

## LRC GUIDE with suggested concerns to be tailored by rescuers & carers

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## Q1 Strategic framework for encouraging responsible ownership of companion animals (see Part 1 of the Discussion Paper for background information)

### Q 1.a Do you support the CA Act being amended to focus more on encouraging responsible pet ownership outcomes over strict compliance processes?

**Support is provided for the CA Act being amended to focus more on encouraging responsible pet ownership outcomes over strict compliance processes. Positive and proactive services and solutions are more successful than negative, punitive approaches.**

Recommendations for the CA Act improvements to focus more on encouraging responsible pet ownership outcomes over strict compliance processes include:

- funded desexing and vaccination programs offered free to pet owners and semi-owners (community cat rescuers/ carers) with managed cats/ colonies
- free pet registrations to encourage more pets to be registered
- AMOs assisting in engaging face-to-face with communities
- cultural change initiatives for areas of high immigration from other countries where there are different (lower) forms of animal welfare standards
- acknowledgment and integration of community volunteers assisting with abandoned pets (e.g. cat rescuers/ carers) – and enabling “care on the streets” solutions, avoiding animals being pushed through the council pound systems.

Refer RSPCA NSW, APWF, CPS and a range of council findings e.g. Banyule, Weddin, Rosewood.

**It is recommended that community cat rescuers and carers are included as key stakeholders in the transformation of the CA Act.**

The transformation of the CA Act framework should involve a range of key stakeholders in designing and implementing the changes in the Act to be focused on outcomes – i.e. domestic cat experts (such as APWF etc) through to community cat rescuers and other volunteers who will be essential for a successful implementation of services and solutions in our communities.

Q1.d How could the legislation be improved to motivate better cat owner behaviour and encourage owners to manage their cats more responsibly? (For example, cat containment)

**Recommendations for the CA Act / legislation improvements to motivate better cat owner behaviour and encourage owners to manage their cats more responsibly include:**

- funded desexing and vaccination programs offered free to pet owners and semi-owners (community cat rescuers/ carers) with managed cats/ colonies
- free pet registrations to encourage more pets to be registered
- AMOs assisting in engaging face-to-face with communities
- cultural change initiatives for areas of high immigration from other countries where there are different (lower) forms of animal welfare standards
- acknowledgment and integration of community volunteers assisting with abandoned pets (e.g. cat rescuers/ carers) – and enabling “care on the streets” solutions, avoiding animals being pushed through the council pound systems.

Refer RSPCA NSW, APWF, CPS and a range of council findings e.g. Banyule, Weddin, Rosewood.

**Mandatory cat containment is not recommended at the state nor council/ LGA levels as it has not proven effective nor as a cost justified investment.**

It has not been proven to be effective, while desexing programs have proven effective in minimising cat populations, roaming cats, impacts to wildlife and nuisance incidents. Promoting and assisting cat owners with containment options and solutions is recommended. Refer APWF.

**It is recommended that community cat rescuers and carers are included as key stakeholders in the transformation of legislation.**

It is recommended the transformation of the CA Act legislation etc involves a range of key stakeholders in designing and implementing the changes in the Act to be focused on outcomes – i.e. domestic cat experts (such as APWF etc) through to community cat rescuers and other volunteers who will be essential for a successful implementation of services and solutions. Refer APWF and CPS.

## Q1.e Are there other matters that should be considered?

**The NSW state and council obligations for recording and tracking information on pets needs to be improved to improve planning and decision making, and ensure tangible and intangible benefits are achieved.**

For example: complaint incidents and council pound pet assessments and outcomes. This information should be available monthly, and be available to the public/ community.

Every council needs to be considering desexing programs and community cat programs to be assessed and implemented based on tangible justification (benefits exceed costs) and intangible considerations such as less physical, mental and emotional burden on council staff, vets and community cat rescuers/ carers.

**It is strongly recommended that both the NSW Companion Animal Act and the NSW Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act require improvements to ensure desexing programs and the efforts of community cat rescuers can proceed without impediments or constraints.**

For example: threats of abandoning cats, biodiversity risks not being adequately assessed to specific areas, and CA Act clause 32 where a cat may be seized for harming any single animal (other than vermin) which includes pest animals, other introduced animals or native animals where the population is not at risk.

