



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ANIMAL WELFARE COMMITTEE

Management of cat populations in New South Wales



Report 2

August 2025

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Animal Welfare Committee

Management of cat populations in New South Wales

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August 2025

Chair: Hon Emma Hurst MLC



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Terms of reference

That the Animal Welfare Committee inquire into and report on the management of cat populations in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings
- (b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers
- (c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions
- (d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives
- (e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies
- (f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs
- (g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system
- (h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories
- (i) options for reducing the feral cat population
- (j) any other related matters.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 21 September 2023.

The inquiry commenced on 11 October 2024

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Emma Hurst MLC	Animal Justice Party	<i>Chair</i>
Hon Bob Nanva MLC	Australian Labor Party	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Hon Robert Borsak MLC	Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party	
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Wes Fang MLC	The Nationals	
Ms Sue Higginson MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Stephen Lawrence MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC	Liberal Party	
Hon Peter Primrose MLC	Australian Labor Party	
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* Ms Sue Higginson MLC is a participating member from 30 October 2024 for the duration of the inquiry

Secretariat

Margaret Pollard, Senior Council Officer

James Ryan, Council Officer

Talina Drabsch, Director

Chair's foreword

The overpopulation of cats in New South Wales is having serious impacts throughout our state. In addition to cat welfare concerns, the number of homeless cats affects volunteer cat carers, animal rescue and rehoming organisations, pounds, and their hard-working staff. Resources are often stretched well beyond capacity and many otherwise healthy cats face euthanasia. Cats also have an impact on wildlife, which is exacerbated when there are large numbers of homeless cats living in communities or in the wild. It is clear that effective cat management strategies are urgently needed.

While there is agreement that something needs to be done, opinion was divided throughout the inquiry regarding the best approach to managing cat overpopulation. The benefits of various strategies were strongly contested with passionate views held by many inquiry participants as to what is the most effective path. Moving forward, it is imperative that the Government ensure that cat management programs are underpinned by sound scientific evidence before they commence.

The Government is currently reviewing the *Companion Animals Act 1998* and it is our hope that the findings of this inquiry will help inform the outcomes of that review. The committee made 10 recommendations addressing various aspects of cat management, with a number going to the issue of desexing. It is clear that desexing is a critical part of any cat management strategy. The breeding cycle must be broken to reduce the overpopulation of cats. The committee was encouraged to learn of some innovative approaches in this area, including the use of immunocontraceptives and gene drive technology.

A major issue that emerged throughout the inquiry was cat containment or cat curfews, and whether or not this should be mandatory. Overall, many believed that there are benefits to voluntary cat containment, but that the potential negative consequences of mandatory or punitive cat containment laws make them unworkable in New South Wales at present. It was apparent to the committee that there is currently insufficient evidence that mandatory cat containment and cat curfew laws are effective, and in fact they could have adverse consequences including the costs imposed on councils and significant increases in euthanasia rates. The committee encourages the Government to fund educational and behaviour-change programs so as to foster the voluntary adoption of cat containment within the community.

This inquiry attracted significant interest, with more than 1200 submissions received. The committee is grateful to the many who shared their knowledge and expertise with the committee, including those who appeared before the committee at the two hearings held. The committee is also thankful for the many rescue and rehoming organisations and volunteer cat carers for the role they currently play in responding to the overwhelming number of cats needing assistance.

I also express my gratitude to my fellow committee members for their insight and contributions throughout the inquiry and to the committee secretariat for their professionalism and diligence.

Hon Emma Hurst MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

- Finding 1** 23
There is an urgent need to implement cat management strategies in New South Wales to address the overpopulation of cats in New South Wales, both in urban environments and in the wild.
- Finding 2** 23
Key threats to wildlife in New South Wales include not only introduced species, but also habitat destruction and fragmentation, and a holistic approach to native animals is required.
- Finding 3** 52
Desexing programs were broadly supported by the large majority of inquiry participants, and have been proven to be an effective cat management strategy.
- Finding 4** 54
That not-for-profit cat rescues and volunteers have played a critical and leading role in the desexing and rehoming of cats in New South Wales.
- Finding 5** 84
Educational and behaviour change programs which encourage and support people to voluntarily keep cats indoors were supported by a majority of inquiry participants, and there is some early positive evidence to support the effectiveness of such programs.
- Finding 6** 85
There is insufficient evidence that mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews at a state or local government level are effective in reducing the number of free-roaming cats and therefore reducing impacts on wildlife.
- Finding 7** 85
Mandatory cat containment laws are likely to create equity issues and have a disproportionate impact on people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and First Nations communities.
- Finding 8** 86
The killing of healthy cats has a severe impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pound, shelter, veterinary and rescue staff and volunteers.
- Finding 9** 86
New South Wales may not be ready to adopt mandatory cat containment laws, whether these laws are statewide or at a local government level.
- Finding 10** 87
NSW Government and councils should manage cats in a way that supports the health and wellbeing of people, animals, and the environment.

Recommendations

- Recommendation 1** 52
That the Government ensure cat management programs are underpinned by sound, peer-reviewed scientific evidence, with clear objectives and measurable metrics established to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Recommendation 2** 53
That the Government provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out free and subsidised desexing programs throughout the state, including desexing of 'owned' cats for those on lower incomes, and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs.
- Recommendation 3** 53
That the Government expand the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.
- Recommendation 4** 53
To assist rural and regional councils with desexing programs, the NSW Government should investigate ways to provide additional support including but not limited to encouraging metropolitan veterinarians and mobile desexing programs to regularly visit rural and regional areas, providing this does not have a negative impact on local service providers.
- Recommendation 5** 53
That the Government, as part of its review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, consider legislative, regulatory and policy changes necessary to support the effectiveness and operation of community cat desexing programs.
- Recommendation 6** 54
That the Government provide funding to cat rescue and rehoming organisations to support desexing, care and rehoming costs.
- Recommendation 7** 54
That, as part of the upgrade of the NSW Pet Registry and Companion Animal Register, the Government prioritise consultation with rehoming organisations, with a view to ensuring greater access for these organisations.
- Recommendation 8** 55
That the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming and the sale of cats from breeders in pet shops.
- Recommendation 9** 55
That the Government invest in research and trials for humane means of fertility control, such as immune-contraceptives and gene drive technology.
- Recommendation 10** 87
That the Government should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained.

Conduct of inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 21 September 2023. The inquiry commenced on 11 October 2024.

The committee received 510 submissions and 741 short submissions.

The committee held two public hearings at Parliament House in Sydney .

Inquiry related documents are available on the committee's website, including submissions, hearing transcripts, tabled documents and answers to questions on notice.

Chapter 1 Background

This chapter provides an overview of the current management of cat populations in New South Wales. It considers the various terminology that is frequently used to describe various sub-categories of cats, noting that the way in which cat populations are often defined stems from the concept of ownership and/or the relationship between cats and humans. A summary of the regulatory framework in New South Wales is included, with particular emphasis given to the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, including its microchipping and registration requirements. Relevant legislation regarding animal welfare and the protection of wildlife are also considered, followed by an outline of the role and responsibilities of councils in relation to cat management.

Cat population in New South Wales: a profile

- 1.1 One in three households in Australia have a cat, making them the second most popular pet.¹ According to Local Government NSW, there are approximately 4.9 million pet cats in Australia.² In addition, there are thought to be 0.7 million unowned cats living in urban areas and between 1.5 million and 5.6 million in the bush.³
- 1.2 The Government recognised that 'cats play a significant role in society and are integral to the lives of their owners', often having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of their owners and families.⁴
- 1.3 It is hard to identify how many cats are in New South Wales, as while there were almost 1.2 million companion cats recorded on the NSW Pet Registry, there were criticisms during the inquiry that the details on the pet registry were inadequate. Further, there are estimates that only one half of pet cats are identified (microchipped) and one quarter are registered.⁵
- 1.4 Findings from a 2021 Animal Medicines Australia survey suggest that there are around 100,000 to 150,000 new pet cats every year in New South Wales.⁶ One-quarter of these are sourced from animal shelters.⁷
- 1.5 The NSW Pet Registry is the public online portal linked to the Companion Animals Register, a statewide register of pet dogs and cats. Breeders and owners can use the Pet Registry to register cats and dogs, add litters, update contact information, and pay relevant fees.⁸ The Companion

¹ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 2.

² Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 4, citing Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 33.

³ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 4.

⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 5.

⁵ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 33.

⁶ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 33.

⁷ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 33.

⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

Animals Register is a key regulatory tool used by councils when undertaking animal management responsibilities.⁹

- 1.6 Microchipping (the identification of cats) and registration are separate processes in New South Wales. Cats must be microchipped before sold or given away, or before they are 12 weeks old. A microchip is a permanent form of identification that is implanted under the cat's skin, with its number recorded on the NSW Pet Registry.¹⁰
- 1.7 The NSW Pet Registry includes details about the owner and the pet, and cats must be microchipped before they can be registered.¹¹ They need to be registered by 12 weeks of age or on transfer of ownership, whichever happens first. From 1 July 2025, the fee for registering a cat is \$70.¹² The registration fee is waived for desexed cats sold by an eligible council pound, shelter, or approved rehoming organisation.
- 1.8 Figure 1 shows the number of identified and registered cats in New South Wales as at 5 November 2024.

Figure 1 Identified and registered cats in NSW (as at November 2024)

Cat data on the NSW Companion Animals Register (CAR)	Total	Percent of total
Total number of cats listed on the CAR	1,190,033	
Total number of cats listed in the CAR that are registered	541,154	45.5%
Number of cats listed on the CAR that are desexed	663,699	55.8%
Number of cats listed on the CAR that are desexed and registered	525,430	44.2%

Source: Submission 94, NSW Government, p 17.

- 1.9 The number of cats that are identified only as opposed to also being registered varies significantly between local government areas.¹³ As an example, 68.9 per cent of identified cats within the Liverpool local government area were not registered compared to 2.8 per cent of identified cats in the Sutherland local government area.¹⁴ Some of the factors influencing whether or not cats are registered are discussed in chapter 3.
- 1.10 Female cats are generally able to reproduce from the age of 16 weeks.¹⁵ Female cats can potentially breed every 12 weeks after birth of a litter, with each litter consisting of anywhere between one and six kittens.¹⁶ The RSPCA NSW observed that 'one unowned cat will reliably

⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

¹⁰ Office of Local Government, *Microchipping* (26 March 2024), <https://www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au/owners/microchipping>

¹¹ Office of Local Government, *Microchipping* (26 March 2024), <https://www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au/owners/microchipping>

¹² Office of Local Government, *Pet registration fees* (1 July 2024), <https://www.petregistry.nsw.gov.au/registration-and-permit-fees/pet-registration-fees>

¹³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 17.

¹⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 17.

¹⁵ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

¹⁶ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11; Submission 169, Animal Liberation, p 46.

become a colony of 50 or more unowned cats within two years because of the very high reproductive success of cats when receiving supplementary food and shelter'.¹⁷

Terminology

- 1.11** All cats in Australia, irrespective of whether they are domesticated, are part of the same species, that is, *felis catus*.¹⁸ Nonetheless, cats are often divided into a number of sub-groups, such as owned, semi-owned, and wild cats. Different groups often use different terminology when referring to sub-groups of cats, which can cause confusion.
- 1.12** The table below does not attempt to provide a definitive description for each category, but rather provides an overview of the common definitions used by some major stakeholders and for regulatory purposes.¹⁹

Table 1 Types of cat populations

Category	Description
Feral/Wild	A feral/wild cat is unowned and unsocialised, reproduces in the wild and has no relationship or dependence on humans. Wild cats cannot be rehomed.
Owned	Owned cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable though sociability varies. They may be contained, partially contained, or uncontained.
Semi-owned	Semi-owned cats are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider that they own them. They are of varying sociability and may be associated with one or more households. Their survival is supported by humans but they are not contained.
Unowned	Unowned cats are indirectly dependent on humans with some having casual and temporary interactions. They are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and may lived in groups. They are uncontained.
Domestic	Domestic cats include owned, semi-owned and unowned cats.
Contained	A contained cat is a domestic cat kept within the owner's property boundaries. This may include the use of a suitable enclosure, fencing, or by keeping the cat indoors. Containment be may be continuous or partial, such as only at night.

- 1.13** In contrast, the national *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024* ('Threat Abatement Plan'), produced by the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, divides cats into two groups - feral and pets.²⁰

¹⁷ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 13.

¹⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 12; *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 5.

¹⁹ See, for example, Submission 166, Animal Welfare League, p 18; Submission 28, Sentient, p 2; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 3; Submission 16, RSPCA, p 1.

²⁰ Australian Government, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 10.

- 1.14** The Threat Abatement Plan describes 'feral cats' as surviving by hunting or scavenging, noting that they have no or little interaction with humans, and live in diverse habitats. Unlike many other stakeholders who emphasised the lack of any relationship between feral cats and humans, the Threat Abatement Plan employs a much broader definition of 'feral cats' by including all cats that are not formally owned by people, including 'stray cats'.²¹ Stray cats are described as a subset of feral cats that are found in and around cities, towns and rural properties and which may rely on resources indirectly or deliberately and periodically provided by people.²²
- 1.15** 'Pet cats' are limited to those that are 'owned by a person or people and their needs (food, shelter, veterinary care) may be wholly supplied by their owners. Some pet cats are contained indoors, while others roam'.²³
- 1.16** The use of 'feral' to describe a subset of the cat population was considered problematic on multiple levels by some inquiry participants. Animal Liberation believed that, in relation to cats, the term 'feral' 'lacks a universally accepted definition, leading to a diversity of interpretations that complicate effective management strategies'.²⁴ In particular, they observed that it is the distinction between 'stray' and 'feral' that tends to cause the most confusion as they are sometimes used interchangeably.²⁵

Current regulatory framework

- 1.17** The regulatory framework for cat management in New South Wales focuses on responsible ownership, cat welfare and environmental protection.²⁶ The Government noted that animal welfare and management is considered to be 'a whole of community responsibility'.²⁷ Multiple government departments and agencies are involved in the management of cat populations, including the Office of Local Government, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Local Land Services, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, NSW Environmental Trust, as well as local councils.²⁸ In addition, veterinarians, rehoming organisations, breeders and approved charitable organisations, such as RSPCA NSW and Animal Welfare League NSW, help support the operation of the framework.²⁹
- 1.18** The legislative framework consists of three components, viewing cats as:
- companion animals – *Companion Animals Act 1998*

²¹ See, for example, Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 1; Submission 166, Animal Welfare League, p 18; Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 3; Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 8; Submission 202, NSW Young Lawyers Animal Law Sub-Committee, p 3; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 4; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 3.

²² Australian Government, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 10.

²³ Australian Government, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 10.

²⁴ Submission 169, Animal Liberation, p 55.

²⁵ Submission 169, Animal Liberation, p 56.

²⁶ Submission 94, NSW Government, pp 6-7.

²⁷ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 5.

²⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 16.

²⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, pp 16-17.

- animals that are protected to ensure their welfare – *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* and *Crimes Act 1900*
- animals that are a potential source of risk to the natural environment and native wildlife – *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, *Biosecurity Act 2015*, *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002* and *Land Services Act 2013*.³⁰

1.19 This section provides an overview of each of these components.

Companion animals

- 1.20 The *Companion Animals Act 1998* (the Act) and the Companion Animals Regulation 2018 are concerned with the effective and responsible care and management of companion animals, namely cats and dogs.³¹
- 1.21 Part 2 of the Act sets out the relevant provisions regarding the compulsory identification and registration of companion animals. Cats are required to be microchipped and registered before the age of 12 weeks or when sold, whichever occurs first.³² Registration is viewed as a component of responsible pet ownership as it enables lost pets to be identified and reunited with owners.³³
- 1.22 The owner of a cat that is not desexed and is aged four months or older must obtain an annual permit.³⁴ The potential impost of the annual permit fee is designed to encourage the early age desexing of cats.³⁵ Exemptions apply to recognised breeders, council pounds, Animal Welfare League NSW, RSPCA NSW, and the Cat Protection Society of NSW, as well as where a veterinarian has specified that a cat cannot be desexed for health reasons.³⁶ In 2023-24, 62.86 per cent of microchipped cats were desexed, increasing to 94.1 per cent of those subsequently registered.³⁷
- 1.23 Section 4 of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* declares that the protection of native birds and animals is an objective of animal welfare policy. The Act prohibits the presence of cats in wildlife protection areas.³⁸
- 1.24 Relevant enforcement powers are provided for in Part 7A of the Act. Councils are generally responsible for enforcement, including 'managing roaming, nuisance, seized and surrendered cats, ensuring compliance with identification and registration requirements, and overseeing rehoming efforts'.³⁹

³⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 6.

³¹ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 3A.

³² Submission 94, NSW Government, p 8.

³³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

³⁴ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 11B.

³⁵ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

³⁶ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 8.

³⁷ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 18.

³⁸ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 30.

³⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

- 1.25** However, section 32(1) of the Act also empowers any person to 'lawfully seize a cat if that action is reasonable and necessary for the protection of any person or animal (other than vermin) from injury or death'.⁴⁰
- 1.26** It is not an offence for a cat to stray outside of the property of its owner. Nor do cats need to be prevented from roaming.⁴¹ Cats are only prohibited from food preparation and consumption areas as well as wildlife protection locations and can be seized.⁴² However, owners would have responsibilities under their General Biosecurity Duty stated in the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.
- 1.27** Nonetheless, councils can issue a nuisance order if a cat makes a persistent noise that 'unreasonably interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of any person in any other premises' or if a cat is repeatedly damaging things outside the property where it lives.⁴³ Nuisance orders remain in force for six months and specify the behaviour of the cat that is to be prevented.⁴⁴ A fine may be issued should the owner fail to comply with the order.⁴⁵ However, nuisance orders are not often used, with only seven cat nuisance orders issued in 2023-24.⁴⁶
- 1.28** The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is currently conducting a review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. It has been 20 years since it was comprehensively reviewed.⁴⁷ A discussion paper was published in February 2025 seeking feedback on how the Act could be improved. The discussion paper notes that the review will consider the findings of this inquiry, as well as other recent parliamentary inquiries into pounds and the veterinary workforce shortage.⁴⁸

Ensuring the welfare of cats

- 1.29** The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development administers animal welfare laws under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*. Its objectives are to prevent cruelty to animals, including cats, and promote animal welfare by requiring the person in charge of an animal to provide care for it, treat it in a humane manner, and ensure its welfare.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 32(1).

