce costs, shelter intakes, and cat-related calls to councils, while also positively impacting the environment.(Rand 2024, Cotterell 2024, RSPCA NSW 2023).

Recommendation F.1: The APWF strongly recommends implementing **proactive Community Cat Programs** that support cat owners and community cat carers /feeders and rescuers in disadvantaged areas with high cat impoundments or cat-related calls, rather than imposing additional barriers and mandates on them that cannot be complied with.

Recommendation F.2: **NSW Government should fund Pilot Community Cat Programs in local governments** where there is a **commitment to a collaborative approach** with animal welfare agencies and/or rescue groups and ongoing support be provided.

Recommendation F.3: Desexing needs to **be targeted to suburbs with highest cat intake or cat-related calls** and microtargeted to locations most likely to result in impoundments and surrender of cats and kittens. **It must also be of sufficient intensity and duration (5-10 or 30 cats desexed/1000 residents per year for 3-4 years, depending on degree of microtargeting)**

Recommendation F.4: **Training programs** be developed and provided by the state government for AMOS to embrace an **assistive approach to cat management** and community engagement because these will provide better outcomes for human and animal welfare and the environment.

Recommendation F.5: **Legislative changes** be made to facilitate maximum benefit from Community Cat Programs by allowing **semi-owners to continue to care for their cats** after desexing and microchipping, **including those in multi-cat situations** (colonies) and **allowing return to their home for healthy stray cats at** high risk of euthanasia because they are fearful or timid (return to field).

Recommendation F.6: **Remove other barriers** such as **excess cat permits, registration** and **breeder permits** to facilitate semi-owners to adopt, desex and microchip the cat/s they are caring for.

Recommendation F.7: Allow **animal welfare agencies and businesses to be listed as the owner** on the microchip database, and also allow **just secondary contact details to be listed for a welfare agency and/or carer**, **without an owner being listed.**

Recommendation F.8: We strongly recommend all local governments areas should **record all cat-related complaints in a customer request system to** ensure transparency, traceability, and accurate reporting of outcomes. This process should be standardised as part of a broader reporting framework to the state government. Enhanced accountability in cat management is essential and should align with the level of oversight currently applied to dog management.

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

Mandated containment leads to more stray cats trapped, impounded, and euthanised due to their lack of identifiable owners. Through promotion of containment bylaws this **increases cat-related complaints to local government,** consequently **leading to more trapping** programs undertaken to resolve the complaints, resulting in **more cats ending up in an already overcrowded pound system**.

The "**trap, adopt, or kill" approach fails to reduce the stray population over time, as it results in low-level, ad hoc culling, which is inadequate** against the high reproductive rate of cats, new cats migrating into areas, and higher survival of young cats (Lazenby 2015, Miller 2014, Tan 2017, RSPCA Australia 2018). The result is a cycle of trapping and euthanasia without long-term population reduction (Boone 2019, NSW Animal Seizures – Pound Data Reports, RSPCA Australia 2021, Hughes 2002). High-level culling or large-scale desexing would be needed for sustained reduction, yet high-level culling is prohibitively expensive for local governments and lacks community support (Rand 2019), with no documented evidence of its success at a suburb or city level (Boone 2019). For example, compared to the approximately 7% of free-roaming cat currently trapped in cities and towns across Australia, **30% to 50% of the cat population would need to be trapped and killed every 6 months for at least 10 years** (Boone 2019, which is clearly not economically feasible or acceptable to the community.

If traditional management practices persist and new mandates implemented, pound intakes will continue to rise, exacerbating the cat overpopulation problem and placing greater strain on animal welfare organizations and the pound systems.

Recommendation G.1: The APWF **strongly recommends that mandated containment not be introduced** and that **instead proactive, free targeted Community Cat Programs** be funded for local governments and animal welfare agencies by the state government. These programs have proven effectiveness and align with community expectations for humane management practices, supporting a Social License to Operate.