**The registered breeders require better oversight, and Back Yard Breeding should cease.**

- The breeding industry should be regulated, not self-regulated.
- Back yard breeders, even small home based breeding, should be banned.
- Pet shops and retailers should only source cats and dogs from animal welfare organisations, rehoming organisations and rescuers.

Refer APWF, Oscars Law.

**It is recommended that community members trapping nuisance cats should cease based on animal welfare concerns that there is no effective way to oversee and control that trappers will meet/ conform with animal welfare needs, and that an animal is transferred to a council pound. .**

However, there needs a balance for experienced community cat rescuers /carers to trap a cat for medical assistance / desexing etc. Therefore, nuisance cat and dog legislations and processes will need improvement to respond to issues within the community.

Refer current clause 32 of the CA Act and seizing a cat.

**Government, government funded organisations, and animal welfare organisations (native and introduced) need to conform with ethical, legal, and social licensing obligations in their language and terms used on websites, social media, and publications through traditional media channels. Overstating the role of cats, risks misinforming the public, and fosters indiscriminate cruelty toward all cats (pet, stray, feral).**

Our companion animals deserve fair and ethical treatment, based on evidence-based communication, with assumptions being transparent and reasonable. Sound policy and ethical management require nuanced, evidence-based communication, and appropriate media framing, avoiding misleading media titles that appear attention grabbing marketing.

In 2017 a study was completed on the impact of language used to describe invasive species. This found that terms like "alien" and "invasive" contribute to fear and moral disengagement, leading to support for lethal control methods and reduced concern for animal welfare.

Refer Crowley etc.

## Q2. Compliance and enforcement role of councils (see Part 2 of the Discussion Paper for background information)

Q2.a What changes to NSW laws, regulations, codes or guidelines could be provided to councils and other enforcement authorities to better support responsible pet ownership?

**A shared set of appropriate terms and definitions from RSPCA Australia 2018 and evolving under domestic cat experts should be embedded in the legislation: feral cats versus domestic cats who are owned, semi owned or unowned.**

These terms are based on where cats reside, and how the cats behave especially with engagement with humans. Refer RSPCA Australia and APWF.

**It is recommended that the NSW state government assist with standardising companion animal planning and reporting, with shared interpretations of legislation to minimise each council determining a different interpretation.**

For example, proforma documents and guidelines be provided where by each council complete a set format with specific numbers, indicators, and exceptions or differences. The key focus areas include:

- NSW state govt to create a proforma for cat and dog management planning – where each of the 128 councils complete with “numbers” and highlight exceptions or special needs.
- NSW state govt to create a proforma for biodiversity reporting and planning - where each of the 128 councils complete with specific native animals and vegetation species, numbers and highlight exceptions or special needs, and include specific researched local findings of impacts of cats alongside all other top threats including land clearing, climate change impacts such as droughts, bushfires, droughts, dogs, humans in 4WDs, bikes etc.
- NSW state govt to create interpretations of POCTA cat related clauses such as abandonment which then all 128 councils can follow the single advice with flexibility to judge severity etc.

Refer various council cat and dog management plans and biodiversity reports – quite often document titles are different, and some councils have still to draft these.

**Q2.c Are the current enforcement provisions under the Act (including penalties for offences- see Appendix B of the discussion paper) appropriate? If not, what enforcement provisions should be changed?**

**Legislation should be improved to include behaviour modification programs for owners and their pets, including mental health assistance, formal training and education, where required council AMO face to face engagement and monitoring of owner and pet improvements.**

**Punitive legislation for fines / extra charges should be removed, specifically for failure to register on time, and the extra fees for not desexing a cat before 4 months of age provided the cat is desexed etc.**

Refer APWF.