⁴¹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

⁴² Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

⁴³ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 31.

⁴⁴ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 31(3) and (4).

⁴⁵ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

⁴⁶ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 7.

⁴⁷ Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Review of the NSW Companion Animals Laws: Discussion Paper*, February 2025, p 5.

⁴⁸ Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Review of the NSW Companion Animals Laws: Discussion Paper*, February 2025, p 6. For the final reports of the inquiries into pounds and the veterinary workforce shortage see: Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service, NSW Legislative Council, *Pounds in New South Wales* (2024); Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales* (2024).

⁴⁹ *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*, s 3.

- 1.30** Together with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulation 2012, the standards for the treatment of animals are specified, with penalties for cruelty and the failure to provide food, drink and shelter.⁵⁰
- 1.31** The Act is enforced by RSPCA NSW, Animal Welfare League NSW, Greyhound Welfare Integrity Commission, and NSW Police.⁵¹

Risks to the natural environment and native wildlife

- 1.32** There are a number of environment and wildlife laws relevant to the management of cat populations. These include the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, and the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002*. Some federal legislation is also relevant, notably the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).
- 1.33** The National Parks and Wildlife Service is tasked with the conservation and protection of wildlife and wilderness areas under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.⁵² A conservation action plan may be prepared in relation to 'assets of intergenerational significance'.⁵³ Twenty-one conservation action plans have been published in New South Wales that identify cats as a key risk in relation to specified areas in national parks.⁵⁴
- 1.34** The *Biosecurity Act 2015* provides a framework for the 'prevention, elimination, minimisation and management of biosecurity risks'.⁵⁵ A number of codes of practice and standard operating procedures have been published to guide the control of pest animals, including wild cats.⁵⁶ Regional strategic pest animal management plans support regional implementation of the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.⁵⁷ These operate as a sub-plan to local strategic plans under the *Local Land Services Act 2013*. Cats are identified by these plans as a priority species.⁵⁸
- 1.35** Among other things, the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* supports 'conservation and threat abatement action to slow the rate of biodiversity loss and conserve threatened species and ecological communities in nature'.⁵⁹ Schedule 4 to the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* specifies that predation by cats is a 'key threatening process'.⁶⁰
- 1.36** The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is currently developing a strategy that will 'guide alignment of strategic prevention and research actions'.

⁵⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵¹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵² *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, s 12.

⁵³ *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, s 153F; National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2019, cl 78C.

⁵⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵⁵ *Biosecurity Act 2015*, s 3.

⁵⁶ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵⁷ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

⁵⁹ *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, s 1.3

⁶⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 10.

- 1.37** In addition, predation by cats is listed as a key threatening process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth), due to 'the significant detrimental impact feral cats have on many Australian threatened species'.⁶¹ Wild cats are managed via the national Threat Abatement Plan under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).⁶² There have been a succession of threat abatement plans (1999, 2008 and 2015), with the most recent one published in 2024.⁶³ These plans are designed to provide a framework for coordinated and efficient national action.⁶⁴

Role of local government

- 1.38** The Office of Local Government is responsible for companion animal policy, legislative development, and maintaining the Register of Companion Animals.⁶⁵ The Minister for Local Government administers the *Companion Animals Act 1998*.
- 1.39** It is estimated that companion animal management costs local governments in New South Wales around \$43 million per year.⁶⁶ This is separate to those costs that are incurred by rehoming and animal welfare organisations.⁶⁷
- 1.40** Section 6A of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* requires a council to promote awareness of the requirements regarding the ownership of companion animals. Councils are the 'key enforcement authority' in relation to companion animal legislation and the monitoring of compliance with its requirements.⁶⁸ As discussed earlier, they are able to issue a nuisance order should certain conditions be met. Many councils also operate pounds and educate their local community on responsible pet ownership.⁶⁹
- 1.41** In addition, some councils have used environmental planning laws to impose controls or prohibit the ownership of cats. This may be via planning agreements or by attaching conditions to development consents.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 1.

⁶² Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 12.

⁶³ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 1.

⁶⁴ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 1.

⁶⁵ Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Review of the NSW Companion Animals Laws: Discussion Paper*, February 2025, p 7.

⁶⁶ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 13; Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 76.

⁶⁷ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 13.

⁶⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 16.

⁶⁹ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 4.

⁷⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 8.

Pounds

- 1.42** Council pounds are a place of care established by a council for the holding of seized or surrendered animals.⁷¹ Part 7 of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* sets out the relevant procedures for dealing with seized or surrendered animals. Council pounds are required to accept cats that have been lawfully seized under the *Companion Animals Act*, detained at approved premises, and which have not been claimed within 72 hours.⁷² Whether this extends to accepting cats from members of the public is unclear. The Government acknowledged that the Act 'does not specifically direct a council pound to accept any cat from a member of the public even if it was lawfully seized'.⁷³
- 1.43** According to the Centre for International Economics, 21,000 cats entered council pounds in New South Wales in 2020-21.⁷⁴ Another 9,000 entered RSPCA shelters.⁷⁵ In general, cats entering pounds and shelters are likely to be:
- unregistered and not desexed
 - semi-owned or unowned domestic cats and potentially wild cats
 - kittens
 - from regional and rural areas.⁷⁶
- 1.44** In New South Wales, 14,254 cats entered the pound system or were already in the custody of a pound in 2023-24. Of those entering a pound facility, 791 were returned to their owner, 8,481 were rehomed or released to a rehoming organisation, and 3,549 were euthanised.⁷⁷
- 1.45** According to the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, an average of one in three cats and kittens in pounds in New South Wales are euthanased compared to less than one in ten dogs.⁷⁸ The euthanasia rate was as high as between 67 per cent and 100 per cent of intake in some council-operated pounds that received more than 50 cats a year in New South Wales.⁷⁹

⁷¹ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 5.

⁷² Submission 94, NSW Government, p 8.

⁷³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 8.

⁷⁴ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 26.

⁷⁵ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 34.

⁷⁶ Centre for International Economics, *Draft report – Rehoming of Companion Animals in NSW*, September 2022, p 35.

⁷⁷ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 18.

⁷⁸ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 2.

⁷⁹ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 2.

- 1.46** Blacktown City Council operates the largest impounding facility in New South Wales.⁸⁰ Its Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre, described as a state of the art facility, was opened in 2023 and looks after the companion animals of a number of councils.⁸¹
- 1.47** Twenty-one per cent of the cats that were taken in by Blacktown City Council in 2023-24 were euthanased, as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Pound seizure statistics for Blacktown City Council

Year	Cat Intake	Reclaimed by Owner	Percentage %	Euthanased	Percentage %
2013/14	2208	37	1.6	1410	64%
2014/15	2074	39	1.8	1105	53%
2015/16	2562	46	1.7	943	37%
2016/17	1575	4	0.2	627	40%
2017/18	2205	38	1.7	876	40%
2018/19	2437	35	1.4	965	40%
2019/20	1906	39	2.0	634	33%
2020/21	1599	34	2.1	639	40%
2021/22	768	11	1.4	93	12%
2022/23	798	28	3.5	95	12%
2023/24	893	13	1.4	188	21%

Source: Submission 172, Blacktown City Council, p 8.

Committee comment

- 1.48** The current regulatory framework for the management of cat populations in New South Wales is underpinned by the principle of responsible pet ownership. This may be seen by the various requirements of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, particularly those relating to the identification and registration of pet cats.
- 1.49** The committee acknowledges the central role played by local government, as well as the support provided by animal shelters, rescues and rehoming organisations (as well as individual cat carers), in the management of cat populations in New South Wales.
- 1.50** The impact of cats on native animals, and the various strategies for managing various cat populations, including the role of containment, are explored in the remaining chapters of this report.

⁸⁰ Submission 172, Blacktown City Council, p 1.

⁸¹ These councils include Canada Bay, Fairfield, Hunters Hill, Parramatta, Ryde, Willoughby, and Woollahra: Evidence, Mr Kerry Robinson OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council, 1 April 2023, p 12.

Chapter 2 The impact of cat overpopulation

This chapter examines the impact of the overpopulation of cats in New South Wales, including the impacts on cat welfare, council pounds, shelters, rehoming organisations and cat carers. It also considers the claims made by certain inquiry participants that cats have a significant impact on native wildlife. It examines the data presented to support such claims, and the ways in which that data has been challenged. Factors influencing the predation toll of cats are considered, together with the respective impacts of pet and wild cats across a range of environments. Finally, the chapter discusses other factors raised in evidence as posing a greater risk to native animals and wildlife.

The impacts of the overpopulation of cats

- 2.1 Stakeholders were in general agreement that there is a cat overpopulation 'crisis' in New South Wales.⁸²
- 2.2 Estimates of the number of wild, semi-owned and unowned cats in New South Wales are not definitive. However, the Government noted that wild cats are present across the entirety of New South Wales.⁸³
- 2.3 Professor Sarah Legge, member, Conservation and Science Committee, Invasive Species Council, pointed to a study with a low confidence estimate of more than 700,000 stray cats in highly modified areas (such as urban areas and rubbish dumps) across Australia, noting that these were cats that sourced their food from live prey, human refuse and deliberate feeding.⁸⁴ The same study estimated that '(t)he overall population for Australia's wild cats (in natural and highly modified environments), fluctuat(es) between 2.1 million and 6.3 million'.⁸⁵
- 2.4 Dr Diana Rayment, Australian Institute of Animal Management, summarised the problem as follows:

The key problem that we've got right now is we have too many cats. Everybody across the entire spectrum—the conservation people, the cat welfare people and the community—knows that we have too many cats and, essentially, what we need to do is drive the numbers down.⁸⁶
- 2.5 Louise Ward, Four Paws further gave evidence that 'there are too many cats that are unowned, living on the street, struggling to survive'.⁸⁷

⁸² See, for example, Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 43; Submission 25, Hunter Valley Cat Haven, p 1; Submission 190, SAFE Rehoming, p 1.

⁸³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 12.

⁸⁴ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, 10 January 2025, p 3.

⁸⁵ S Legge et al, 'Enumerating a continental-scale threat: how many feral cats are in Australia?' (2017) 206 *Biological Conservation*, pp 293-303.

⁸⁶ Evidence, Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management, 1 April 2025, p 19.

⁸⁷ Evidence, Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia, 1 April 2024, p 41.

- 2.6** Unowned, roaming cats face a wide range of welfare risks, including 'contracting infectious diseases (such as feline immunodeficiency virus and feline leukaemia) being hit by cars, dog attacks, cat fights that can cause serious injuries and abscesses, human cruelty, becoming trapped (such as in drain ways), ingesting toxins, being stolen or being seized by animal management officers'.⁸⁸
- 2.7** Local Government NSW raised concerns that 'there is a significant number of "homeless" (unowned or semi-owned) cats compared to potential owners or places in pounds', and 'many council facilities and rehoming organisations are already at capacity'.⁸⁹
- 2.8** Many pounds across NSW are full, and some pounds do not accept stray cats, which means a major burden of managing the cat overpopulation crisis has fallen to volunteer run rescue and rehoming organisations, together with community cat carers.⁹⁰ This was acknowledged in the Portfolio Committee No. 8 inquiry into pounds in New South Wales.⁹¹
- 2.9** For example, Hunter Valley Cat Haven gave evidence about the impact the cat overpopulation crisis is having on their rescue and cats in their area:

We are at the frontline dealing with the on going crisis in cat management in the Hunter Valley area. Cats and kittens are suffering and our non funded volunteer based Rescue is at breaking point...We go to call outs and what we find is shocking, houses with cat colonies breeding out of control, dead and sick kittens, cats in poor condition and starving. The home owners overwhelmed and struggling. Neighbours angry and upset. In one home alone there was over a hundred cats and kittens. All these people seeking help are being directed to our small volunteer based non funded Rescue and in most cases by Councils.⁹²

- 2.10** Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW similarly expressed concerns about the ability of their shelter to take in the rising number of cats needing assistance:

RSPCA NSW had almost 7,000 cats come through our doors last year, most of whom were sick, injured or infant strays. Our call centre receives close to 800 calls each month requesting assistance with stray cats. Stray cats are the largest cohort of animals we care for as our organisation, far exceeding even our cruelty cases and surrendered animals. Right now we have more the 500 orphaned kittens in the homes of our volunteer foster carers. Because the overall statewide need is far beyond what we can accommodate, we have to prioritise.⁹³

⁸⁸ Submission 28, Sentient, p 5.

⁸⁹ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 9.

⁹⁰ Evidence, Ms Anna Hall, Manager, World League for Protection of Animals, 1 April 2025, p 49; Submission 25, Hunter Valley Cat Haven, p 1.

⁹¹ Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service, NSW Legislative Council, *Pounds in New South Wales* (2024), Finding 3.

⁹² Submission 25, Hunter Valley Cat Haven, p 1.

⁹³ Evidence, Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, pp 13-14.

2.11 Dr Ma raised concerns that if the cat overpopulation crisis continues, and more cats continue to enter pounds and shelters, 'then it's inevitable that the euthanasia rates are going to go up'.⁹⁴

2.12 Mr Timothy Crossman, President and General Manager, SAFE Rehoming, raised concerns about the procedural barriers faced by rehoming organisations in processing the paperwork required to rehome the high volume of cats in their care, and advocated for greater access to the Companion Animals Register:

What we have to do then is we submit the paperwork off to the council, the council changes the name, and then we have to go and submit that again once the cat is adopted. There's this double handling going on that is—and I'm sure everyone will attest to this—paperwork up to your head, basically. Part of the resolution in that, especially with the introduction of the registered rehoming organisations is to allow some sort of access for those registered rehoming organisations to the Companion Animals Register so that we can then sort out our own paperwork internally with the correct documentation with that, of course, as well. That will be a huge time-saver, not only for the rescues but also for the council because they're not having to then process all these forms constantly for us as well.⁹⁵

2.13 The inability to find pet-friendly rental accommodation can lead to people abandoning or surrendering their cats. Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW described the impact of the cost of living and housing crisis on the number of abandoned cats:

We're already seeing cats being abandoned at increased rates due to the cost of living and the housing crisis. People are having to move and are not able to take their cats with them. That's happening all the time. Those cats become unowned cats, and they contribute to this unowned cat problem. Adding additional barriers on effective cat ownership just makes that problem worse. We definitely suspect that cats will be surrendered by people who can't keep them anymore, or cats will be abandoned where there aren't accessible surrender options.⁹⁶

2.14 Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient similarly highlighted the impact of the cost of living and housing crisis, remarking that 'There are many people who, faced with the threat of a fine, will abandon or surrender their cats'.⁹⁷

Cats and wildlife

2.15 The Government advised that '(p)redation by feral cats is listed as a key threatening process under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (and also under Commonwealth law)'.⁹⁸ They added that the 'threat of feral cats is identified as a management priority for 38 threatened entities under the Saving our Species program including mammals, birds, reptiles and threatened

⁹⁴ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 15.

⁹⁵ Evidence, Mr Timothy Crossman, President and General Manager, SAFE Rehoming, 1 April 2024, p 48.

⁹⁶ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14.

⁹⁷ Evidence, Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient, 1 April 2025, p 23.

⁹⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 9.

ecological communities'. In their view, this is unlikely to reflect the overall scope and severity of the threat.⁹⁹

- 2.16** Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council echoed these remarks, stating that '(pr)edation by cats is a key threatening process for endangered wildlife under both New South Wales and Commonwealth environment law.'¹⁰⁰ Professor Sarah Legge, member, Conservation and Science Committee, Invasive Species Council advised that '(r)ecent analyses estimate that stray cats in Australia kill 130 million reptiles, 44 million birds and 149 million mammals annually'.¹⁰¹
- 2.17** However, the number of native animals killed by cats was disputed by Animal Liberation who argued that research shows that 'the median number of native animals caught by individual cats is three (3) over a six month period' for urban cats. They acknowledged however that the number of native animals killed by cats in regional areas was likely higher.¹⁰²
- 2.18** Ms Janelle Brooks, Director, Conservation Programs Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, elaborated on the risks of wild cats, remarking that they are unique in that they are 'a threat to the environment, to human health and to agriculture'.¹⁰³ She noted that a national Feral Cat Taskforce had been established and that 'feral cats are identified as a priority pest animal in all 11 regional strategic pest animal management plans in New South Wales'.¹⁰⁴
- 2.19** Some stakeholders argued that cats have contributed to extinctions in Australia. Some of the figures that were provided by stakeholders are noted below.
- The Invasive Species Council relayed that cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 20 native Australian mammals and are an identified threat to over 200 nationally listed threatened species.¹⁰⁵
 - According to research cited by the Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW, cats have contributed to the extinction of 22 species in Australia, and threaten eight critically endangered species, nine endangered species, and 29 vulnerable species.¹⁰⁶
 - The Biodiversity Council stated that 'Feral cats affect at least 230 nationally-listed threatened animal species and have been the key driving factor of around 30% of Australia's faunal extinctions'.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁰⁰ Evidence, Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council, 16 December 2024, p 2.

¹⁰¹ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, 10 January 2025, p 2.

¹⁰² Submission 169, Animal Liberation, p 10.

¹⁰³ Evidence, Ms Janelle Brooks, Director, Conservation Programs Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, 1 April 2025, p 57.

¹⁰⁴ Evidence, Ms Brooks, 1 April 2025, p 57.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December, 2024, p 2.

¹⁰⁶ Submission 7, The Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney, p 6.

¹⁰⁷ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 35.

- 2.20** However, other witnesses noted a number of limitations in the available data on cat predation and extinctions, such as a lack of longitudinal studies and inconsistent results. They also highlighted the need to differentiate between the impacts of wild, pet and semi-owned cats, and for studies to be conducted across different types of environments.¹⁰⁸ The limitations and challenges around the data on extinctions, and the impact of cats on wildlife more generally, is discussed further below.