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

Mandated 24/7 cat containment (also known as a 24-hour cat curfew) is generally proposed because of a belief that it will reduce wandering cats and associated issues such as nuisance complaints or potential wildlife predation, and protect cats from potential harm. While it seems logical and compelling that mandated 24/7 cat containment would reduce the number of wandering cats and associated issues, this assumption is not supported by the evidence. **The evidence in Australia and internationally clearly shows that mandated 24/7 cat containment is not an effective strategy** in the short, medium and long-term **to reduce wandering cats or associated issues such as nuisance complaints or potential wildlife predation**. RSPCA Australia Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia 2018 report acknowledges: **"Overall, councils with cat containment regulations have not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations".**

In the City of Yarra Ranges (Victoria), in the 3rd year after mandating 24/7 cat containment:

- cat-related complaints increased by 143%.
- Yarra Ranges Council acknowledged that the significant increase in cat complaints, is likely to be a result of the introduction of a 24-hour cat curfew in 2014
- **impoundments increased by 68%**
- **euthanasia increased by 18%** (human population only increased by 2%) (Yarra Ranges 2021).

In the **City of Casey (Victoria), 20 years after introducing mandated 24/7 cat containment**:

- the **number of cats impounded was still 296%** higher than baseline (from 264 cats in 1998 to 1,047 cats in 2019/20), more than double the rate of the human population increase.
- In 2000, Casey received 349 cat nuisance and related complaints which had increased to 376 complaints in 2020/2021 (Casey Council 2001 & 2021a, b).

In the City of Ipswich in Queensland, implemented a 24/7 cat containment bylaw. An analysis of the situation before implementing the free cat desexing program found that **51% of Ipswich cat owners fully contained their cats, 18% contained their cats only at night.** This contrasts with a **study in NSW where there is no mandate for cat containment, this study shows that 65% of residents fully contain their cats and a further 24% contained them at night**. Further **highlighting that mandating cat containment does not work** (Rand 2024, MA 2023).

Recommendation H.1: **Mandated 24/7 cat containment should not be implemented** as a strategy to reduce wandering cats, nuisance complaints, or potential wildlife predation, as evidence from Australia and internationally demonstrates its ineffectiveness and it is a **barrier to solving the problem because low-income households cannot comply, therefore it discourages adoption of stray cats and encourages "it's not my cat" response.**

Recommendation H.2: The **government should prioritize evidence-based approaches** such as Community Cat Programs, which include free desexing and microchipping initiatives, to manage cat populations and reduce associated issues more effectively. These programs encourage responsible ownership and have proven to be more successful in achieving long-term reductions in wandering cats and complaints without the negative outcomes associated with mandated containment.

Recommendation H.3: Governments should **focus on providing information on inexpensive and simple containment methods such as bed-time feeding, and encourage voluntary containment** measures. Notably, studies have **shown higher rates of cat containment in areas without mandates** (NSW 65% versus Qld 51%) (Rand 2024b). By investing in these proactive strategies, governments can achieve better outcomes for cat management, community satisfaction, and animal welfare based on data from Victoria (Banyule), NSW (Greenacre) and Queensland (Ipwich)

(i) Options for reducing the feral cat population

Define feral cats accurately in legislation based on RSPCA recommended definition

Effective feral cat management depends firstly on correct definition of feral cats. For cat management that is aligned with One Welfare, it is important that legislation recognises that **feral cats do not live in the vicinity of where people live** and they do not receive food from humans intentionally (direct feeding) or unintentionally (e.g. via food waste bins). Feral cats have none of their needs fulfilled by humans. ***Because feral cats are not found or trapped in the vicinity of where***

people live or work, they are not the subject of nuisance behaviour complaints and do not enter Australian local government pounds or animal shelters. This information is based on the Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats, published by the Commonwealth of Australia in 2015 and the RSPCA Best Practice in Domestic Cat Management Report (2018).

This recommendation that the term "feral" not be used to describe cats in shelters or pounds aligns with current practices at RSPCA Australia, which has ceased using 'feral' as a category for intake or euthanasia in its annual statistics, recognizing that feral cats do not engage with shelter or pound facilities. The previously used term "feral" as a reason for euthanasia is now recategorized as "behaviour. "(RSPCA Australia Annual Statistics 2022).