## Q2.d Are there other compliance and enforcement matters that should be considered?

**Alternative proactive solutions for community support of abandoned cats should be enabled and facilitated, and funded for key outcomes to reduce the number of abandoned pets and increase rehoming opportunities without putting more burden on the council pound systems.**

**Community carers and rescuers should be considered a part of the overall / holistic animal welfare systems. The state and council capacity planning and funding should integrate the efforts of the community.**

Refer APWF, CPS NSW and RSPCA NSW.

**There is also a similar need for acknowledgement and funding for native species care in each LGA, with governments bringing native rescuers and companion animal rescuers to work together in a healthy relationship.**

Based on findings, then appropriate planning and further funding can be accomplished for the best outcomes for wildlife, companion animals and humans/ community citizens.

For example:

- conservation fencing for areas to protect the vegetation and keep out all other animals including humans, refer Victorian Parks; and/or
- focused areas for intense promotion of desexing and containing pets (dogs and cat) to minimise specific impacts to wildlife with the highest risks/ threats.

**Mandatory cat containment is not recommended at the state nor council/ LGA levels as it has not proven effective nor as a cost justified investment.**

Refer response to Q1.e. Refer APWF.

### Q3. Companion animal population and rehoming (see Part 3 of the Discussion Paper for background information)

#### Q3.a What more could be done to reduce stray and homeless cats and dogs in NSW?

**It is recommended for cultural change programs to be funded and developed to address the lack of animal welfare care across communities. This is aligned with improvements in AMO roles and face to face community engagement.**

The primary cause for abandoning cats and dogs is due to the costs involved with desexing, registration and ongoing vet care. Looking after a pet is becoming out of the reach of many on low incomes. Other factors include the lack of rent/ leased properties to house and contain pets, constraining strata or home organisation laws, and neighbours who dislike or fear companion animals. Refer APWF.

It is also anecdotally well experienced that excessive cat populations tend to be located in areas of low socio economic areas, and those areas with high immigration from other countries where animal welfare is not to Australian standards.

**The high number of “stray” or homeless abandoned pets will be positively reduced through funded desexing programs for dogs and cats. It is recommended that every council should be assessing the business case/ justification in their own LGAs for desexing programs and proven associated constructive actions. The NSW state government should provide a proforma case/ plan for each council’s use. And this can be integrated in each council’s dog and cat management plan.**

These programs have been proved cost effective by the Banyule council cat desexing program operated over several years which returned four-fold in savings over the investment costs. Refer Banyule council. Also refer to Parramatta, Weddin and Rosewood councils.

**It is recommended that the NSW state government provide funding to kick-start high intensity cat desexing in LGAs with cat crisis/ hot spot issues**

Where there are very high numbers of roaming undesexed and not registered cats, high intensity desexing programs as operated by AWPf, RSPCA NSW and CPS NSW have proven very effective in significantly reducing the kittens born with each year, intakes to council pounds and associated costs.

Refer research/ studies from APWF, RSPCA NSW and CPS NSW.



Improvements in the CA Act and legislation have been raised in previous questions. For example: enabling pet registration to be free and removing punitive extra fees where a cat was not desexed before 4 months of age which acts as a disincentive, and for rescuers of abandoned cats being punished for rescuing an older cat, desexing, registering and rehoming.

Refer APWF, CPS.

### Q3.b What changes can be made to NSW laws, regulations, codes or guidelines to reduce the number of companion animals entering the pound and rehoming system in the first place?

Addressing the most significant issues or root causes for abandoning pets is described in Q3.a.

Reducing the number of companion animal entering a council pound and their rehoming system requires proactively supporting surrendered and abandoned pets.

**It is recommended for surrendered pets to be minimised with support services to assist pet owners retaining their pets in their homes. These require funding from the NSW state government which will provide benefits for the owners and the pets and relive the burdens on council pounds and associated animal welfare systems.**

For example:

- The Banyule council Vic desexing program over several years involved Animal Management Officers engaged and supporting the local community with desexing their pets, building trusted relationships. Refer Banyule council.
- Pets for Life which is an integrated program to provide assistance to pet owners involves a number of organisations including Caloundra Community Centre, the Sunshine Coast Animal Refuge (SCARS), the University of the Sunshine Coast, Sunshine Coast Council, Bluecare, Volunteering Sunshine Coast and community individuals. Refer Pets for Life.
- RSPCA NSW Community Outreach Services provide preventative vet services for pet owners/ guardians. Refer RSPCA NSW.