Data limitations and challenges

- 2.21** While acknowledging the impact of cats on biodiversity, the Australian Veterinary Association raised concerns that 'much of the evidence underpinning...extinction attributions is based on expert opinion and habitat overlap, rather than direct observation or longitudinal studies'.¹⁰⁹
- 2.22** As an example, the Australian Veterinary Association cited several studies that acknowledged the limitations of evidence of a causal relationship between cats (especially domestic cats) and predation on native wildlife:
- A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis of available data on the role of cats and foxes in species decline and extinction found a marked lack of population studies that demonstrated a correlation between threatened mammals and the introduction of cats. The authors of the review concluded that 'the hypothesis that foxes and cats cause extinctions has come to be accepted with little evidence'.¹¹⁰
 - A 2024 review where the authors acknowledged 'the need for more standardised, long-term studies across urban and peri-urban environments to fully understand the relative contribution of different cat populations'.¹¹¹
 - A summary of evidence for the impacts of pet cats on wildlife which noted that '(t)he examples of wildlife population declines as a result of pet cat predation are highly suggestive, although these studies are few (especially so from Australia)'.¹¹²
- 2.23** The Biodiversity Council highlighted the complexity of factors acting on wildlife in urban environments, and cautioned that care should be exercised when interpreting research on how cats influence populations and biodiversity in urban areas.¹¹³ They noted that studies that have

¹⁰⁸ Evidence, Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association, 1 April 2025, p 28; Evidence, Dr Jacquie Rand, Emeritus Professor, Companion Animal Health, University of Queensland and Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 16 December 2024, pp 35–36; Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, 9 February 2025, p 4.

¹⁰⁹ Answers to questions on notice, Australian Veterinary Association, 8 May 2025, p 3.

¹¹⁰ Answers to questions on notice, Australian Veterinary Association, 8 May 2025, p 3, quoting AD Wallach and EJ Lundgren, 'Review of evidence that foxes and cats cause extinctions of Australia's endemic mammals', *Bioscience*, 10 April 2025.

¹¹¹ Answers to questions on notice, Australian Veterinary Association, 8 May 2025, p 3.

¹¹² Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 6, quoting S Legge, JCZ Woinarski, CR Dickman, BP Murphy, L-A Woolley, and MR Calver, 'We need to worry about Bella and Charlie: the impacts of pet cats on Australian wildlife' (2020) 47 *Wildlife Research*, p 525.

¹¹³ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 15.

looked for 'correlations between cat density and wildlife abundance' have yielded results that are inconsistent, or hard to interpret, due to an extensive range of variables.¹¹⁴

- 2.24** The theme of caution in the use of existing data was echoed by Dr Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation. Dr Rand advised that Australia lacks a well-conducted population study demonstrating a population effect of cats on native birds and mammals.¹¹⁵

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).¹¹⁶

- 2.25** Dr Rand cautioned that many variables, such as the normal lifespan of certain native animals, the quality of vegetation, housing density, distance from bushland and size of bushland, together with use of accurate, contemporary data on pet cat containment, should be factored into conclusions about the levels and impacts of cat predation.¹¹⁷
- 2.26** Some stakeholders argued that a clearer understanding of the impact of various categories of cats – domestic, community and wild – in different locales and regulatory environments, together with clarity around other threats to native wildlife, were critical to developing targeted, effective strategies to protect wildlife.¹¹⁸

Factors influencing predation

- 2.27** The following section discusses the factors identified as influencing the predation toll of cats on wildlife, and how wildlife has been impacted.

Number of domestic cats allowed to roam

- 2.28** The estimates of cats allowed to roam somewhat varied amongst inquiry participants:
- The Cat Protection Society cited its 2023 Ipsos Cat Welfare Survey which found that 42 per cent of cat owners in New South Wales kept their cats indoors at all times, and a further 9 per cent provided their cats with contained outdoor access.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 15.

¹¹⁵ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 35.

¹¹⁶ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 15.

¹¹⁷ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, pp 35-36; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 15.

¹¹⁸ Evidence, Dr Lee, 1 April 2025, p 26; Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, pp 35-36.

¹¹⁹ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 5.

- RSPCA NSW cited 2023 research that reported 65 per cent of cat owners in New South Wales 'indicated they currently kept their cat(s) fully contained, with a further 24% containing their cats overnight'.¹²⁰
- The Biodiversity Council also cited the research by the Cat Protection Society and RSPCA NSW. However, they noted that the authors of the latter indicated that the percentage of people who fully contained their cats may have been inflated because the survey methodology didn't use random sampling. The Biodiversity Council suggested that between 35 and 52 per cent of cat owners in New South Wales allow their cats to roam.¹²¹

2.29 Several councils in Sydney reported that cats had strayed onto urban bushland in their local government area.

- North Sydney Council advised that its local government area contains less than 50 hectares of remnant natural bushland spread across a number of sites. More than 195 native wildlife species inhabit the bushland, most of which are deemed 'threatened' at the local level given the constrained local habitat. The council uses cameras to monitor wildlife in its bushland, which showed cats regularly visiting these areas.¹²²
- Northern Beaches Council reported that roaming domestic cats frequented Sydney Harbour National Park from residential areas.¹²³ The council noted 'that the study site is an area of high biodiversity value, encompassing habitat for threatened eastern pygmy possums, the endangered long-nosed bandicoot population, and the endangered little penguin population'.¹²⁴
- Georges River Council advised that they conducted a biodiversity study of bushland reserves and noted that cats were frequently observed in these areas.¹²⁵ The council deemed the complaints from residents of cats killing other animals were indicative of the threat posed to native wildlife when cats are allowed to roam freely:

Council staff have also seen first-hand the predation and damage roaming cats cause and the amenity issue they cause when they enter onto another person's land.¹²⁶

2.30 The frequency and consequences of pet cats roaming at night was reported by numerous inquiry participants, who detected cats in their backyards or adjacent natural bushland. The following is a sample of the experiences relayed:

¹²⁰ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8, citing research by G C Ma and L J McLeod, 'Understanding the Factors Influencing Cat Containment: Identifying Opportunities for Behaviour Change' (2023) 13 *Animals*, p 1630.

¹²¹ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, pp 10-11.

¹²² Submission 183, North Sydney Council, p 2.

¹²³ Submission 61, Northern Beaches Council, p 2.

¹²⁴ Submission 61, Northern Beaches Council, p 2.

¹²⁵ Submission 29, Georges River Council, p 1.

¹²⁶ Submission 29, Georges River Council, pp 1-2.

- 'We live in a beautiful natural environment and have personally experienced damage to native wildlife (nests destroyed, eggs damaged, young birds killed) as well as continual fouling of our gardens by roaming pet cats, especially at night'.¹²⁷
- 'All manner of birds, lizards, frogs etc are being killed regularly in our garden and in the gardens (of) our friends and family members by known (roaming) domestic cats'.¹²⁸
- 'My back yard literally backs onto Lane Cove National Park, about which I'm a keen observer. I have two infra-red motion caption cameras permanently set up keeping me informed as to what is going on in my back yard in the wee hours. Occasionally I get a real thrill and see possums saddle-backed by their joeys, or even bandicoots ambling by. Unfortunately, far more frequently I'm seeing a huge array of cats, out on the hunt in the middle of the night, many with prominent collars indicating they likely belong to someone'.¹²⁹

2.31 The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation highlighted the importance of using the latest data when estimating cat containment. They cited research that showed '93 per cent of cats are contained at least some of the time, with only 7 per cent not contained at least at night'.¹³⁰ However, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation also acknowledged that even when cats are contained at all times, their own research had shown five per cent of those had escaped in a two-week period.¹³¹ Further, they noted other research that found that 41 per cent of lost cats were described by their owners as 'indoor only'.¹³²

2.32 The potential for owners to underestimate the extent to which their cats roam was evidenced in an Australian study that tracked cat movements using GPS-tracking collars. The study, cited by the Biodiversity Council, showed that '39 per cent of pet cats...were out roaming when their owners thought they were at home'.¹³³

Percentage of roaming cats that hunt

2.33 While it was generally accepted that wild cats can impact native wildlife, varying evidence was received as to the numbers of pet cats that hunt, and the resultant impacts. The RSPCA, for example, gave evidence that 'there is no strong evidence quantifying the impact that domestic cats have on threatened native wildlife populations'.¹³⁴

2.34 The Biodiversity Council cited estimates from Australian and overseas studies that found between 75 and 79 per cent of pet cats that are allowed to roam will hunt.¹³⁵

¹²⁷ Short submission 1211, Elizabeth Dodsworth, p 15.

¹²⁸ Short submission 1216, John and Liz Lawes, p 20.

¹²⁹ Short submission 1210, Dr David Langley, p 14.

¹³⁰ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 35; Answers to questions on notice, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 22 January 2025, p 4.

¹³¹ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 33.

¹³² Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 33.

¹³³ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 17.

¹³⁴ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2.

¹³⁵ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 13.

- 2.35** The Invasive Species Council asserted that '(a)lthough pet cats are fed, most of them still hunt. When they do, only about 15 per cent of what they kill is brought home, so many owners are unaware of what their cat is up to'.¹³⁶
- 2.36** By contrast, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation highlighted the use of dated studies that 'extrapolated the proportion of native species that were killed—which is good—to all pet cats, whether they were contained inside or not'.¹³⁷

Predation toll on wildlife

- 2.37** The following section discusses the extent of wild and domestic cat predation on wildlife, with examples drawn from a range of local government areas in metropolitan and regional New South Wales. It also details evidence provided by organisations engaged in wildlife rescue regarding the source of injuries to wildlife.

Predation toll attributed to domestic cats

- 2.38** Cats were described as 'extremely effective hunters and killers of small mammals, birds, frogs, lizards and insects'.¹³⁸ Professor Sarah Legge, member, Conservation and Science Committee, Invasive Species Council, explained that she had contributed to establishing the predation toll of both wild and pet cats, and that each pet cat hunts at about a quarter of the rate of a wild cat, killing an average of 110 native animals a year.¹³⁹
- 2.39** RSPCA NSW outlined the impact of domestic cats on national parks:
- In non-urban areas, especially near National Parks, predation by cats has a greater impact. Domestic cats living near a NSW National Park, preyed mainly on native mammals (49%), then introduced mammals (26%), followed by native birds (19%) and reptiles (6%) (Meek, 2003).¹⁴⁰
- 2.40** However, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation was highly critical of the conclusions in oft-cited data on the impact of domestic cats on Australian wildlife, noting that it results in overestimates:

...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 preyed 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.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Evidence, Professor Sarah Legge, member, Conservation and Science Committee, Invasive Species Council, 16 December 2024, p 3.

¹³⁷ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2025, p 35.

¹³⁸ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December 2024, p 2.

¹³⁹ Evidence, Professor Legge, 16 December 2024, p 2-3.

¹⁴⁰ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2.

¹⁴¹ Submission 68, The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 19.

- 2.41** The Australian Veterinary Association also raised concerns about the lack of research on the impact of cats on wildlife extinctions:

We haven't got good evidence about cats contributing to extinctions. We know that dogs actually have far more significance when it comes to predating on native wildlife, and particularly wildlife of significance... I'm not arguing that cats don't kill wildlife at all. It's just more that if we're going to make blanket statements about cats being the problem, we just need to be careful that we've got the research to back things up and justify the movements that we take because we don't have great data at the moment.¹⁴²

- 2.42** The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation offered the example of a long-term study in the City of Armadale in Western Australia that examined the 'impact of different cat regulations on the diversity and abundance of small and medium-sized mammals in urban bushland'.¹⁴³ The study included areas with different cat management strategies, including a 'no-cat zone', an area with cat curfews and compulsory bells, and an area with no cat-related regulations. It concluded there was no significant impact by domestic cats on species diversity or abundance and that vegetation characteristics were more likely to influence these factors.

Predation toll attributed to wild cats

- 2.43** As noted earlier, the threat of wild cats is identified as a management priority for 38 threatened entities under the Saving our Species program that include mammals, birds and reptiles.¹⁴⁴ The Government explained that this figure is drawn from conservation strategies and programs where the threat is well-understood and is unlikely to reflect the overall threat posed by wild cats in New South Wales.¹⁴⁵

- 2.44** According to the Invasive Species Council, it is 'irrefutable' that wild cats impact wildlife.¹⁴⁶ Evidence that the impact is lethal was provided by a number of witnesses:

- Research cited by RSPCA found that wild cats are estimated to be responsible for approximately 456 million individual native animal deaths each year (Murphy et al., 2019).¹⁴⁷
- The Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney indicated that an analysis of the stomach contents of 270 cats in Sturt National Park, near Tibooburra in New South Wales, showed that wild cats consumed 'many native wildlife species including small reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals and nomadic birds that arrive in wet seasons'.¹⁴⁸
- The Biodiversity Council reported that deaths from the cat-borne disease, toxoplasmosis, have been observed in koalas, wombats, wallabies, possums, bandicoots and bilbies.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² Evidence, Dr Lee, 1 April 2025, pp 25-26.

¹⁴³ Answers to questions on notice, Dr Jacquie Rand, The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 22 January 2025, p 9.

¹⁴⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁴⁵ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁴⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, 9 February 2025, p 4.

¹⁴⁷ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2.

¹⁴⁸ Submission 7, Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney, p 7.

¹⁴⁹ Submission 14, Biodiversity Council, p 18.

The impact of cat predation on biodiversity

2.45 UNSW Centre for Ecosystem Science observed that even low numbers of wild cats can reduce the population of a threatened species, or impede the reintroduction of threatened species to an area.¹⁵⁰

2.46 Some species, like eastern quolls and bettongs, are highly susceptible to cat predation and can only exist in the absence of cats.¹⁵¹ Fenced conservation areas, and cat (and fox-free) islands provide necessary refuges for many threatened species.¹⁵² Mr Joey Clarke, Senior Science Communicator, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, identified a project at Mallee Cliffs National Park where a safe haven has been provided for eight species of native mammals that are gradually being introduced. Mr Clarke explained that some species are very susceptible to predation and can only persist because cats and foxes have been removed:

It was an insight into what the bush should look like. There are supposed to be these very healthy, thriving populations of small native mammals, but the only places that we see that now are in these safe havens where cats and foxes have been removed entirely.¹⁵³

2.47 However, others such as RSPCA NSW and Four Paws Australia, observed that biodiversity impacts were overstated and may vary according to location.¹⁵⁴

2.48 Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, recounted an instance of unintended consequences for biodiversity when cats were rapidly removed from an island off the coast of Australia:

There was an island on the south-east coast of Australia which the Federal Government wanted to try to eradicate cats from. They were going to spend \$3 million or \$4 million; it ended up costing tens of millions...They got rid of the cats and the rat population surged and ate the birds anyway. So the birds they were trying to save died. If you strongly intervene and radically try to change an environment, it's going to rebalance in different ways.¹⁵⁵

Other factors affecting native wildlife

2.49 As noted earlier in this chapter, a common theme in evidence was the need for comprehensive, long-term, well-designed, granular studies, including field studies, about the impacts of cats on

¹⁵⁰ Submission 7, Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney, p 7.

¹⁵¹ Answers to questions on notice, Invasive Species Council, 9 February 2025, p 1.

¹⁵² Evidence, Ms Janna Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, 1 April 2025, p 7; Evidence, Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 1 April 2025, p 2; Submission 7, Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney, p 6.

¹⁵³ Evidence, Mr Joey Clarke, Senior Science Communicator, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 1 April 2025, p 2.

¹⁵⁴ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, pp 4-5.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence, Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 18.

native wildlife.¹⁵⁶ Such calls were sometimes accompanied by concerns that cats were bearing a disproportionate amount of blame for biodiversity impacts.¹⁵⁷ Many witnesses asserted that other factors (climate change, habitat destruction and fragmentation, clear-felling estates for housing, vehicle collisions, even dog attacks) presented a greater threat to native wildlife than cats.¹⁵⁸

- 2.50** The global animal welfare organisation, Four Paws, which conducts a range of community cat and sterilisation programs across Europe and Southeast Asia, argued that Australia vilified cats in ways not evident in other countries where they operate.¹⁵⁹ While the organisation recognised that cats do impact native wildlife, they asserted that blaming cats for most species' extinctions ignores the 'primary threat' on native animals of deforestation and land clearing for agriculture and housing developments.¹⁶⁰
- 2.51** The wildlife rescue organisation, FAWNA NSW, from the New South Wales mid-north coast, alluded to a greater impact by cats on native wildlife. Their statistics for three local government areas over a three-year period revealed that they responded to 416 native animals and birds that were victims of cat attacks and, of these, only 81 survived.¹⁶¹ They also advised that almost all the calls were from cat owners reporting injuries caused by their cats. FAWNA NSW observed that these numbers would not reflect the full extent of cat predation in these areas, as other prey would have died 'before human intervention'.¹⁶²

Committee comment

- 2.52** The committee is concerned by the evidence of the cat overpopulation 'crisis' in NSW, which includes many that are 'homeless', 'unowned' or living in wild or rural areas. This is having a myriad of negative impacts on wildlife, the welfare of these cats, volunteer cat carers, overrun animal rescue and rehoming organisations, and council pounds where these animals face euthanasia. The committee is satisfied that there is an urgent need for cat management strategies to be implemented in New South Wales.

¹⁵⁶ Evidence, Dr Lee, 1 April 2025, p 24; Evidence, Ms Karri Nadazdy, Assistant to the President, Animal Care Australia, 16 December 2024, p 35; Evidence, Dr Steven McLeod, Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, 1 April 2025, p 57.

¹⁵⁷ Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 37; Evidence, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 16 December 2024, p 34.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 41; Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws, 9 May 2025, p 3; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 2; Evidence, Ms Tara Ward, Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office, 1 April 2025, p 38; Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 35.

¹⁵⁹ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 1; Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 37.

¹⁶⁰ Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 37.

¹⁶¹ Submission 171, FAWNA NSW (For Australian Wildlife Needing Aid), pp 1-2. FAWNA NSW covers the Kempsey, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Mid-Coast local government areas.

¹⁶² Submission 171, FAWNA NSW, p 2.