Behaviour should never be used to determine whether a cat is feral or domestic. Research demonstrates **that pet cats can respond with more aggressive behaviours to humans when highly stressed than genuinely feral cats** (APWF 2017, Rochlitz 1998, Kessler 1997, Ellis 2014, DiGangi 2022, Jacobsen 2022, Slater 2013, Kerr 2018). It is critical that before a decision that a cat is euthanised on behaviour, it is given sufficient time to adapt to a stressful environment. Outcome decisions relating to euthanasia based on behavioural characteristics must be deferred to allow the cat sufficient time to habituate to the unfamiliar environment (e.g., shelter or pound), given the likelihood that these cats will experience high levels of fear in a trap cage or unfamiliar environment. Not allowing a stressed cat to settle into the environment may result in the cat exhibiting signs of being unsocial and ultimately lead to euthanasia.

Humane feral cat control that protects native species of conservation concern

The **APWF strongly supports the implementation of humane and effective control programs that consider biodiversity protection, animal welfare**, and the **potential negative impacts on domestic cat populations.**

We understand there are responsibilities of government agencies and local councils to implement programs for the management of cats, depending on the landowner and whether the cats to be managed are feral or domestic. However, these management programs differ greatly depending on the location and classification of cats, from traditional trap, impound, and euthanise or rehome, to programs using baiting and shooting. It is important to recognize that **cats in indigenous communities, around farm buildings, mining sites and other more remote areas where there are humans, should be classed as domestic cats.** ***Effective management can only be achieved when the value to humans, either through companionship and/or as working cats, is considered***. Collaboration with authorities, as well as engagement with Traditional Owners, will be crucial to the ethical and effective management of domestic cats in these communities.

Lethal control of feral cats

When lethal control is implemented, there **must be an evidence-basis that** it **positively impacts the populations of native species** of conservation concern and its success is **not judged on the number of cats killed.** It should also **minimise negative impacts on native wildlife**.

The Felixer® grooming traps are stated to be a novel technique for the control of feral cats and foxes. The traps are designed to target these animals through a discriminatory sensor arrangement and algorithm. Once a cat enters the trap, it is sprayed with a lethal dose of 1080 on the fur, and this is ingested when they groom themselves (Read 2019). It is reported by Read (2019) that 82% of feral cats were correctly identified as targets, and that also that no brushtail possums or medium-sized marsupials were targeted, and therefore, the Felixer could provide safe and specific feral predator control (Read 2019). **The Felixer traps reduces risk of poisoning in native wildlife compared to the use of mass baiting from a vehicle or plane** (AJP NSW 2024, Warburton 2021). However, a more recent study investigated whether Felixer was safe for marsupial carnivores, with a focus on determining the impact of Tasmanian devils and quolls, because of their similarities in habitat, behaviours, and their physical size (Rickards 2022, Moseby 2020). This study over nine sites and a 4-month trial period, reported the three highest **target animal rates by the Felixer were feral cats (48%), followed by the Tasmanian Devil (23%) and the common wombat (12%).** Less frequently targeted were hare/ rabbit (9%), the **Eastern Grey Kangaroo (7%) and the Cape Barron Goose (5%).** Based on these findings, although more targeted than mass baiting, the device is therefore not target-specific for cats. In addition, despite contrary claims on the website, the **Felixer cannot distinguish between a feral cat or a pet cat that has no collar. Its use should never be approved around human habitation** within the reported home range of pet cats (up to 33 hectares; Roetman 2017).

Non-lethal protection of native wildlife

Where possible, non-lethal methods of managing feral cats that **improve survival of native species** of conservation concern should be implemented. These include **improving fire management and supporting native species to be more resilient to cat predation through habitat restoration. Fenced predator-proof areas** to protect the most vulnerable native species are supported, because the need for ongoing predator control is minimised.