**It is recommended for NSW state and council education programs to address pets are for life rather than selected for short term benefits, which will assist in reducing surrenders.**

These programs align with the One Welfare approaches. One Welfare focuses on providing solutions for pets to stay with owners, instead of trying to enforce punitive laws and more often remove pets from owners, with the pets then likely being euthanased.

Refer One Welfare research indicating benefits to people and communities when solutions are provided.

### Q3.c For companion animals needing to enter the 'pound' system, what could be done to increase rehoming?

**All council pounds and associated staff need to provide a range of services to increase rehoming rates for dogs and cats, involving prompt communication, improving marketing skills, relationships with businesses focused on companion animals, community volunteers, rehoming organisations and rescuers/carers.**

These include:

- Fee free pet registration will help increase the take up of easily identifying owners, and therefore assist with reuniting any lost pets with their owners
- Advertising available animals needs to be completed promptly and with constructive marketing, to more effectively match potential new owner needs with the dog or cat attributes. Council pound systems should be open to interfaces with social media and rescue groups and volunteers who may assist with a wider market reach.
- Extending rather than reducing holding time, provides a longer time period for animals to settle/ decompress in a shelter environment.
- Establishing and working with a foster network provides kinder environments for most pets, as many will find shelter/ pound environments limiting and frightening. Ensure fosterers are respected and do not have animals in their care taken away for euthanasia without effective communication and behaviour modification processes.
- Simplify processes such as adoption paperwork, establish foster to adopt steps.
- Counsel potential adopters through a matchmaking process, and provide after adoption services to ensure a pet is settling in their new family and environment.
- Hold pet adoptions events regularly and in the community, rather than just at a shelter.

Refer to Victorian council pound research to reduce euthanasia rates and ASPCA shelter adoption tips.

### Q3.d Are there other dog and cat population and rehoming matters that should be considered?

**Enabling Return to Field (RTF) and working with community cat rescuers/ carers (semi owners), freed from current legal barriers can assist our council pounds and the holistic animal welfare system.**

Very recent research brings together the individual successful strategies/ tactics for Urban Cat Management for the best integrated outcomes.

- returning a cat to where it was found is better for the cat and potential owners  
"It is more likely to be reunited with its owner or carer by returning it to where it was found, rather than by holding it in the shelter, where the return-to-owner rates are low... Cats are 13 times more likely to be reunited with their owners by means other than a visit to the shelter by the owner"
- TNR and RTF reduces mental health impacts on all of those involved  
"return to field is being embraced by shelter staff because it avoids the mental trauma of having to euthanize healthy, less socialized cats and improves job satisfaction"
- we need the legislative barriers removed and provide flexibility  
"It is recommended that legislative amendments be made to allow both TNR and RTF in light of the adverse mental health impacts of the euthanasia of healthy cats and kittens on shelter and pound staff and AMOs, as well as members of the community caring for cats"
- ultimate return on investment in tangible and intangible benefits  
"When these programs are applied with sufficient intensity and duration, they decrease free-roaming cats, the numbers of cats euthanized, and cat-related complaints... This is especially important if there are no threatened and endangered native species at risk of cat predation in the area."

Refer to Australian Urban Cat Management research.

**This is an unreasonable and unfair financial burden, and in what may be seen as a form of emotional abuse where those who care about cats (cat rescuers / carers or semi owners) are carrying the load for cat welfare in their communities.**

Otherwise, cats suffer on the streets or are likely to be euthanased at pounds. This has been getting worse every year over the last decade, and extremely onerous in crisis /hot-spot suburbs.

Semi owners are monitoring and retrieving abandoned cats in communities across NSW. These cats and kittens are desexed, chipped, registered and rehomed. These efforts are usually limited by personal funds and facilities.