Finding 1

There is an urgent need to implement cat management strategies in New South Wales to address the overpopulation of cats in New South Wales, both in urban environments and in the wild.

- 2.53** The committee recognises that cats can have an impact on a range of animals, including native wildlife through predation. Australia is home to a wide range of unique native animals, many of which are presently vulnerable, threatened or endangered, and action must be taken to protect these animals from threats of harm.
- 2.54** However, it became apparent over the course of the inquiry that the extent of the impact of cats was contested, with a number of cat welfare focused witnesses pointing to significant limitations in the available data, as well as identifying research gaps they stressed were critical to address. Further, the committee acknowledges criticisms such as the lack of longitudinal studies, weaknesses in methodology, and the existence of inconsistent results.
- 2.55** Some stakeholders were concerned that data that fails to differentiate between the impacts of different cat populations, and across different types of environments, is being used to inform conclusions about predation tolls, and establish a causal link between cats and species extinctions. To this end, the committee recognises the important work of researchers who are seeking to contribute to a comprehensive, accurate and nuanced picture of the impact of wild and domestic cats on wildlife, and in a range of environments. The committee therefore commends efforts to develop a broader research base and fill the data gaps to inform effective strategies to protect wildlife.
- 2.56** The committee notes the divergent views of inquiry participants about the impact of cats on biodiversity. However, it became clear during the inquiry that managing the impact of cats on wildlife is a priority for the many members of the community who are concerned about declines in native and threatened species, including for many people who are cat owners or people concerned for the welfare of cats.
- 2.57** The committee also notes that the Biodiversity Council reported that the most effective strategy for maintaining native animal populations in the landscape was improved habitat. Areas that had more complex, higher quality habitat had less cats and healthier populations, and a bigger variety of native mammals.
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Finding 2

Key threats to wildlife in New South Wales include not only introduced species, but also habitat destruction and fragmentation, and a holistic approach to native animals is required.

Chapter 3 Cat management strategies

There are various approaches to managing cat populations, with stakeholders often divided over what they consider to be the most effective strategy. Different categories of cats may require a distinct response, and so the way in which cat populations are defined can become key. This chapter considers some of the definitional debates, especially those around the breadth of the 'feral cat' category in the national Threat Abatement Plan. The issue of desexing is examined, including some of the barriers that hinder greater desexing rates. Finally, the various strategies that may be used to manage and reduce cat populations, including the use of conservation fencing, gene drive technology and immunocontraceptives are outlined.

Improving responsible pet ownership

- 3.1** Responsible pet ownership is multifaceted and includes the microchipping and registration of cats, as well as desexing. The Government's approach to cat management in New South Wales has largely focused on encouraging responsible pet ownership as a way of addressing the challenges of 'roaming cats, overbreeding, failure to desex and improving impounding rates and outcomes'.¹⁶³ The current regulatory framework highlights the importance of caring for pet cats so they do not become a nuisance or threaten wildlife, and aims to minimise the number of cats entering pounds or shelters.¹⁶⁴
- 3.2** The Australian Veterinary Association was optimistic that an 'effective, humane and evidence-based cat management program is achievable'.¹⁶⁵ However, they emphasised that a holistic approach would be needed with the Government, local councils, rescue organisations, wildlife experts, First Nations communities, and veterinarians all involved in developing cat management policies.
- 3.3** Many community organisations shared their experience of directly working with various cat populations in rescue shelters, through fostering and by caring for colony cats.¹⁶⁶ The intertwined nature of human and cat welfare as it relates to cat management policies was emphasised by Lisa Riordan, Team Leader, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats:

The outcomes of these sessions... is to make sure that we remember the subject is as much about the people as it is the cats: the community, the rescuers, the feeders, the

¹⁶³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁶⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁶⁵ Evidence, Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association, 1 April 2025, p 23.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, Evidence, Mr Timothy Crossman, President and General Manager, SAFE Rehoming, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Evidence, Mrs Lisa Riordan, Team Leader, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Evidence, Mr Ludovic Barbier, Lead Cat Caretaker, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Evidence, Ms Stephanie Bates, Owner and Manager, Westie Cat Support Services, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Evidence, Ms Leah Michael, President, World League for Protection of Animals, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Evidence, Ms Anna Hall, Manager, World League for Protection of Animals, 1 April 2025, p 44ff; Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW; Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW.

shelter workers, the veterinary staff and all the people who are so impacted by everything that potentially could happen out of the decisions made from this inquiry.¹⁶⁷

- 3.4** The central role of rescue organisations was acknowledged by a number of stakeholders.¹⁶⁸ The Animal Defenders Office advocated for such groups to be regarded as key stakeholders in cat population management.¹⁶⁹
- 3.5** The importance of the Government also working with caregivers of semi-owned cats was stressed by RSPCA NSW 'as they perform an important role in finding, socialising, and caring for these populations of cats, functions that might otherwise fall on local councils at considerable expense'.¹⁷⁰ However, they warned that the imposition of additional restrictions on these semi-owners would likely result in 'abandonment of care-giving responsibility'. They stressed that requirements to permanently identify and register cats, and the annual permit fee for undesexed cats already act as barriers to effective unowned cat management programs.¹⁷¹
- 3.6** It was generally agreed that the present approach to cat management in New South Wales could be improved. According to Four Paws Australia, current cat management practices in New South Wales and throughout Australia 'do not align with modern science, fall short of community expectations, and are outdated, ineffective and inhumane'.¹⁷²
- 3.7** However, views differed significantly as to how the management of cat populations should be improved and what strategies should be employed to that end. Many of these options are considered throughout the remainder of this chapter. However, the potential use of cat containment as a management strategy is dealt with separately in Chapter 4.
- 3.8** The Government indicated that it would be considering the findings and recommendations from this inquiry in determining a more effective approach to cat management.¹⁷³ Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government acknowledged that 'we are looking forward to what the Committee will give in terms of some policy direction or idea around the fairly challenging issue of cat management'.¹⁷⁴

Definitional debates

- 3.9** The various ways in which cats may be categorised were outlined in Chapter 1. Definitions can influence what is considered to be an appropriate or effective cat management strategy for that sector of the cat population, and are often fiercely contested as a result. The importance of recognising different categories of cats when assessing the suitability, enforceability and effectiveness of particular cat management strategies was acknowledged by the Government.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Evidence, Mrs Riordan, 1 April 2025, p 45.

¹⁶⁸ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 12; Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 9.

¹⁶⁹ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 12.

¹⁷⁰ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 5.

¹⁷¹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 5.

¹⁷² Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 2.

¹⁷³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 19.

¹⁷⁴ Evidence, Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government, 1 April 2025, p 54.

¹⁷⁵ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13.

- 3.10** Numerous stakeholders were of the view that different strategies are required to manage various categories of cats.¹⁷⁶ However, there is some debate over how cat populations are defined and categorisation can differ. The national 'Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024' ('Threat Abatement Plan') acknowledges both the lack of consistency in definitions and the difficulties in achieving agreement:

There is currently no nationally consistent classification of cats, and the legal frameworks and associated definitions are different across the jurisdictions. While consistency would be beneficial, achieving consensus across jurisdictions, cat management organisations and stakeholder cohorts may not be feasible.¹⁷⁷

- 3.11** As discussed in Chapter 1, the national Threat Abatement Plan includes all cats that are not formally owned by people, including 'stray cats', in its definition of a 'feral cat'. The Plan outlines how 'feral cats' live in diverse habitats, survive by hunting or scavenging, and having none or little interaction with humans.¹⁷⁸
- 3.12** There was some discussion throughout the inquiry about the appropriateness of this definition, with a number of stakeholders voicing concerns.¹⁷⁹
- 3.13** RSPCA Australia in *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia: Summary of Findings and Recommendations* (May 2018) stressed that the 'most important definitional delineation is between feral and domestic cats as this has profound consequences for the treatment and fate of individual cats'.¹⁸⁰ They argued that cats with some dependence on humans should be defined as domestic cats, whereas those which are 'unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans and reproduce in the wild' should be defined as 'feral'.¹⁸¹
- 3.14** In Sentient's view, 'domestic cats are at risk of unnecessary killing due to the current inadequate definition used in the revised Feral Cat Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) of 'feral' or 'pet'.¹⁸² They strongly opposed the definition used, arguing that 'it is confusing and fails to recognise the human associations with unowned/semi-owned domestic cats and the vastly different stakeholder groups involved or concerned with their management'.¹⁸³ Sentient stressed that domestic cats require a completely different approach to that used in relation to wild cats.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁶ Evidence, Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia, 1 April 2025, p 38; Submission 28, Sentient, pp 1-2; Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 8.

¹⁷⁷ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 9.

¹⁷⁸ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, p 10.

¹⁷⁹ Submission 197, Love Rescue Collaborate, p 3; Submission 28, Sentient, pp 1-2; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 4.

¹⁸⁰ RSPCA Australia, *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia: Summary of Findings and Recommendations*, May 2018, p 6.

¹⁸¹ RSPCA Australia, *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia: Summary of Findings and Recommendations*, May 2018, p 6.

¹⁸² Submission 28, Sentient, pp 1-2.

¹⁸³ Submission 28, Sentient, pp 1-2.

¹⁸⁴ Submission 28, Sentient, p 2.

- 3.15** The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation warned that misclassifying domestic cats as 'feral' can result in barriers to the effective management of free-roaming cats in urban areas.¹⁸⁵ They argued that domestic cats should be excluded from the legal definition of 'feral cats' as this would 'enable targeted programs that humanely and scientifically reduce the number of urban free-roaming cats over time'.¹⁸⁶ Further, this would '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'.¹⁸⁷
- 3.16** The Australian Institute of Animal Management stressed that domestic cat management policies and actions must clearly define wild cats and 'distinguish between cats who are genuinely unowned, unsocialised, and have no relationship with or dependence on humans, and domestic cats who are physically present on public land at the time of cat control activities'.¹⁸⁸
- 3.17** For Getting 2 Zero, the misclassification of cats fails to account for the different interactions with humans and the associated impacts.¹⁸⁹
- The ecological niches filled by feral cats and domestic cats are very different. Feral cats live independently of humans in remote areas and management methods can be mostly decided without regard to impacts on humans living in these areas. Domestic cats live with and alongside humans who care for and are bonded to them (Zito et al., 2015), so management measures for these cats must consider the impacts of humans on the methods chosen, and of the method chosen on the humans affected. Classing semi-owned and unowned domestic cats as feral cats, ignores the significant differences between the environments in which these cats exist and is inconsistent with RSPCA's 2018 Best Practice Domestic Cat Management report.¹⁹⁰
- 3.18** However, other stakeholders were in favour of a broader definition of 'feral cat'. Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council emphasised the rapid rate at which cats breed and argued that for urban areas 'any cat that's not a pet cat should be considered a feral cat'.¹⁹¹

The centrality of desexing and controlling cat numbers

- 3.19** Female cats are generally able to reproduce from the age of 16 weeks, potentially having a litter every 12 weeks after birth of a litter.¹⁹² This has significant implications for the semi-owned and unowned cat populations, which are not contained and are often not desexed. Local Government NSW warned that 'Unless action is taken, the stray cat population will only continue to grow to plague proportions'.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 4.

¹⁸⁶ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 4.

¹⁸⁷ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 4.

¹⁸⁸ Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 7.

¹⁸⁹ Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 8.

¹⁹⁰ Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 8.

¹⁹¹ Evidence, Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, 1 April 2025, p 11.

¹⁹² Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

¹⁹³ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

- 3.20** The overwhelming majority of stakeholders agreed that desexing cats is a necessary feature of a successful cat management program, with Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government describing it as 'critical'.¹⁹⁴
- 3.21** The Animal Welfare League NSW referred to desexing as 'the cornerstone of managing cat populations'.¹⁹⁵
- 3.22** The various benefits of desexing include:
- a reduction in the number of stray cats
 - decreased euthanasia rates
 - improved animal health due to the reduction in the risk of certain cancers
 - improved animal health due to an improvement in issues such as territorial behaviour and the urge to roam.¹⁹⁶

Mandatory desexing

- 3.23** Nonetheless, there were mixed views as to whether or not desexing should be mandatory. The Animal Defenders Office recommended that legislation should be introduced requiring domestic cats to be desexed. However, it was their view that the cost of desexing should be subsidised for low-income earners to help improve cat desexing rates.¹⁹⁷
- 3.24** Australian Pet Welfare Foundation gave evidence that it was preferable to provide affordable and free desexing of cats rather than make cat desexing mandatory:
- 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.¹⁹⁸
- 3.25** The Government relayed that the NSW Companion Animals Taskforce had found the concept of mandatory desexing to not be widely supported in Australian research.¹⁹⁹ They identified a number of factors that make a mandatory approach challenging.
- Resource limitations of councils and animal welfare organisations make monitoring and enforcement difficult.

¹⁹⁴ Evidence, Mr Whitworth, 1 April 2025, p 54.

¹⁹⁵ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11.

¹⁹⁶ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 12.

¹⁹⁷ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 9.

¹⁹⁸ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 12.

¹⁹⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 10.

- The cost of desexing procedures can be a barrier. Offering subsidies or affordable options for communities can also be a cost implication for veterinary businesses, governments and welfare organisations.
- Limited availability of desexing services due to the veterinary workforce shortage.²⁰⁰

3.26 Many of the issues concerning desexing that are explored in detail throughout the remainder of this chapter, were also considered by Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service in its inquiry into pounds in New South Wales.²⁰¹

Age to desex cats

3.27 Many stakeholders asserted that it is best to desex a cat before they are four months old, known as 'early-age desexing' or 'prepubertal desexing'.²⁰² Early-age desexing is encouraged by the legislative framework in New South Wales, as an annual permit is required to own an undesexed cat that is four months or older.²⁰³ This is intended to discourage early unwanted litters and associated repercussions for the size of the cat population.²⁰⁴

3.28 Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW, stressed that 'early-age desexing of cats is critical'.²⁰⁵ She described how the Cat Protection Society of NSW had worked with Fairfield City and the City of Sydney on subsidised cat desexing programs.²⁰⁶ Ms Vesk suggested that 'if you had a pot of money, spending it to, first of all, intervene and have cats desexed early is critical because it stops the breeding cycle'.²⁰⁷

3.29 However, Animal Care Australia were of the view that most private practice veterinarians only desex after six months of age, and that using early-age desexing as a population control measure does not prioritise the animal.²⁰⁸

3.30 The Australian Veterinary Association explained how, at the discretion of a veterinarian, a cat could be desexed as early as eight weeks, and stressed that 'Current scientific evidence strongly supports desexing cats before puberty and finds that this does not increase the risk of short-term complications or long-term health effects'.²⁰⁹ While they acknowledged that it is a relatively small proportion of veterinarians that recommend early-age desexing, despite there being 'good

²⁰⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 11.

²⁰¹ Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service, NSW Legislative Council, *Pounds in New South Wales* (2024).

²⁰² Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 1; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15; Evidence, Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council, 16 December 2024, p 2; Evidence, Ms Tara Ward, Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office, 1 April 2025, p 38.

²⁰³ *Companion Animals Act 1998*, s 11B(1).

²⁰⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 10.

²⁰⁵ Evidence, Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW, 16 December 2024, p 8.

²⁰⁶ Evidence, Ms Vesk, 16 December 2024, p 8.

²⁰⁷ Evidence, Ms Vesk, 16 December 2024, p 9.

²⁰⁸ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 12.

²⁰⁹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

evidence' to support the practice, they concluded that this was likely due to 'the differing demographics of veterinarians'.²¹⁰ They viewed gender, age and year of graduation, university of graduation, current employment in non-private practice, experience within practice and practice policy as factors that influence whether or not a veterinarian supports early-age desexing.²¹¹

Barriers to greater desexing rates

- 3.31** While the benefits of desexing were widely acknowledged, there are nonetheless large numbers of cats not desexed. Various factors may deter owners from desexing cats within their care or from desexing semi-owned or unowned cats to stop breeding.
- 3.32** The Animal Welfare League NSW stressed that the 'strongest predictor of the rate of desexing of cats in a particular suburb is the average income'.²¹² They emphasised that 'People know this is a good thing to do but cannot afford it. Low socioeconomic areas have the highest numbers of undesexed cats and the largest populations of semi-owned and unowned roaming domestic cats'.²¹³
- 3.33** Many stakeholders, including Local Government NSW, described how subsidised desexing programs could encourage greater desexing rates.²¹⁴ Various examples were provided of subsidised desexing programs currently operating in New South Wales, including the Companion Animal Desexing Scheme for low income households which is conducted by Animal Welfare League NSW.²¹⁵
- 3.34** A number of other programs are similarly run by welfare organisations and charities in conjunction with councils to subsidise the desexing, identification and vaccination of cats owned by welfare recipients or those in financial hardship.²¹⁶ Animal Care Australia described how the National Desexing Network serves as 'a nationwide referral system for discounted desexing made available to pet owners in financial need'.²¹⁷ This network connects local councils, pet owners and vets in relation to the provision of free or subsidised desexing.²¹⁸
- 3.35** The City of Sydney operates three cat management programs including the Street Cat Rehoming Program, the Subsidised Desexing Program for residents with a pension, concession or healthcare card, and the Glebe Cat Management Program.²¹⁹

²¹⁰ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

²¹¹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

²¹² Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11.

²¹³ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11.

²¹⁴ See, for example, Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11; Submission 5, Local Government NSW, pp 8 and 15; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4; Submission 39, WIRES, p 5.

²¹⁵ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11.

²¹⁶ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 8.

²¹⁷ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 14.

²¹⁸ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 14.

²¹⁹ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 8.