It is critical that a holistic plan is developed to protect native species, recognising that a greater risk to native species whose long-term viability is threatened, is from **habitat destruction** associated with agriculture, commercial and residential development, and extreme climate conditions, particularly loss from fire. **Effective protection of native species whose long-term viability is threatened by cats is a money wasted if there is no suitable habitat left for those species.** It is essential that the broad spectrum of threats are addressed to maximize the benefit to species survival for the funds expended.

Research on cat ecology should include impacts of non-lethal methods such as restoration of habitat quality and size, and improving fire prevention/management (Doherty, 2017). Impacts of other threats such as agriculture and water management should be evaluated. **Native species need to be supported to be more resilient to cat predation through habitat restoration and as part of re-introduction programs** (Moseby 2012; West 2018). We support that further research is always helpful to ensure that strategies are based in contemporary evidence.

Protecting wildlife from farm cats

In a current study being conducted by APWF of free desexing offered for cats on dairy farms, all farmers stated that farm-cats are considered important working animals because the **effectively eliminate costs associated with damage caused by rodents,** particularly to **electrical wiring in the dairy,** and they reduce food safety issues associated with rodents (Crawford unpublished 2024). **Farmers stated that cats are the preferred method of rodent control, and were preferred over rodent poison** because of factors such as **cost, baiting's impact on wildlife, and its threat to pets and children**. Of note, they mentioned that **baits are tax deductible** but **currently working cats are not**. All farmers viewed the **cats as working animals** and stated they are a necessity on the farm, with one farmer stating that his cats did more work than his working dogs (which are tax deductible). **Following desexing of the cats, farmers perceived an improvement in the farm-cats' impact on wildlife with comments stating that they see less (if any) wildlife being killed by the cats after desexing.** Following desexing they also noted an improvement in the cats' health and behaviour with Improved body condition, less fighting, more friendly, less wondering, less defecation. Most farmers have some sort of bond with some of the cats and these cats have names, they talk to them, they pet them.

Therefore, based on this information, it is recommended **that the NSW Government engage with the Commonwealth Treasurer** to request to **costs associated with maintaining working cats** on farms **be tax deductible** including **costs of desexing,** microchipping, health care, and preventive health care such as vaccination and parasite control. This would **facilitate effective management cat numbers around farm buildings to reduce the risk of** farm cats **predating wildlife or relocating to bushland** because **of pressure for food and shelter from an uncontrolled farm-cat population.**

Recommendation I.1: The APWF strongly recommends that this Inquiry and the NSW Government adopts cat **definitions aligned with the recommendations of RSPCA Australia.**

Recommendation I.2: **Implement targeted Community Cat Programs** in urban and peri-urban areas to **decrease cat breeding and therefore the number of unowned and semi-owned cats, as well as reduce the risk of abandonment of cats in bushland**, **parks,** forests, and national parks. By managing cat populations in populated areas, these programs will lessen the need for feral cat control efforts in sensitive biodiversity zones.

Recommendation I.3: **We recommend prioritizing non-lethal methods** for managing feral cats, such as **habitat restoration**, to support the survival of native species, with lethal methods used only as a last resort.

Recommendation I.4: **Support research** to develop effective and **humane non-lethal methods** to control feral cats.

Recommendation I.5: The use of **bounties for feral cat contro**l is neither considered effective nor appropriate and should therefore **not be permitted,** especially because of the risk that pet and semi-owned cats are targeted.

Recommendation I.6: When lethal management is necessary, **more humane alternatives to 1080, such as paraminopropriophenone** (PAPP) in Felixer spray traps and baits, should be adopted as soon as possible. We advocate for banning the use of 1080 in NSW due to its significant risks to human health and non-target species, aligning with its prohibition or restriction in many other countries.

Recommendation I.7: **Any lethal control program must be backed by evidence-based research,** with ongoing monitoring to assess impacts on cat populations and measure progress on increasing populations of target native species.