Rehoming Organisations are just the “tip of the iceberg” that are transparent to the NSW state government and councils. However, not all rescuers/ carers are able to bear the financial and labour burden for reporting etc as an RO. There is also a lack of confidence in building a trusted relationship with some councils.

**Desexing programs involving community cats and their rescuers/ carers start to rectify this unfair burden.** Refer APWF.

**It is strongly recommended that the research into the Australian Newcastle breakwater cats culling is taken into consideration the cruelty to cats that was witnessed, the impacts on the volunteer cat rescuers/carers, and community angst that highlighted the support for the cats and carers.**

The research includes:

- the **extremely strong bond between volunteer carers and rescuers with colony cats** “known by authorities for at least five years, and included using a RTF/TNR program to reduce numbers from 100 to about 40” with rehoming many cats abandoned by others,
- the advice “...the severity of the adverse psychological impacts, and the morbidity rate amongst the cat caregivers... was far greater than would be expected as a risk to the community if the cats had remained at the site. We therefore suggest that **potential legal ramifications should be considered before authorities intentionally choose a method of management that is likely to inflict substantial harm on community members.**”

**It is strongly recommended that a relationship is established between the NSW state government, councils and community cat rescuers/ carers, with One Welfare solutions.**

## References for more information

APWF Draft Submission for the NSW CA Act Review: <https://petwelfare.org.au/government-submissions>

“Urban Cat Management in Australia—Evidence-Based Strategies for Success”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/15/8/1083>

RSPCA NSW Facebook post

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPCANewSouthWales/posts/pfbid0nAV9NvfFSUJ3VWUgZFDLYwL7M5pNAHQyF3XSuHteFhSP7bQZy3TCVp5xXsCp2F6il>

CPS <https://catprotection.org.au/desexing/> & CPS Answers to Supplementary questions

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011#tab-otherdocuments>

APWF 2024 Report & other information <https://petwelfare.org.au/community-cat-programs>

Banyule council Vic: “Impact of a Local Government Funded Free Cat Sterilization Program for Owned and Semi-Owned Cats”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/11/1615>

Rosewood council NSW: “Outcomes of a Community Cat Program Based on Sterilization of Owned, Semi-Owned and Unowned Cats in a Small Rural Town”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/14/21/3058>

Weddin Council NSW <https://weddinlandcare.com.au/milestone-for-keeping-cats-safe-at-home-project>

“Rethinking Urban Cat Management—Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Traditional Cat Management” <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/15/7/1005>

“‘You can’t ban compassion’: helping stray cats is illegal in much of Australia – but for some, it’s worth the risk” <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/feb/23/you-cant-ban-compassion-helping-stray-cats-is-in-much-of-australia-but-for-some-its-worth-the-risk>

“The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle”

<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/2/271>

Transcript from various organisations including RSPCA NSW, CPS NSW and APWF:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=3011#tab-hearingsandtranscripts>

Oscars Law: <https://www.oscarslaw.org/our-mission.htm>

<https://www.oscarslaw.org/legislation-in-each-state.htm>

Crowley, Hinchliffe, McDonald “Conflict in invasive species management”

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315045722\\_Conflict\\_in\\_invasive\\_species\\_management](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315045722_Conflict_in_invasive_species_management)

RSPCA Australia cat terms and definitions: <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management-in-Australia-RSPCA-Research-Report-May-2018.pdf>

APWF cat terms: <https://petwelfare.org.au/position-statements/cat-definitions>

Victorian Parks <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/news/2022/09/19/02/11/how-does-a-fence-protect-native-plants-and-animals>

Pets for Life: <https://www.petsforlife.org.au/>

RSPCA NSW Community Outreach Services <https://www.rspcansw.org.au/support-services/community-outreach-assistance/>

One Welfare research: “Punishment to Support: The Need to Align Animal Control Enforcement with the Human Social Justice Movement” <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/10/1902>

“Strategies to Reduce the Euthanasia of Impounded Dogs and Cats Used by Councils in Victoria, Australia” <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/8/7/100>

ASPCA adoption tips: <https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/effective-tips-boost-adoptions-reduce-barriers-improve-experience>