- 3.36** The Community Animal Welfare Scheme campaign operated by the RSPCA in conjunction with specific councils, offers subsidised desexing for residents with pension, healthcare, or New Start cards.²²⁰ As part of this scheme, cats are also vaccinated and microchipped without cost.²²¹
- 3.37** The Keeping Cats Safe at Home program run by the RSPCA (described in detail in Chapter 4) also includes a subsidised desexing component. According to Local Government NSW, this aspect of the program was rapidly utilised by residents, demonstrating that many owners do want to desex their cats but are hindered by its cost.²²²
- 3.38** Further, subsidised desexing may be more cost effective than other cat management strategies. Wollondilly Shire Council explained how it costs an average of \$400 to collect an abandoned cat, hold the cat for around four days, and then euthanise them. In contrast, the cost of desexing a cat under the National Desexing Network Cooperative Desexing Program is approximately \$125 per cat.²²³
- 3.39** The suggestion of vouchers being available to assist with desexing was met with enthusiasm by some inquiry participants. Ms Rosalie Horton, Senior Coordinator, Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre advised that Blacktown City Council had already joined the National Desexing Network to offer subsidised desexing for residents, before declaring 'it would be great if there was something like you can get with your Service NSW vouchers where you could get a couple of desexings for animals'.²²⁴
- 3.40** When asked whether assisting people to desex, microchip and register their animals had been considered, Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government reflected that it is matter of working out who pays for it:

I think we're waiting for the Companion Animals Act review, as well as any advice coming out of this inquiry, before formalising or moving forward on any further analysis. The idea of a voucher system does have merit, just as the idea of providing grants to third-party organisations to undertake mass desexing also has merit. But, again, it's a question of who pays and how we fund that. If it's the government paying then we'll need to come up with a rational cost approach to put to government as to what the benefits are, what the costs are and how it will be managed.²²⁵

Large-scale desexing programs

- 3.41** Large-scale desexing of cats can ensure the size of the cat population is manageable. Tamworth Regional Council viewed it as the best use of funding and 'the only way to address the problem'.²²⁶ Some of the benefits of large-scale desexing programs include:

²²⁰ Submission 189, Canterbury Bankstown Council, p 3.

²²¹ Submission 189, Canterbury Bankstown Council, p 3.

²²² Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 8.

²²³ Submission 348, Wollondilly Shire Council, p 5.

²²⁴ Evidence, Ms Rosalie Horton, Senior Coordinator, Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre, 1 April 2025, p 18.

²²⁵ Evidence, Mr Whitworth, 1 April 2025, p 60.

²²⁶ Submission 274, Tamworth Regional Council, p 4.

- a reduction in the incidence of unwanted and unintended litters
- alleviation of the pressure on pounds and shelters, and associated euthanasia rates
- a reduction in the potential of cats to contribute to the wild cat population
- a consistent, widespread approach
- cats in other areas are less likely to migrate
- it allows for efficiencies in education and awareness raising
- it is better understood by the community.²²⁷

3.42 However, there are a number of factors that need to be considered in order for large-scale desexing to be successful, especially regarding the long-term management of a cat population. Some of the factors presented were as follows.

- Local Government NSW stressed that both the funding of desexing as well as the availability of veterinarians are crucial to the success of such programs.²²⁸
- Animal Care Australia advocated that private practice veterinarians should not be expected to provide their time and services for free.²²⁹
- Four Paws emphasised that for change to be lasting, large-scale desexing programs require strong community engagement.²³⁰

3.43 The role of veterinarians in providing high volume desexing services was recognised by a number of inquiry participants.²³¹ The Australian Institute of Animal Management emphasised the importance of veterinarians to intensive desexing support programs, advocating that 'the current veterinary shortage and lack of vets who are trained and confident performing High Quality High Volume Spay Neuter surgical techniques' be addressed.²³²

3.44 Dr Jacqui Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation similarly stressed the importance of increasing the capacity for desexing. She suggested that this could be achieved by funding high-volume desexing training at universities so as to ensure that veterinarians 'graduate with really good day-one skills, particularly surgery skills'.²³³ Dr Rand argued for a 'sustainable and effective funding structure for high-intensity desexing programs', highlighting that if this is provided, then in time 'costs to the state and local governments, welfare agencies and rescue groups will start to decline as declines in free roaming cats, cat impoundments and surrenders and cat-related calls are realised'.²³⁴

²²⁷ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11; Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 3; Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, pp 11-13.

²²⁸ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

²²⁹ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 11.

²³⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws, 9 May 2025, p 5.

²³¹ Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 23; Evidence, Dr Jacqui Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 16 December 2024, p 32.

²³² Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 23.

²³³ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 32.

²³⁴ Answers to questions on notice, Dr Jacqui Rand, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 22 January 2025, p 12.

- 3.45** The Australian Veterinary Association was also of the view that sustainable funding for large scale cat desexing programs was an essential component of being able to expand desexing initiatives.²³⁵ They recommended that financial support be provided by the Government to private veterinary businesses for the provision of public good services, including sterilisation procedures at subsidised costs.²³⁶
- 3.46** That rural and regional councils may need assistance with desexing programs and vet resourcing was also recognised. To this end, Local Government NSW encouraged metropolitan veterinarians and mobile desexing programs to regularly visit rural and regional areas.²³⁷
- 3.47** While large-scale desexing programs may assist in managing the size of a cat population, questions were raised about the ability of desexing programs to reduce the impact of cat populations on native wildlife. Animal Care Australia acknowledged that while large-scale desexing programs do not address the immediate impact of semi-owned, unowned and wild cats on communities and wildlife, they nonetheless will 'reduce the reproduction opportunities for those already within a colony'.²³⁸
- 3.48** Australian Pet Welfare Foundation gave evidence that desexing programs 'significantly reduce the number of unwanted kittens born, free-roaming cats and associated issues such as nuisance or potential wildlife predation'.²³⁹
- 3.49** The Cat Protection Society received a grant of \$1.5 million from the NSW Government to deliver a two-year, targeted cat desexing program, called DIVA Cats (Desexing, Identification and Vaccination Assistance for Cats), which allowed them to desex more than 2,000 cats.²⁴⁰ Dr Colin Salter, Policy Lead, WIRES gave evidence about the impact this program would have on wildlife, stating 'That's a potential cat population reduction of about 10,000 over that short period of time...If people are caring for [cats] and desexing them, that's reducing those additional births, which is having a significant reduction in the impact on wildlife'.²⁴¹
- 3.50** When asked what proportion of an area's semi-owned or unowned cat population would need to be sterilised to reduce the wildlife impact, Dr Gemma Ma of RSPCA NSW explained that regional areas require a more intensive approach those urban locations:

Generally, it is recommended you desex about 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the population in the area to start to control the population. We are noticing that we need to do a much higher intervention intensity in regional areas than we do in urban areas because we have to account for that migration into the population from the bush. We need to desex about 50 cats per 1,000 population out in places like Walgett and Weddin compared to doing one to five cats per 1,000 population in the urban areas. The

²³⁵ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4.

²³⁶ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

²³⁷ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

²³⁸ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 11.

²³⁹ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 21.

²⁴⁰ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 1 and Evidence, Ms Vesk, 16 December 2024, p 10.

²⁴¹ Evidence, Dr Colin Salter, Policy Lead, WIRES, 16 December 2024, p 24.

migration into the area really stuffs up your intervention because it means you have to desex a whole lot more cats and it's less effective.²⁴²

The effectiveness of targeted desexing programs

- 3.51** A number of stakeholders presented evidence about the effectiveness of targeted desexing programs.²⁴³ The Government explained how these programs 'target areas with high cat populations, low socio-economic status, high pound intakes and high numbers of semi-owned or unowned cat populations'.²⁴⁴ They help reduce reproduction and overpopulation.²⁴⁵
- 3.52** The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation considered high-intensity targeted desexing programs as being of benefit to many, including 'cat welfare, rehoming organisations, the animal care sector, volunteers, and veterinarians' as well as reducing 'costs, shelter intakes, and cat-related calls to councils, while also positively impacting the environment'.²⁴⁶
- 3.53** RSPCA NSW spoke of the ability of targeted desexing programs to 'quickly and dramatically reduce euthanasia rates for cats by preventing the birth of infants, and by providing an alternative pathway for unsocialised (often categorised as 'feral') adults'.²⁴⁷ They noted that these are the groups that contribute substantially to euthanasia statistics in pounds and shelters.
- 3.54** Various examples of successful targeted desexing programs were presented by inquiry participants, as set out in the table below.

Table 2 Examples of targeted desexing programs

Location	Description
Ipswich, Queensland	A large-scale targeted desexing campaign in Ipswich, Queensland resulted in a 60 per cent reduction in the intake of 'stray cats' by pounds and shelters in three years. It achieved consistent reductions in cat intakes, nuisance calls and euthanasia through the provision of targeted, free cat desexing across three primary target areas. An average of 28 cats for every 1000 residents were desexed over 3.4 years in a targeted area with high cat impoundments. The average cost for the cat desexing surgeries was \$2 a year per resident. ²⁴⁸

²⁴² Evidence, Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 19.

²⁴³ Evidence, Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management, 1 April 2025, p 17; Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 19; Submission 28, Sentient, pp 6-7; Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 33.

²⁴⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 10.

²⁴⁵ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 10.

²⁴⁶ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 33.

²⁴⁷ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 10.

²⁴⁸ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 11; Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 6; Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 7; Submission 28, Sentient, pp 6-7; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 14.

Banyule City Council, Victoria	A large-scale desexing program was conducted by Banyule City Council in Victoria. Cat impoundments reduced by 66 per cent in eight years. Euthanasia and cat-related calls also fell by 82 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. Savings to council were calculated at \$440,660 whereas the outlay was \$77,490. Particular features thought to have contributed to the program's effectiveness were its targeting of low socio-economic suburbs with the highest cat-related complaints and the provision of free transport to appointments as required. ²⁴⁹
Bendigo, Victoria	Targeted desexing was effectively used by a council shelter in Bendigo to control the number of cats. The reclaim rate for cats increased to 50 per cent while the intake of cats reduced by 60 per cent in the 12 to 24 months since introducing a strategic and free microchipping and desexing program. Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero described how the program was so successful that 'in the middle of kitten season, they ran out of cats a number of times and were able to take cats from neighbouring municipalities to offer them up for adoption'. ²⁵⁰

- 3.55** Another example of a successful targeted desexing program referred to throughout the inquiry was the 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' program. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW reflected that the evidence supporting the effectiveness of targeted desexing is 'starting to mount up' and is 'reliably consistent'.²⁵¹ Importantly, targeted desexing was seen as a vehicle for engaging semi-owners and ensuring unowned cats are desexed. It was RSPCA NSW's view that the benefits of targeted desexing include the protection of wildlife due to reductions in the size of the cat population.²⁵² Dr Ma described targeted desexing as 'a real One Welfare approach' as it is 'decreasing the population of cats, decreasing their environmental impact, and improving their welfare and improving the welfare of the people who care about them'.²⁵³
- 3.56** RSPCA NSW further explained how targeted desexing programs 'incorporate an element of human behaviour change by ensuring that for every participating cat, someone is designated as the person responsible for their ongoing care, thus challenging the feeding of unowned cats as a social norm'.²⁵⁴ They recommended that statewide targeted cat desexing programs be implemented and funded as the main form of cat management policy in New South Wales, as it 'is the only method of cat population management that has proven to work. We have shown

²⁴⁹ Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 6; Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 11.

²⁵⁰ Evidence, Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero, 1 April 2025, p 35.

²⁵¹ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 18.

²⁵² Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 9.

²⁵³ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 19.

²⁵⁴ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 9.

this approach consistently results in rapid reductions of free-roaming cat population density and council nuisance complaints, pound intake and euthanasia'.²⁵⁵

- 3.57** Targeted desexing was also viewed as cost-effective, especially compared to other cat management strategies.²⁵⁶ The Australian Institute of Animal Management described targeted cat desexing programs as 'the cheapest, quickest and more effective way to achieve control of local breeding populations of domestic cats'.²⁵⁷ Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management explained how it could achieve more with less:

We also know that when you microtarget, so when you go out and find the caregivers who are providing the most resources and you basically get at that reproductive cohort of cats, you desex them and you keep on top of that population of cats, the population numbers nosedive. You don't need to desex anywhere near as many cats. You are talking a single digit per 100,000 people in the population, versus—according to some of the numbers coming out of the states—30 to 60 cats upwards per 100,000 of your population. The resources involved—just the sheer money and the number of desexes that you need to do using just a straight TNR approach versus a targeted desexing approach—are worlds apart.²⁵⁸

- 3.58** Registration requirements were seen as another barrier to the potential desexing of semi-owned and unowned cats, including via targeted desexing programs.²⁵⁹ The Cat Protection Society of NSW operates a targeted desexing program known as DIVA Cats (Desexing, Identification and Vaccination Assistance for Cats).²⁶⁰ They explained how the requirement that a cat be registered to an individual person coupled with the veterinary workforce shortage, hampered its ability to deliver the program.²⁶¹ They argued that permitting cats to be registered to the DIVA program instead of an individual or removing the need for registration before desexing would enable them to desex more cats:

It's beyond distressing that we have at hand the means to do something about feline population growth, and action as simple as waiving the need for registration would make a huge and positive impact. Instead, community cat carers who invest their own time and money risk or incur penalties for simply trying to improve animal welfare.²⁶²

- 3.59** Animal Care Australia similarly stressed that the need to clarify the ownership or origin of a cat before it is desexed serves as a major deterrent:

People are afraid to bring cat colony members to be desexed in fear the cats may be euthanised or they themselves could be fined for having an unregistered or non-microchipped cat. The system needs to be changed if we are truly going to see all cats that require to be desexed actually treated.²⁶³

²⁵⁵ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14; Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 9.

²⁵⁶ Evidence, Ms Thompson, 1 April 2025, p 32; Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 6.

²⁵⁷ Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 6.

²⁵⁸ Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 17.

²⁵⁹ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 4.

²⁶⁰ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 1.

²⁶¹ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 4.

²⁶² Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, pp 4-5.

²⁶³ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 11.

Trap neuter and return programs

- 3.60** A number of stakeholders referred to a particular type of desexing strategy generally known as trap, neuter and return programs ('TNR'), although some stakeholders did prefer the term 'release' or 'rehome' instead of 'return'.²⁶⁴ Such programs generally trap unowned or semi-owned cats, desex them, and then return them to their original location.²⁶⁵ They are then cared for and fed by local community members. In some cases, cats are also vaccinated before being returned.
- 3.61** Four Paws Australia explained their Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return ('TNVR') approach for managing stray cat populations, describing it as 'widely acknowledged by experts as the most humane and effective strategy for reducing stray cat numbers over time'.²⁶⁶ The table below outlines the various steps involved in the program.

Table 3 Four Paws Australia – Trap Neuter Vaccinate Return program²⁶⁷

Step	Description
Initial health check	Check for any immediate health concerns, such as fleas, ticks, mites, or other parasites.
Vaccination	Targets rabies and feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and panleukopenia, to protect the cat from common and potentially fatal diseases.
Desexing	The cat is dropped off in the morning and picked up later in the day after recovering from anaesthesia.
Post-operative care	After desexing, the cat is monitored for a short period to ensure it recovers well from the surgery. Pain relief is administered before and after the procedure to minimise discomfort.
Microchipping	The cat may be microchipped for identification purposes, helping to track and manage the cat population more effectively.
Return and monitoring	Once the cat has recovered, it is returned to its original location. Community cat carers or volunteers continue to monitor and provide food and shelter for the cat, ensuring its well-being.

Source: Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws Australia, 9 May 2025, pp 8-9.

- 3.62** Sentient explained how trap, neuter and return programs are designed for managing urban rather than wild cats, noting that 'There is strong evidence that TNR programs conducted in urban and peri-urban areas, often referred to as community cat programs, significantly reduce intakes to shelters, euthanasia rates of healthy cats and kittens and nuisance complaints about cats'.²⁶⁸ However, they stressed that the success of TNR programs requires members of the public to

²⁶⁴ There were different preferences among stakeholders as to whether the 'R' should stand for return, release or rehome. For example, Four Paws Australia uses the term 'return': Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws Australia, 9 May 2025, p 5. Blacktown City Council used the term 'rehome': Evidence, Ms Horton, 1 April 2025, p 15.

²⁶⁵ RSPCA, *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia* (May 2018), p 46.

²⁶⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws Australia, 9 May 2025, p 5.

²⁶⁷ Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws Australia, 9 May 2025, pp 8-9.

²⁶⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 3.

provide ongoing care. Any cats that migrate into the area must also be desexed for it to be effective.²⁶⁹

- 3.63** Campus Cats NSW manages a population of cats on the Kensington campus of the University of New South Wales. The following case study provides an example of how they have successfully used a TNR approach, but with an ongoing commitment to cat welfare, to manage this specific cat population.

Case study – Campus Cats NSW²⁷⁰

Campus Cats NSW is a charity that runs a volunteer-led desexing program designed to humanely manage a population of roaming urban cats on the University of New South Wales's Kensington campus.

At the program's inception in 2008, up to seventy cats were estimated to be living on campus.²⁷¹ The primary goals of the program were to humanely reduce these numbers and stabilise the population while ensuring positive outcomes for the remaining cats. Under this model, Campus Cats conducted an audit of the population before trapping, desexing, microchipping and vaccinating cats and finally returning them to the campus under supervision. This approach has resulted in a substantial decline in the number of roaming cats on campus, with the population reducing from an estimated seventy cats to just eight as of November 2024 – a nearly 90 per cent decrease.²⁷²

Campus Cats argues that their strategy to cat management is most aptly described as a 'Community Cat Management Program'.²⁷³ Though trap, neuter and return principles inform this approach, the program differentiates itself from the legal ambiguities of TNR – such as concerns about abandonment – by ensuring an ongoing commitment to cat welfare. This includes regular feeding, monitoring with trail cameras and access to veterinary care following release. Additionally, all cats in the program are lifetime registered on the NSW Companion Animals Register, and those assessed as sociable and suitable for rehoming are placed into adoptive homes.²⁷⁴

Other than an initial grant from the university, the program has been entirely donation-funded, operating with a relatively modest annual expenditure averaging \$7,550 per year. These funds have primarily been directed to veterinary costs (averaging \$4,250 per year) and cat food (at around \$2,500 annually). Due to the volunteer-driven nature of the program, administrative costs have been a small proportion of the overall yearly program cost, averaging \$800 per year.²⁷⁵

Legality issues

- 3.64** One of the major issues with TNR programs that was raised during the inquiry centred on the potential illegality of returning a cat to where it had been found once it had been desexed. Section 11 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* provides that it is an offence to abandon

²⁶⁹ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 3.

²⁷⁰ Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW; Evidence, Emeritus Professor Helen Swarbrick, President, Campus Cats NSW, 16 December 2024, p 41ff.