Recommendation I.8: Recreational shooters engaged in formal feral cat control programs should be **evaluated for shooting proficiency and adherence** to Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) CAT 001: Ground Shooting of Feral Cats. Additionally, **field audits should be conducted** to assess the welfare outcomes of these shooting activities

Recommendation I.9: **The inquiry recommends that the NSW Government engage with the Commonwealth Treasurer** to include **working cats on farms as working animals**, and allow costs of desexing, microchipping, health care, including vaccination, **be tax deductible.**

Recommendation I.10: **All relevant stakeholders** including federal and state governments, relevant industry groups, animal welfare agencies and conservation agencies should be engaged to **support intensive desexing initiatives** for farm-cats to assist in their population control.

Recommendation I.11: That, based on the principle of **sentience**, all cats be afforded equal care and protection.

(j) Any other related matters

Mental Health Impacts

The trap-adopt-kill approach inflicts severe mental health consequences on staff responsible for euthanising healthy and treatable cats and kittens, leading to issues like depression, traumatic stress, substance abuse, and even suicide (Baran 2009, Reeve 2005, Rohlf 2005, Rollin 2011, Tiesman 2015, Whiting 2011). Community cat carers and semi-owners also experience emotional distress when cats they care for are trapped and euthanised (Neal 2023).

- Euthanising healthy and treatable animals is a recognized factor contributing to burnout among veterinarians and shelter staff, and it is directly linked to high turnover rates (AVA 2022; Rogelberg 2007).

- These mental health impacts come at a significant cost to local governments and animal welfare organisations, including expenses related to recruitment, sick leave, and decreased productivity, and they also raise the potential for OH&S claims or legal action.

- It is not only staff directly involved with euthanasia who are affected. As one seasoned animal management officer described, **"Would you like to spend your workday picking up cats to take to die?"** She expressed feeling like a "glorified pet-killing taxi driver." Notably, Community Cat Programs, which focus on desexing rather than euthanasia, avoid causing these documented mental health impacts on staff.

Recommendation J.1: **The severe negative impacts on human wellbeing,** and especially mental health, associated with killing healthy and treatable cats should be a **major consideration when deciding on methods for domestic cat management**.

Rescue Groups/ Community Care Foster Networks

In New South Wales (NSW), a significant number of organizations are designated as approved rehoming entities under Section 88B of the Companion Animals Act 1998. Approved rehoming organizations receive specific benefits that reduce the financial burden of caring for and rehoming companion animals, particularly cats and dogs. These provisions aim to support rehoming efforts and encourage the public to adopt animals from approved organizations rather than other sources.

However, **many smaller rescue groups, community-based foster networks, and individuals in these roles play an essential role in managing multi-cat sites** (colonies) and **independently desexing and rehoming animals,** remain unrecognized under this designation. These groups and individuals frequently cover the costs of desexing, veterinary care, and rehoming from their own limited resources, often relying on private veterinary arrangements, with donations from the public, or assistance from the approved rehoming organisations and/or other rescuers. Most rescuers and carers are strong networkers to achieve timely outcomes for the animals with scarce resources. A number of rescuers desex and microchip cats at multi-cat sites using their own and donated finances.

Recognizing these not-for-profit (NFP) community foster networks and rescue groups and individuals would acknowledge their substantial contributions to managing stray and semi-owned cats that are not typically impounded or cared for by approved rehoming organizations. The **overpopulation of cats is a community issue, and many community members are fulfilling roles traditionally assigned to authorised officers.** Additionally, community members are generally reluctant to involve officers in trapping programs, fearing that unsocialized and/or ill cats will be impounded and subsequently euthanised. This concern can erode trust in larger animal welfare facilities, underscoring the **importance of supporting and legitimising the efforts of smaller, community-driven rescue initiatives.**

In some instances where proactive Community Cat Programs have supported individuals and smaller rescue groups with subsidized desexing and microchipping, **enforcement officers have**

utilized microchip registry data to take action against multi-cat carers and owners. Additionally, individuals are required to pay a $78 lifetime registration fee if the cat was not desexed before the legislatively required age, further discouraging cat carers and semi-owners from microchipping cats due to fear of fines and penalties.