²⁷¹ Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW, p 2.

²⁷² Evidence, Emeritus Professor Swarbrick, 16 December 2024, p 41.

²⁷³ Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW, p 4.

²⁷⁴ Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW, pp 2 and 4.

²⁷⁵ Submission 41, Campus Cats NSW, p 4.

an animal. The Government acknowledged that there is legal uncertainty as to whether returning or releasing the cat post-procedure breaches this section.²⁷⁶ Numerous stakeholders in favour of TNR programs raised concerns in relation to the potential for those employing TNR as part of their care for semi-owned and unowned cats to be charged with an offence under the Act.²⁷⁷

- 3.65** While Local Government NSW accepted that TNR strategies can be useful in reducing the size of a colony population over time, they noted that the release stage is not only problematic in relation to section 11 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* but may also be contrary to section 2.6 of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* due to it not preventing predation.²⁷⁸
- 3.66** However, a different perspective was offered by Emeritus Professor Helen Swarbrick, President, Campus Cats NSW. She explained how cats who are healthy when they are trapped essentially demonstrate that they are being cared for. Emeritus Professor Swarbrick concluded that returning a cat to where it was trapped is therefore not abandoning the cat but simply returning it to its home.²⁷⁹
- 3.67** A number of stakeholders advocated for the removal of legislative barriers to trap, neuter and return programs so that people are not at risk of prosecution for abandoning cats that have been returned as part of the program.²⁸⁰ The Animal Welfare League NSW suggested that section 11 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* should be amended to 'specifically legalise trap-neuter-return, and then to fund and implement a widespread targeted desexing program'.²⁸¹ They argued that this would help transition semi-owners to ownership and reduce the uncontrolled breeding of semi-owned cats.
- 3.68** Both the Animal Defenders Office and WIRES noted that Mr Alex Greenwich MP of the Legislative Assembly previously attempted to remove the relevant legislative barriers through the introduction of the Animal Welfare (Population Control Programs) Bill 2014. However, the bill lapsed.²⁸²

Effectiveness of trap, neuter and return programs

- 3.69** Aside from the legality issues, inquiry participants were divided as to the efficacy of TNR programs. Some were not convinced that TNR would be effective in reducing the size of wild cat populations.
- 3.70** The Government observed that such programs 'do not have agreed efficacy due to concerns from existing research and program evaluations over effectiveness'.²⁸³ Dr Steven McLeod,

²⁷⁶ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 11.

²⁷⁷ For example, Submission 39, WIRES, p 11; Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 12; Evidence, Emeritus Professor Swarbrick, 16 December 2024, pp 43-44; Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 12.

²⁷⁸ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 12.

²⁷⁹ Evidence, Emeritus Professor Swarbrick, 16 December 2024, p 41.

²⁸⁰ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 12; Submission 39, WIRES, p 13; Evidence, Emeritus Professor Swarbrick, 16 December 2024, pp 43-44.

²⁸¹ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 12.

²⁸² Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 12; Submission 39, WIRES, p 13.

²⁸³ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 11.

Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development explained how there are various factors that need to be met for a trap, neuter and return strategy to be effective:

- the colony size must be small
- at least 75 per cent of the cats in the colony need to be desexed (up to 90 per cent in some cases)
- the population needs to be closed
- there needs to be continual monitoring.²⁸⁴

3.71 Dr McLeod concluded that these requirements cannot be met for almost all cat populations in Australia:

...the only viable situation is probably an urban environment where you can have quite close control over the populations themselves. In most other populations, we're not going to be able to achieve either a high proportion of sterilisation, if it's a feral population, or that the population itself is closed, and all of these things themselves undermine it.²⁸⁵

3.72 Other issues raised related to the inability of TNR to prevent the predation of the current cat population on wildlife. Wollondilly Shire Council did not support trap, neuter and return programs for this reason, noting that 'a neutered cat is more likely [to] have a longer life than an entire cat'.²⁸⁶

3.73 Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council was also sceptical of the benefits of TNR in relation to the welfare of both the cats concerned as well as that of wildlife:

It doesn't improve the welfare of those cats and it also doesn't reduce rates of predation of wildlife in areas where people live or rates of diseases, and it increases the risk that those unowned re-released cats are going to spread diseases to your own cats and your family. We can't really see any benefit to those programs other than maintaining unowned cats in our landscapes, which is exactly what we need to be trying to avoid.²⁸⁷

3.74 However, this was strongly disputed by Four Paws Australia, who asserted that 'TNVR [Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return] is widely acknowledged by experts as the most humane and effective strategy for reducing stray cat numbers over time', particularly in urban and semi urban areas.²⁸⁸ Further, they were of the view that 'By sterilising and vaccinating cats, further reproduction and the spread of diseases is prevented, allowing populations to stabilise and decline in a sustainable manner'.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁴ Evidence, Dr McLeod, 1 April 2025, p 58.

²⁸⁵ Evidence, Dr McLeod, 1 April 2025, p 58.

²⁸⁶ Submission 348, Wollondilly Shire Council, p 6.

²⁸⁷ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 11.

²⁸⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws, 9 May 2025, pp 4 and 5.

²⁸⁹ Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws, 9 May 2025, p 5.

- 3.75** WIRES also saw value in the provision of subsidised, accessible and mobile de-sexing services in addition to what they termed 'Trap, Desex, Adopt or Return and Support programs ('TDARS').²⁹⁰ They described 'the abundance of evidence-based research in Australia and internationally' of its potential, noting that it would prevent additional births and consequently 'reduce the numbers of free-roaming and free-living cats in the community'.²⁹¹ It was their view that this would 'directly improve outcomes for local wildlife ... reducing the burden on the volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector'.²⁹² They concluded that 'TDARS style programs, alongside being a welfare centred approach, are also more effective and require less effort than lethal measures to reduce populations and their associated impacts on wildlife'.²⁹³
- 3.76** Ultimately, how TNR programs are viewed often depends on what is determined as the measure of success. Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government observed that the relevant criteria for some is the number of new litters whereas for others it is a reduction in predation.²⁹⁴
- 3.77** Dr Steven McLeod, Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development highlighted that it can be some years before the reduction in predation takes effect:
- We need to evaluate it in terms of is it effective, and is it achieving the goals such as reducing damage? In most cases, it won't, and there are a couple of reasons. The first, immediate reason is because the method is not increasing mortality, the animals that are released back into the site they were taken from initially can still prey upon other species, and it won't be until those animals die that we see a reduction in that. For neutered animals, that can be quite a protracted period—many years.²⁹⁵
- 3.78** By contrast, other stakeholders such as WIRES highlighted the immediate benefit of desexing programs as less births result in less hunting by that offspring and therefore reducing birthing rates has an immediate effect on any future impact.²⁹⁶
- 3.79** While Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management saw value in trap, neuter and return programs, she argued that it should not be the primary strategic focus of cat management. She emphasised the need to employ limited resources effectively and expressed her concern about its reliance on already vulnerable people:
- We shouldn't be going into communities and just implementing this without actually talking to these people and targeting our resources. We've got limited resources; we need to target them where we can actually use them most effectively. We don't want to be imposing on a group of vulnerable members of our community anyway. It is not the aim of good management to be imposing things on people. Yes, I do genuinely think that there is a role for TNR, but it should be minor.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁰ Submission 39, WIRES, p 5.

²⁹¹ Submission 39, WIRES, pp 5 and 10.

²⁹² Submission 39, WIRES, p 5.

²⁹³ Answers to questions on notice, WIRES, 10 January 2025, p 9.

²⁹⁴ Evidence, Mr Whitworth, 1 April 2025, p 60.

²⁹⁵ Evidence, Dr McLeod, 1 April 2025, p 58.

²⁹⁶ Evidence, Dr Salter, 16 December 2024, p 24.

²⁹⁷ Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 17.

Kitten farms and the sale of cats in pet shops

- 3.80** The majority of inquiry participants agreed that there is an oversupply of cats in New South Wales. Blacktown City Council described how they experience a 'kitten tsunami season' and see 'more than enough kittens'.²⁹⁸
- 3.81** Some stakeholders raised concerns about the practice of kitten farming. Ms Gina Vereker, Director, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council described how kitten farming is a problem in regional areas.²⁹⁹
- 3.82** The Animal Defenders Office viewed the ability to breed cats as 'one of the main problems regarding the oversupply of domestic cats'.³⁰⁰ They accordingly proposed a moratorium on the breeding of cats and a ban on the sale of cats in pet shops.³⁰¹
- 3.83** Dr Colin Salter, Policy Lead, Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service (WIRES) described how purposely bred cats cannot be sold in pet shops in Victoria.³⁰² He referred to the 'crisis' regarding the number of cats in council facilities, before concluding that 'As long as there are cats in those facilities, there are cats that need homes, they're the ones that should be rehomed first, rather than creating more cats'.³⁰³
- 3.84** Four Paws Australia advocated for the ban of cats and kittens in pet shops, with an exception for rescued cats.³⁰⁴

The role of education and increasing community awareness

- 3.85** Many inquiry participants emphasised the role of education and increasing community awareness in fostering responsible cat ownership and better management of the cat population.³⁰⁵ Local Government NSW was 'highly supportive of community education and responsible pet ownership programs because they tackle the complex issue of cat management at the source'.³⁰⁶ They recommended that the Government 'commit to an ongoing, state-wide community awareness and education campaign on responsible pet ownership, the importance of desexing, and the benefits of keeping cats contained'.³⁰⁷
- 3.86** Community education programs can help:

²⁹⁸ Evidence, Ms Horton, 1 April 2025, p 18.

²⁹⁹ Evidence, Ms Gina Vereker, Director, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council, 1 April 2025, p 17.

³⁰⁰ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 9.

³⁰¹ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 11.

³⁰² Evidence, Dr Salter, 16 December 2024, p 23.

³⁰³ Evidence, Dr Salter, 16 December 2024, p 23.

³⁰⁴ Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 37.

³⁰⁵ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4.

³⁰⁶ Evidence, Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager, Environment, Local Government NSW, 16 December 2024, p 26.

³⁰⁷ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 14.

- increase cat desexing rates
- reduce unowned cat populations
- reduce predation of native wildlife
- reduce cat nuisance issues
- increase rates of good quality, welfare enhancing cat containment
- improve feline welfare.³⁰⁸

3.87 According to the Animal Defenders Office, community education 'is more appropriate than creating harsh laws that have significant enforcement, compliance, resource, and welfare implications'.³⁰⁹

3.88 Both Getting 2 Zero and the Australian Institute of Animal Management explained how people generally view themselves as responsible pet owners, and so may not see the messaging of education campaigns as relevant to them.³¹⁰ For this reason, it is important that education programs are thoughtfully designed in order to target the right people.³¹¹ They may need to target specific demographics in relation to owned, semi-owned and unowned cats.³¹²

3.89 Nonetheless, there may be limits to what can be achieved through education, with a number of stakeholders emphasising that education initiatives need to be accompanied by greater access to desexing. The Australian Veterinary Association stressed that around half of owned cats in Australia are passively acquired by people who had not planned on becoming cat owners.³¹³ For this reason, they were in favour of education initiatives being accompanied by other programs to ensure responsible pet ownership:

"Education" alone is not the answer, as it is often not a lack of knowledge but rather barriers that stand in the way of people undertaking responsible ownership behaviours. Therefore, community education programs must be accompanied by programs that address barriers to people undertaking responsible ownership behaviours and improve access to cat desexing services to reduce the number of cats who are passively acquired.³¹⁴

Management of wild cats

3.90 The best way to manage the wild cat population was a matter of considerable debate throughout the inquiry. Many stakeholders acknowledged that the management of wild cats requires a different approach to domestic cats, whether owned, semi-owned or unowned. RSPCA NSW stressed that wild cats cannot be rehomed, and involve different stakeholders to other cat

³⁰⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 7.

³⁰⁹ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 7.

³¹⁰ Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 5; Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 5.

³¹¹ Submission 28, Sentient, p 5.

³¹² Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 10.

³¹³ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 9.

³¹⁴ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 9.

populations.³¹⁵ Many stakeholders acknowledged that managing wild/feral cats requires a different approach than domestic cats, whether owned, semi-owned, or unowned.

3.91 This section generally focuses on wild cats, namely those cats that are unowned, unsocialised, reproduce in the wild and have no relationship or dependence on humans.³¹⁶

3.92 As discussed in Chapter 1, predation by wild cats is listed as a key threatening process under both New South Wales and Commonwealth law.³¹⁷ There is also a national Threat Abatement Plan. Nonetheless, the Government advised that the use of conservation fencing is the only broad strategy available to counter wild cats at present:

...there is currently no broadscale, landscape-wide technique or strategy that will deliver effective feral cat control other than conservation fencing to establish large feral cat-free areas. Ongoing research and testing are needed to inform decision-making about the most effective and cost-efficient method of control for conservation.³¹⁸

3.93 The Government noted that wild cats are present throughout all of New South Wales, forming 'a persistent, ongoing, and critical threat to native wildlife and ecosystems'.³¹⁹ They acknowledged that complete eradication of cats using current management techniques is extremely unlikely.³²⁰

3.94 There is ongoing research into how wild cats are best managed. Local Government NSW described how in 2019 the University of New England was awarded \$14.6 million by the NSW Environmental Trust for its project, 'Developing strategies for effective feral cat management'. The project has been testing and developing effective, integrated management strategies for wild cats in New South Wales and is currently in its final year.³²¹

3.95 The remainder of this section considers some of the strategies proposed to control the wild cat population, including conservation fencing, baiting, and gene drive and immunocontraceptive technology.

Use of conservation fencing

3.96 Conservation fencing involves the construction of fenced areas that exclude cats, foxes and other introduced predators. Australian Wildlife Conservancy is a national leader in the establishment of areas free of cats through the use of conservation fencing, with native species subsequently reintroduced within the fenced area.³²²

³¹⁵ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 12.

³¹⁶ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 1.

³¹⁷ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13.

³¹⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13.

³¹⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13.

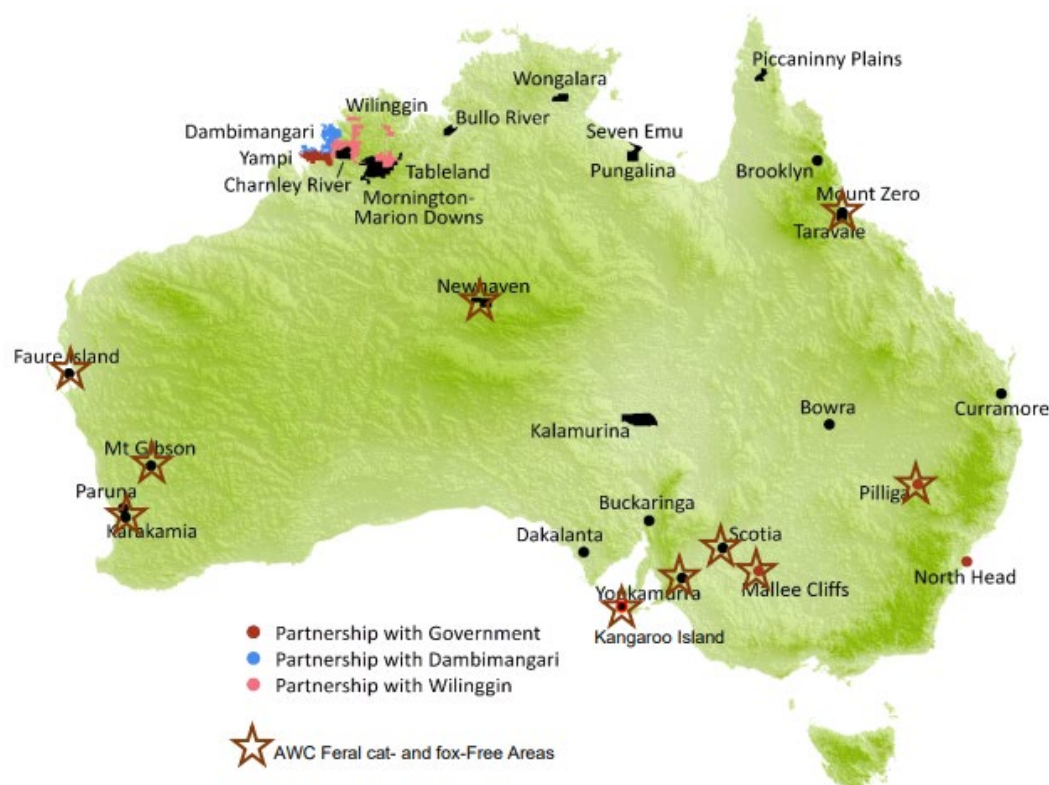
³²⁰ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13.

³²¹ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 13.

³²² Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 1; Evidence, Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 1 April 2025, p 2.

- 3.97 Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy informed the committee that there are currently 10 fenced areas throughout Australia, three of which are in New South Wales (including two in national parks).³²³ Figure 3 shows the location of fenced areas within Australia that are free of foxes and cats.

Figure 3 Australian Wildlife Conservancy sanctuaries and partnership sites, showing location of feral predator-free areas



Source: Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 8.

- 3.98 Australian Wildlife Conservancy outlined how conservation fences typically take a minimum of three years to construct, from initiation to feral predator-free status (one year for each of the following stages – planning, fence construction and feral eradication).³²⁴
- 3.99 The initial capital cost is about \$50,000 per kilometre of fencing, and it requires ongoing monitoring and maintenance where the fencing is checked two or three times a week. Fence material needs to be replaced after 20 to 50 years. 'Feral eradication' within the fenced area costs around \$400,000 for 8,000 hectares.³²⁵
- 3.100 The various advantages and disadvantages of conservation fencing as a means of controlling wild cats are outlined in table 4 below.

³²³ Evidence, Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 1 April 2025, p 2.

³²⁴ Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 7.

³²⁵ Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 7.

Table 4 Advantages and disadvantages of conservation fencing

Advantages	Disadvantages
Efficacy	Scale – fenced areas represent a tiny proportion of Australia
Security – more risky control measures can be used outside the fence	Landscape suitability – there are limitations to its use in steep, high rainfall and flood-prone areas
Ecological understanding of native species without distortion of introduced predators	Connectivity – may restrain the movement of terrestrial species
Cost-effectiveness	Collision/entanglement – potential impact on some birds and reptiles
No requirement for long-term poison baiting	Predator naivete – removes opportunity to adapt to introduced predators
Exclusion of other feral pests such as goats and donkeys	Overabundance – native mammals may reach high densities with impacts on vegetation and habitat
Community engagement – demonstrates that Australian mammals 'can and should be' abundant	

Source: Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 7.

- 3.101** Mr Richard Kingswood, Director, Biodiversity and Ecological Health Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, described how conservation fencing was being established across New South Wales with an eradication program operating inside the fenced area, creating a safe environment for the reintroduction of species that used to be there.³²⁶ He concluded that it had been done 'to very good effect' across the national park estate in New South Wales.³²⁷

Baiting and other killing techniques

- 3.102** The threat of wild cats is identified as a management priority for 38 threatened entities under the 'Saving our Species' program established by the NSW Government.³²⁸ On-going attempts to manage feral cats is undertaken in the program with varying success by removing them from those sites where they directly impact species and ecosystems. Various control methods are used, including trapping, shooting, baiting, Felixer cat grooming trap trials and detection dogs.³²⁹

³²⁶ Evidence, Mr Richard Kingswood, Director, Biodiversity and Ecological Health Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, 1 April 2025, p 59.

³²⁷ Evidence, Mr Kingswood, 1 April 2025, p 59.

³²⁸ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 15.

³²⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 15.

- 3.103** Whether lethal strategies should be used to control the wild cat population was passionately contested by the inquiry participants from the animal rights sector. Animal Care Australia described the central challenge:

The solution of eradicating the feral cat population is controversial and does not sit easy with many pet cat owners or sympathetic animal enthusiasts. Conversely, the continued killing and eradication of threatened species by cats does not sit easy with conservationists and native animal enthusiasts.³³⁰

- 3.104** A number of stakeholders stressed the importance of a measured approach to the eradication of wild cats. The Australian Veterinary Association argued that lethal control 'must be justified, humane, and targeted to specific cat populations posing a risk to threatened wildlife'.³³¹ They also emphasised the importance of establishing thresholds for intervention, and 'a theory of change should guide lethal methods to ensure desired outcomes are achievable'.³³²
- 3.105** The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation argued that 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'.³³³
- 3.106** Whether poisons should be used in baits was fiercely debated, with stakeholders voicing concerns about the pain caused to the animal as it dies, as well as its impact on non-targeted species, such as wildlife.³³⁴ The Animal Defenders Office strongly opposed the baiting or poisoning of cats, highlighting the 'intense pain and suffering poisons inflict on sentient animals'.³³⁵
- 3.107** The Australian Veterinary Association recommended that toxic baits should only be used 'as a last resort when humane, non-lethal options are unavailable'.³³⁶ They stressed that any lethal control program 'must be backed by evidence-based research, with ongoing monitoring to assess impacts on cat populations and measure progress toward program objectives'.³³⁷
- 3.108** A number of inquiry participants voiced particular concern about the use of 1080 poison. This is derived from 'poison pea' plants mostly located in Western Australia where many native animals are tolerant of it.³³⁸ However, Sentient described how native animals are more vulnerable to the use of 1080 poison in southeastern Australia:

Recent research using remote cameras in south-eastern Australia found that non-target native species, primarily native mice, accounted for 88% of interactions with 1080 baits (defined as digging up or eating the baits) and that they were much quicker to do so than target species such as foxes and dingoes. A 2022 study investigating the uptake of

³³⁰ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 5.

³³¹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 17.

³³² Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 17.

³³³ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 37.

³³⁴ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 20.

³³⁵ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 10.

³³⁶ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 18.

³³⁷ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 18.

³³⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 5.

toxic Eradicat baits by non-target species in five eastern Australian environments found that 13 non-target species (including mammals, birds and one reptile) were at high risk of mortality.³³⁹

3.109 Some of the concerns expressed by stakeholders about the use of 1080 poison are noted below.

- Sentient advocated for a ban on 1080 poisoning due to the 'unacceptable suffering' it causes to target species as well as those inadvertently poisoned.³⁴⁰
- The Australian Veterinary Association similarly recommended that the use of 1080 toxin for controlling wild cats be phased out, voicing concerns about its 'relative humaneness as well as social acceptability'.³⁴¹
- The Animal Welfare League NSW strongly opposed the use of 1080 poison to control wild cats 'as it has the potential to kill other animals and is a particularly inhumane poison'.³⁴²
- The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation advocated for banning the use of 1080 poison 'due to its significant risks to human health and non-target species, aligning with its prohibition or restriction in many other countries'.³⁴³

3.110 Paraminopropiophenone (PAPP) was proposed as a more suitable alternative to 1080 poison.³⁴⁴ The Australian Veterinary Association described PAPP, which is used in 'Curiosity' baits and causes mild suffering for a relatively short duration in wild cats, as the 'more humane toxin'. Nonetheless, they recommended caution regarding its use in certain areas, notably those where quolls inhabit. The Australian Veterinary Association advised that despite its demonstrated efficacy, the uptake of PAPP has been limited. They strongly supported the trialling of the use of PAPP in Felixer grooming traps.³⁴⁵

3.111 There are a number of other methods for controlling wild cat populations. Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy described some of the approaches to cat control that are used by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy outside fenced areas.³⁴⁶ These include: working with First Nations people who hunt cats; artificial intelligence informed machines that poison cats; baiting; live trapping; and shooting.

3.112 However, the effectiveness of these methods may not be long-term. Dr Kanowski explained how cats from other areas will migrate into an area that has been cleared of wild cats:

The trouble with all those methods is the difficulty of effectively suppressing cat populations at a landscape level. We've done a number of experiments where we've done shooting at quite substantial scales over extended duration and the cats in the

³³⁹ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 5.

³⁴⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 5.

³⁴¹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, pp 17-18.

³⁴² Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 16.

³⁴³ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 40.

³⁴⁴ Submission 28, Sentient, p 10; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 40.

³⁴⁵ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, pp 17-18.

³⁴⁶ Evidence, Dr Kanowski, 1 April 2025, p 3.

surrounding landscape quickly reinvade the area that had been shot. That's true, more or less, for any control measure, even baiting.³⁴⁷

Gene drive technology and contraceptives

3.113 Various inquiry participants were in favour of exploring the use of innovative approaches to the control of the wild cat population through the use of gene drive technology and immunocontraceptives.³⁴⁸ These methods utilise fertility control to manage cats.

3.114 Dr Steven McLeod, Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development described the gene drive work conducted by the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions in conjunction with the University of Adelaide.³⁴⁹ They are examining the impact of gene drive on cat populations and the length of time before a localised population becomes extinct. However, Dr McLeod noted 'As far as I'm aware, there is no further funding to develop this technology, apart from the modelling, so at the moment that's theoretical'.³⁵⁰

3.115 The Australian Wildlife Conservancy reflected that they are 'interested in the development of novel techniques, such as gene drive, which have the potential for continental-scale control in a humane manner'.³⁵¹ As such, they are collaborating with the CSIRO and other science and conservation organisations in developing the genetic control of wild cats.³⁵² Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy explained how gene drive technology works:

We collaborate with the CSIRO and university researchers on this technology. Essentially, it is manipulating the genetics of cats and then releasing them into the wild such that, when those cats breed with the feral cats, the offspring—perhaps the males or perhaps the females—are infertile and the population dies out. That's how it works. There's no injury to any individual cat. It's just that the population cannot keep breeding.³⁵³

3.116 The Australian Wildlife Conservancy viewed gene drive technology as offering 'a potentially safe, humane, effective approach to the control of invasive species over regional to continental scales' in contrast to current methods of direct control.³⁵⁴ However, they noted that 'long-term research is required to develop and deploy gene drives safely and effectively'.³⁵⁵ The use of gene drive technology to effectively control wild cats throughout Australia is likely several decades away from being ready to be used.³⁵⁶

³⁴⁷ Evidence, Dr Kanowski, 1 April 2025, p 3.

³⁴⁸ Submission 7, Centre for Ecosystem Science, UNSW Sydney, p 17; Supplementary submission 1222a, Mr Karl Augustine, p 2; Submission 213, Anthony Learmouth, p 2.

³⁴⁹ Evidence, Dr McLeod, 1 April 2025, p 56.

³⁵⁰ Evidence, Dr McLeod, 1 April 2025, p 56.

³⁵¹ Evidence, Dr Kanowski, 1 April 2025, p 2.

³⁵² Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 10.

³⁵³ Evidence, Dr Kanowski, 1 April 2025, p 3.

³⁵⁴ Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 10.

³⁵⁵ Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 1.

³⁵⁶ Submission 47, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, p 10.

- 3.117** The Australian Wildlife Conservancy gave evidence that there had been 'limited investment in the gene drive' in Australia to date, and it would be of 'substantial benefit' to see investment from governments in this technology.³⁵⁷
- 3.118** Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient argued for further consideration of immunocontraception, noting that there have been recent advances in the area and describing it as 'an awful lot easier than actually trapping, sedating, desexing and releasing'.³⁵⁸ Dr Elliott described how immunocontraceptives could be used to control the wild cat population:
- These immunocontraceptives could be introduced to the feral cat population using a mild form of herpes virus already present in the population, which would allow self-dissemination, reducing the reproductive ability of male and female cats. This is still early work and does involve gene therapy that could be used with large populations, but the next stage would be to test the immunocontraceptives in vivo. This should not be decades away but is not immediately available.³⁵⁹
- 3.119** Sentient further gave evidence that 'with appropriate funding from the government, immunocontraceptives that are already available could be used for fertility control in cats'.³⁶⁰
- 3.120** The Australian Veterinary Association also referred to the potential of immunocontraception and gene drive technology in controlling wild cat populations, acknowledging that 'debate continues regarding ethical aspects of this type of technology as well as practical application challenges'.³⁶¹

Committee comment

- 3.121** In Chapter 2, the committee acknowledged the negative impacts associated with the overpopulation of cats in NSW, and the clear and pressing need to implement cat management strategies. However, it was contested amongst some stakeholders as to which strategies were most effective and should take priority.
- 3.122** Whatever strategies are employed in the pursuit of the effective management of the various types of cat populations, it is important that they are evidence-based, utilising quality data and research. Otherwise there is a real risk that much time, money and effort will be spent on strategies producing little result or that are counter-productive and compound the difficulties already faced. The committee therefore recommends that the Government ensure cat management programs are underpinned by sound, peer-reviewed scientific evidence, with clear objectives and measurable metrics established to evaluate their effectiveness.

³⁵⁷ Evidence, Dr Kanowski, 1 April 2025, p 3.

³⁵⁸ Evidence, Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient, 1 April 2025, p 27.

³⁵⁹ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p 4.

³⁶⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Sentient, 5 May 2025, p

³⁶¹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 19.

Recommendation 1

That the Government ensure cat management programs are underpinned by sound, peer-reviewed scientific evidence, with clear objectives and measurable metrics established to evaluate their effectiveness.

- 3.123** Desexing is critical to stop the continual cycle of breeding that is continuing to increase the cat population in New South Wales. The majority of stakeholders supported desexing programs as an effective way to reduce the number of cats. This includes both programs that educate and support the community to desex their 'owned' cats so that unwanted litters are not later dumped on the streets or in bushland areas, or at pounds and shelters, as well as large scale, targeted desexing programs in urban environments (also referred to as 'community cat desexing programs') to address the 'semi-owned' and 'unowned' cat population.
- 3.124** The committee recognises that the cost of desexing serves as a primary barrier to greater desexing rates, which highlights the need for free and subsidised desexing programs. Evidence showed that communities are quick to utilise these programs when they are made available to them.
- 3.125** While there is obviously a cost to the provision of free and/or subsidised desexing, it is clear from the evidence that it is nonetheless a cost-effective approach compared to other cat management strategies. It has proven to be particularly valuable in relation to 'owned' and 'semi-owned' cats in urban environments, where the availability of free or subsidised desexing can reduce future litters and encourage those who already provide some care for these animals to take ownership. This would benefit the community by reducing the size of these cat populations on the street, as well as by preventing them from further breeding.
- 3.126** The committee notes that desexing rates are often less in low socio-economic areas. Targeted desexing programs have proven to be an effective way of reducing the size of the cat population in these areas where there are often large numbers of semi-owned and undesexed owned cats. This will in turn reduce euthanasia rates as fewer cats are seized or surrendered.
- 3.127** The committee agrees with RSPCA NSW and the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation that targeted desexing programs should be implemented and funded. We accept the evidence of the Australian Institute of Animal Management as to its cost-effectiveness. It is recommended that the Government, as a priority, look into investing in large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs, with a specific focus on areas with the largest free-roaming cat populations. To this end, the committee recommends that the Government provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out free and subsidised desexing programs throughout the state, including desexing of 'owned' cats for those on lower incomes, and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs. Such programs should be one of a suite of measures employed, prioritised where they can have the greatest impact.

Finding 3

Desexing programs were broadly supported by the large majority of inquiry participants, and have been proven to be an effective cat management strategy.

Recommendation 2

That the Government provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out free and subsidised desexing programs throughout the state, including desexing of 'owned' cats for those on lower incomes, and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs.

- 3.128** In order to support the operation of these large scale, targeted desexing programs, we will need to expand the state's capacity for high-volume desexing through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices. The committee accordingly recommends that the Government expand the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.
- 3.129** The committee also recommends that to assist rural and regional councils with desexing programs, the NSW Government should investigate ways to provide additional support including but not limited to encouraging metropolitan veterinarians and mobile desexing programs to regularly visit rural and regional areas, providing this does not have a negative impact on local service providers.
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Recommendation 3

That the Government expand the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.

Recommendation 4

To assist rural and regional councils with desexing programs, the NSW Government should investigate ways to provide additional support including but not limited to encouraging metropolitan veterinarians and mobile desexing programs to regularly visit rural and regional areas, providing this does not have a negative impact on local service providers.

- 3.130** The committee notes evidence received from organisations such as RSPCA and the Cat Protection Society that the current registration requirements, including that cats be registered to an individual, can be a barrier to community cat desexing programs. The committee notes the NSW Government is currently conducting a review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, and recommends that it considers legislative, regulatory and policy changes necessary to support the effectiveness and operation of community cat desexing programs as part of this review.
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Recommendation 5

That the Government, as part of its review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, consider legislative, regulatory and policy changes necessary to support the effectiveness and operation of community cat desexing programs.

- 3.131** The large number of unowned and semi-owned cats in New South Wales has had a significant impact on cat rescue and rehoming organisations. Many council pounds are at capacity or refuse to take in cats. This leaves it up to rescue and rehoming organisations, and volunteer cat carers, to respond to the overwhelming number of cats needing assistance. The committee recognises that these organisations and volunteers have played a key role in feeding and caring for unowned cats, as well as trapping and taking these cats off the street to receive vet care, desexing, vaccinations, microchipping and care until they can be rehomed to a loving home. The committee thanks these organisations for the tireless and important work they do in rescue and rehoming.
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Finding 4

That not-for-profit cat rescues and volunteers have played a critical and leading role in the desexing and rehoming of cats in New South Wales.

- 3.132** The efforts of cat rescue and rehoming organisations have helped reduce the pressures on councils, including their pounds. Many of these organisations are non-profit organisations who rely on donations or grants. Others rely on volunteers and those involved in cat rescue, covering costs with their own money. Many of these organisations are struggling. It is apparent that cat management strategies will continue to rely on the continued work and support of these volunteer-run rescue and rehoming organisations in desexing and rehoming cats. For this reason, the committee recommends that the Government provide funding to cat rescue and rehoming organisations to support desexing, care and rehoming costs.
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Recommendation 6

That the Government provide funding to cat rescue and rehoming organisations to support desexing, care and rehoming costs.

- 3.133** There are some practical changes that can be made to the current system that would considerably assist rehoming organisations in their work. Not having full access to the Pet Registry and Companion Animal Register was a source of frustration for some, as it creates more work when resources are already stretched. The committee recommends that as part of the upgrade of the NSW Pet Registry and Companion Animal Register, the Government prioritise consultation with rehoming organisations, with a view to ensuring greater access for these organisations.
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Recommendation 7

That, as part of the upgrade of the NSW Pet Registry and Companion Animal Register, the Government prioritise consultation with rehoming organisations, with a view to ensuring greater access for these organisations.

- 3.134** It is abundantly clear that there is already an oversupply of cats in New South Wales. Unfortunately, this results in the euthanasia of healthy cats as homes are unable to be found and pounds and rehoming shelters are stretched beyond limit. In order to encourage the rehoming of as many of these cats as possible, and reduce the number of cats being dumped and ending up being euthanised in pounds, the committee recommends that the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming and the sale of cats from breeders in pet shops.

Recommendation 8

That the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming and the sale of cats from breeders in pet shops.

- 3.135** It is clear that the management of wild cats requires a unique approach and that the use of conservation fencing to protect wildlife, while successful in its own way, is insufficient for fully ensuring the wild cat population is adequately controlled. The inability of current techniques to eradicate cats in rural and bushland environments has been recognised by the Government.
- 3.136** The committee was nonetheless encouraged to learn of the potential use of gene drive technology and immunocontraceptives to humanely control the wild cat population, and we encourage the Government to pursue development of these alternative approaches. The committee heard evidence, including from the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, that there has not been sufficient investment in these alternative approaches and proper investment could speed up research and the roll out of these new technologies. The committee thus recommends that the Government invest in research and trials for humane means of fertility control, such as immune-contraceptives and gene drive technology.

Recommendation 9

That the Government invest in research and trials for humane means of fertility control, such as immune-contraceptives and gene drive technology.

Chapter 4 The role of cat containment

The use of containment as a strategy for managing cat populations in New South Wales was a significant point of discussion throughout the inquiry. The various benefits and risks associated with voluntary and mandatory cat containment are explored throughout this chapter. Some of the challenges should mandatory cat containment laws be introduced are examined, along with the objections commonly raised, especially regarding the potential for counter-productive outcomes. These include the implications for those on lower incomes or in rental properties, its effectiveness or lack thereof in relation to semi-owned and unowned cats, and the potential impact on pounds and shelters. The potential repercussions for councils should a mandatory cat containment policy be introduced are discussed, including issues around enforcement and the various funding and resourcing challenges it presents.