Recommendation J.2: **Recognise the value of community foster networks, rescue groups** and individuals involved in managing stray and semi-owned cats and **incorporate their support** in Community Cat Programs to assist with trapping and transporting cats for desexing, and for fostering and adopting, as well as caring for cats at managed multi-cat sites.

Recommendation J.3: It is strongly recommended that there are **no barriers** for anyone **enrolling a cat into a Community Cat Program, including fear of receiving an infringement for excess cats or a breeder permit, or paying extra fees for registration**.

Recommendation J.4: It is strongly recommended that **extra cost of a permit is immediately removed for cats over 4 months old when they are desexed and registered,** because this is a **financial barrier for rescue groups** and for cat semi-owners wanting to take full ownership of cats they are feeding..

Recommendation J.5: **Life time registration be abolished** because it substantially **increases the costs** of a **Community Cat Program** to local governments, welfare agencies, rescue groups and community foster carers, and is also a **barrier to semi-owners adopting the cat they are caring for.** Instead increase the efficiency of microchipping for reuniting lost cats because this is more cost effective.

The National Domestic Cat Working Group

The National Domestic Cat Working Group, initiated by the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner, is an essential platform for addressing domestic cat management, distinct from feral cat issues.

Recommendation J.6: **AWPF recommends the NSW Government urge the Federal Government** to reestablish and fund the **National Domestic Cat Working Group** and that it has representatives from key state organisations involved in domestic cat management.

Conclusion

In concluding this submission, it is essential to **clarify the ultimate objective** of this inquiry into Management of Cat Populations in NSW. Is the goal to introduce further restrictive legislative mandates, or to achieve a tangible reduction in the number of free-roaming cats across the state? The **overpopulation of cats in NSW poses significant challenges for animal care, human and animal welfare and their environments. It strains resources** and personnel, while **exacerbating mental health impacts** for those tasked with managing and caring for these animals. **Current and proposed measures** such as containment laws, remain largely unenforceable and **fail to address the root causes** of the issue effectively. They also lead **to further exposure of staff to the negative impacts on job satisfaction and mental health** of having to **kill healthy and treatable cats and kittens**.

The **most viable solution to the cat overpopulation crisis lies in the implementation of Community Cat Programs combined with a community-assistance or outreach approach**. By supporting high-intensity cat desexing and microchipping programs that are targeted and microtargeted to the most problematic areas for cat impoundments or cat-related calls, cat **overpopulation can be humanely and sustainably addressed**. This should be combined with a **community-focused strategy** that assists households to **care for and keep their cats**, including taking **ownership of semi-owned cats**. This will lessen the burden on formal animal management, and enhance public trust in animal welfare policies. These strategies need to be supported by **appropriate legislative changes** that recognise **definitions of feral and domestic cats based on** RSPCA recommendations**, remove legislative barriers to desexing** by allowing continuing care **for semi-owned desexed cats in their home location** (TNR) and allowing healthy cats that would otherwise be killed, to be desexed, microchipped and **returned to their home (RTF).** Other barriers for owners and semi-owners to have cats desexed and microchipped, including registration, breeder permit fees and cat-limits should be removed and **anti-nuisance and animal welfare laws used to address cat-related issues.**

Mandated containment is proven to be ineffective and is a **barrier to solving the issue of cat overpopulation,** while simultaneously it **increases cat-related complaints and costs to council** and **increases killing of healthy and treatable cats**, increasing **exposure of staff to the subsequent negative mental health impacts**. ***Mandated containment should not be implemented*, but cat containment should be encouraged in situations where it is feasible,** and **information disseminated** about simple, inexpensive and effective measures**,** such as using **bed-time feeding to facilitate night-time containment of cats**.

This inquiry provides an **opportunity for the NSW Government to be a leader in domestic cat management** and implement **One Welfare aligned policies** that **drive measurable decreases in the number of free-roaming cats**, **cat-related complaint calls** to councils, **cat impoundments** and **euthanasia,** and **benefit the wellbeing** of **animals, humans** and their physical and social **environments**.

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