Community expectations regarding voluntary versus mandatory cat containment

- 4.1 Cat containment can take various forms. It may involve the use of a suitable enclosure or fencing that keeps a cat within the boundaries of its owner's property. Alternatively, a cat may be kept indoors 24 hours a day or just at certain times, such as during the night.
- 4.2 Recent Australian research suggests that cat containment is increasingly a social norm and community expectation, with evidence that many cat owners already contain their cats.³⁶² According to the Cat Protection Society of NSW, 42 per cent of cat owners in New South Wales keep their cats indoors, another nine per cent also provide contained outdoor access, and a further 25 per cent keep them indoors overnight.³⁶³
- 4.3 The community are also generally supportive of voluntary cat containment. Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council referred to research by Monash University that found that two-thirds of people in New South Wales are in favour of cat owners being required to contain their cat within their property.³⁶⁴
- 4.4 Despite this, there was strong disagreement amongst inquiry participants about whether cat containment should be made mandatory in NSW, backed by punitive legislation, or if it could be achieved voluntarily through education, behaviour change and support programs.
- 4.5 For some stakeholders, mandatory cat containment was seen as part of responsible pet ownership, similar to the requirements that apply to dog owners.³⁶⁵ Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council argued that communities need to understand that keeping a cat contained to the owner's property is part of being a responsible pet owner and should be supported by the regulatory framework:

We accept that that shift is not going to happen overnight. It is not something that is going to happen on a purely punitive basis, but having clear rules allows the community

³⁶² Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 7.

³⁶³ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 5.

³⁶⁴ Evidence, Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, 1 April 2025, p 2.

³⁶⁵ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 7; Evidence, Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council, 16 December 2024, p 4.

to start to understand those responsibilities, and it has to be backed up with funding for education, compliance and making sure that we have registration and desexing alongside it.³⁶⁶

- 4.6** The Biodiversity Council similarly argued that the expectation of cat containment should be reflected in law, and supported by 'investment in communication, education and enforcement to ensure that the policy can realise its potential'.³⁶⁷
- 4.7** By contrast, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation highlighted that 'it is not lack of knowledge but lack of resources that are the barrier to "responsible" cat care'.³⁶⁸
- 4.8** RSPCA NSW similarly stressed that community education needs to be accompanied by programs that remove barriers to responsible cat ownership.³⁶⁹ They reflected that 'education-based approaches, when coupled with complementary strategies such as subsidised desexing, microchipping, and behaviour change programs, have been shown to be highly effective in increasing voluntary cat containment'.³⁷⁰ Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW explained the importance of community education in encouraging people to contain their cats:

We found that the main barrier for people keeping their cats contained was their psychological capability— knowing how to do it, feeling confident to do it and persisting to make that change in behaviour. What we've focused on is providing people with accessible information on how to successfully keep their cats contained, providing them with encouragement, creating a community of practice of cat caregivers who are keeping their cats at home, and all of that sort of thing.³⁷¹

- 4.9** WIRES outlined how this would ultimately improve both cat welfare as well as protect wildlife:

An education-based approach will assist in fostering the social license for cat containment and programmes to prevent additional births, leading to more effective outcomes for the welfare of cats, the communities who care for them — and reduce the risk of harm to wildlife.³⁷²

Cat welfare and the benefits and risks of containment

- 4.10** It was broadly recognised by stakeholders that voluntary cat containment has a number of benefits that extend to both the community and wildlife, as well as to the general welfare of cats themselves. Local Government NSW described how containment can limit the negative impact of cats on the community and wildlife:

³⁶⁶ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December 2024, p 4.

³⁶⁷ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 3.

³⁶⁸ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 30.

³⁶⁹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8.

³⁷⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, RSPCA NSW, 31 January 2025, p 4.

³⁷¹ Evidence, Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 16.

³⁷² Submission 39, WIRES, p 11.

Containing cats prevents them from roaming and interacting with and/or injuring native wildlife and other animals, it prevents uncontrolled breeding and reduces the likelihood of injuries to cats from vehicle strike or other animals. By preventing unwanted breeding and roaming, it also reduces the likelihood of cats joining or contributing to the unowned, stray, semi-owned or feral cat population. In short it prevents or limits many of the negative impacts that cats have on the community and the environment.³⁷³

- 4.11** Four Paws Australia noted that cats can thrive in contained environments, with physical welfare often improved if a cat is kept indoors due to protection from 'road accidents, fights, misadventure, infectious diseases like feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), and intentional or unintentional harm from humans'.³⁷⁴
- 4.12** Both RSPCA NSW and Animal Care Australia acknowledged that contained cats tend to live longer.³⁷⁵
- 4.13** However, the Animal Defenders Office warned that while health and longevity are important, 'they do not equate to an animal's wellbeing'.³⁷⁶ They went on to highlight that cats are closer to being wild animals than dogs, and that this must be taken into account when considering the wellbeing of cats who are contained.³⁷⁷
- 4.14** In addition, indoor lifestyles may come with its own risks, including obesity, feline lower urinary tract disease, and behavioural issues as a result of boredom, frustration and stress.³⁷⁸ The Australian Veterinary Association emphasised the importance of an enriched contained environment that allows cats to still perform natural behaviours, cautioning that 'Poor containment conditions may lead to stress, physical, medical and behavioural issues, underscoring the need for public education on cat welfare'.³⁷⁹
- 4.15** Various examples of features of an enriched environment were provided. They included:
- space to explore and climb
 - mental stimulation
 - litter box
 - scratching posts
 - comfortable sleeping areas
 - proper nutrition
 - grooming
 - health care

³⁷³ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 6.

³⁷⁴ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 7.

³⁷⁵ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 6; Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 6.

³⁷⁶ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 6.

³⁷⁷ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 6.

³⁷⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 7; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 27.

³⁷⁹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4.

- companionship.³⁸⁰

- 4.16** RSPCA NSW stressed the importance of ensuring that a cat's physical and mental needs can be met in a contained environment. Factors that influence whether a cat's needs are met include the presence of other animals, limited indoor space, human factors, the ability to modify a property, and some cats simply being unable to cope with containment.³⁸¹
- 4.17** RSPCA NSW also warned of welfare compromises in households 'where cats are unable to sufficiently avoid noisy or aversive interactions such as may occur with the presence of young children or dogs' as well the potential for inter-cat tension in multi-cat households.³⁸² In addition, containment policies may put cats at risk of inappropriate methods being used such as cats being kept in outdoor sheds, kennels, cages or enclosures or being tethered.³⁸³ As a result, containment may be inappropriate if owners 'cannot or do not invest the time, effort and resources necessary to meet the physical and emotional needs of their cats'.³⁸⁴
- 4.18** RSPCA NSW were supportive of cats being provided with safe, outdoor access that is also contained as it 'helps to provide a more complex environment that increase the cat's opportunity for choice, activity, and stimulation, which has significant benefits for the cat's physical and mental wellbeing'.³⁸⁵ They concluded that containment within the boundaries of an owner's property was the most appropriate way to protect owned cats and wildlife.³⁸⁶
- 4.19** Some stakeholders suggested utilising bedtime feeding after which the cat is kept indoors to encourage the containment of cats at night.³⁸⁷ This can prevent night-time predation which is of benefit to nocturnal wildlife. The Australian Veterinary Association noted that it is 'a relatively easy and no cost strategy'.³⁸⁸
- 4.20** Australian Pet Welfare Foundation strongly recommended and encouraged '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'.³⁸⁹
- 4.21** However, Local Government NSW viewed the benefits of night-time curfews as limited, noting that cat containment is 'most effective if required 24 hours/7 days, as night time curfews alone will not significantly reduce wildlife predation and the breeding of unwanted cats'.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁰ Submission 20, Animal Care Australia, p 9.

³⁸¹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

³⁸² Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 6.

³⁸³ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 6.

³⁸⁴ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 6.

³⁸⁵ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

³⁸⁶ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 6.

³⁸⁷ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 11; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 27.

³⁸⁸ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 11.

³⁸⁹ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 29.

³⁹⁰ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 13.

Debates around mandatory containment

- 4.22** While many stakeholders were generally in favour of containment, whether or not it should be mandatory and associated with punitive laws was a significant point of contention. The discussion in this section relates to laws introduced either at a state level or local council level.

Effectiveness of mandatory cat containment laws

- 4.23** A key debate amongst stakeholders was whether punitive, mandatory cat containment laws would be effective at reducing the number of cats in New South Wales and their potential impact on wildlife.

- 4.24** Dr Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, gave evidence that mandatory cat containment laws are not effective because they do not deal with the problem of stray cats:

...if your goal is to increase cat-related complaints to local governments, increase cat impoundments, increase the number of healthy cats and kittens killed in pounds and shelters, increase the costs to pounds and shelters, increase exposure of staff to the mental health damage of killing cats and kittens, and have no benefit in protecting wildlife, then, based on scientific evidence, I recommend you implement mandated 24-hour cat containment. While it seems logical and compelling that mandated containment would reduce the number of free-roaming cats and associated issues, this assumption is not supported by evidence. So why isn't it effective? It's not effective because most free-roaming cats are strays, with no owner to contain them.³⁹¹

- 4.25** The Australian Institute of Animal Management expressed similar views about the lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of mandatory cat containment laws:

There is no evidence that supports the efficacy of mandatory containment legislation or cat curfews, as an effective cat management strategy.... Mandatory containment policies are generally not viewed as being effective in achieving an improvement in reduction of free roaming cat populations, complaints about wandering cats, reduction in intake to municipal or private animal shelters, or any other metric currently in use.³⁹²

- 4.26** The need for better evidence-based information on the effectiveness and impacts of mandatory containment was also raised by some stakeholders, with some drawing attention to a lack of evidence as to its efficacy.³⁹³

- 4.27** The Australian Veterinary Association warned that mandatory cat containment laws 'are being introduced without, or with minimal, evidence-based information to assist with maximising success as well as ensuring that measures are implemented to minimise unintentional negative

³⁹¹ Evidence, Dr Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 16 December 2024, p 30.

³⁹² Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 4.

³⁹³ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 10; Submission 28, Sentient, p 3; Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 4; Answers to questions on notice, RSPCA NSW, 31 January 2025, p 2.

consequences'.³⁹⁴ They argued that strategic management plans must be 'holistic, effective, humane and ethical' as well as involve quality engagement with key stakeholders, namely veterinarians, social scientists, animal welfare groups, local government policy and operational staff, and researchers.³⁹⁵

- 4.28** While RSPCA NSW encouraged voluntary containment, they did not currently support it being mandatory due to a lack of evidence as to its outcomes as well as the 'many complex potential negative consequences which may arise'.³⁹⁶ Instead, they recommended that voluntary cat containment be encouraged as a way of keeping both cats and wildlife safe.³⁹⁷ They referred to their research through the Keeping Cats Safe at Home program which demonstrated that 'the uptake of cat containment is increasing over time, and that this style of cat management is becoming a social norm and community expectation'.³⁹⁸
- 4.29** Others questioned the effectiveness of mandatory cat containment policies generally, claiming better outcomes are achieved by other cat management strategies. Four Paws described mandatory containment laws as 'unworkable, unenforceable and likely to result in harm to both cats and people'.³⁹⁹ Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia argued that 'free desexing in targeted areas, education on responsible pet ownership, community cat programs, and support and investment in long-term sustainable cat management' would better meet the needs of cat owners and carers, rescue and welfare organisations, local councils and the broader community.⁴⁰⁰
- 4.30** The Animal Welfare League NSW also agreed that mandatory cat containment laws are not the best way of managing the cat population.⁴⁰¹ They claimed that better outcomes for native wildlife and cat welfare could be achieved via voluntary measures and targeted interventions which had proven to be more effective. They were also of the view that a voluntary approach would be better supported by the community.
- 4.31** The Cat Protection Society of NSW agreed that cat containment will not work. They argued that 'high intensity cat desexing initiatives and community cat programs have the capacity to genuinely make a positive difference to managing cat populations'.⁴⁰² They described how they utilise a One Health/One Welfare framework which recognises that the lives of cats are not separate, but are 'entwined with people, other animals and the environment around them'.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁴ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 10.

³⁹⁵ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 10.

³⁹⁶ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

³⁹⁷ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14.

³⁹⁸ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14.

³⁹⁹ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 6.

⁴⁰⁰ Evidence, Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia, 1 April 2025, p 37.

⁴⁰¹ Evidence, Mr Stephen Albin, Chief Executive Officer, Animal Welfare League NSW, 1 April 2025, p 30.

⁴⁰² Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 3.

⁴⁰³ Submission 93, Cat Protection Society of NSW, p 1.

Social concerns regarding mandatory cat containment laws

- 4.32** Other objections to a mandatory cat containment policy stemmed from a variety of factors, some of which were identified by the Government as follows:⁴⁰⁴
- **enforcement** – the difficulties associated with capturing cats and identifying owners
 - **resource constraints** – the burden on councils as they collect, impound and potentially rehome or euthanise uncollected cats
 - **affordability and practicalities** – cat enclosures and secure fencing can be expensive and prohibitive for low income earners and renters
 - **increased pressure on pounds and rehoming organisations** – due to a potential increase in the number of cats seized or surrendered
 - **welfare and behavioural concerns**
 - may contribute to **negative attitudes towards cats**
 - the need for **behaviour change** programs to be implemented first.
- 4.33** Evidence was also received about practical considerations that may make a mandatory policy problematic. For example, some cats may be difficult to contain, whether for personality reasons or for their ability to escape from enclosures.⁴⁰⁵
- 4.34** Further, cat containment may pose a barrier to people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other vulnerable groups, such as those leaving domestic violence, who may find it difficult to find affordable rental accommodation that can cater for a pet, or allow them to make modifications to a property to safely keep a pet.
- 4.35** Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW, gave evidence of how the RSPCA had worked in Walgett, a low socio-economic community with a high proportion of First Nations people.⁴⁰⁶ She described how it is an area in which people choose not to microchip their animals, even if free microchipping is available, 'because they're scared that, down the track, the council is going to come and give them a fine for not registering, because it has happened before. Overpolicing happens'.⁴⁰⁷
- 4.36** The Animal Welfare League NSW also cautioned about the potential adverse impact of mandatory cat containment policies on First Nations communities, stating that 'there are indigenous (and other) communities in many such areas that will be adversely impacted from targeted policy approaches that will disproportionately bear compliance costs'.⁴⁰⁸
- 4.37** However, some stakeholders accepted that containment strategies could be of particular benefit in specific areas, such as those bordering bushland. While the Australian Veterinary Association was wary about councils declaring suburbs to be cat-free, they recognised that a balanced

⁴⁰⁴ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 11.

⁴⁰⁵ Submission 28, Sentient, p 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 16.

⁴⁰⁷ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 6.

approach could involve the use of containment strategies in new developments that border 'sensitive habitat areas'.⁴⁰⁹

- 4.38** Ms Tara Ward, Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office similarly gave the example of mandatory containment policies being used in new urban areas near bushland or wildlife areas 'so that people can make a choice as to whether they want to live there and keep animals in those conditions', with containment to be encouraged elsewhere.⁴¹⁰ However, she warned of the invisibility of contained cats and associated welfare risks, questioning 'how will we know when neglect, lack of exercise, hoarding or abuse is occurring?'⁴¹¹
- 4.39** The following sections consider some of the issues associated with mandatory cat containment in more detail. These include the demonisation of cats, counter-productive outcomes of mandatory containment policies, and the impact on those with lower incomes or who are renting. It also discusses the perceived ineffectiveness of containment policies when dealing with semi-owned and unowned cats, and the risk of increased pressure on the already strained pound system.

Negative attitudes towards cats

- 4.40** Concerns were raised about the negative way in which cats are already viewed and 'blamed' for the killing of wildlife.⁴¹² The use of phrases like 'war on cats' were seen as fuelling this perception.⁴¹³ Some inquiry participants feared that cat containment policies would contribute to even greater negative public sentiment towards cats.⁴¹⁴
- 4.41** RSPCA NSW recognised that cat containment policies have the potential to 'demonise cats', and that mandatory containment risks fueling 'anti-cat sentiment in the community leading to increased deliberate cruelty against cats'.⁴¹⁵ They argued that any decision to implement mandatory 24 hour containment would require 'careful community messaging to guard against demonisation of cats, emphasising that there are legal and moral obligations to protect all cats from cruelty and harm and discouraging inappropriate behaviour towards free-roaming cats once legislation is implemented'.⁴¹⁶

⁴⁰⁹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 5.

⁴¹⁰ Evidence, Ms Tara Ward, Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office, 1 April 2025, p 38.

⁴¹¹ Evidence, Ms Ward, 1 April 2025, p 38.

⁴¹² See, for example, Short submission 512, Mr Alan Tarlinton, p 1; Short submission 520, Ms Amy Johnson, p 1; Short submission 565, Ms Cornelia Herschel, p 1; Short submission 573, Mr David Stock, p 1.

⁴¹³ Submission 197, Love Rescue Collaborate, p 9.

⁴¹⁴ Submission 181, Knox AdvoCats, p 2; Submission 425, Name suppressed, p 2; Submission 421, Name suppressed, p 2.

⁴¹⁵ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

⁴¹⁶ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 11.

The potential for counter-productive outcomes

- 4.42** RSPCA NSW stressed that for cat containment policies to be effective, they must achieve at least one of the following:
- reduce wildlife predation
 - reduce cat nuisance issues
 - reduce pound and shelter intake
 - improve feline welfare.⁴¹⁷
- 4.43** It was a significant point of contention throughout the inquiry as to whether cat containment policies could achieve these things, or whether they would in many ways unintentionally make these problems worse. Evidence was received from a number of stakeholders that mandatory cat containment could in fact be counter-productive and make cat management more difficult.⁴¹⁸
- 4.44** Some stakeholders referred to the experience of other Australian jurisdictions. Getting 2 Zero advised that councils who had implemented mandatory 24 hour containment elsewhere in Australia had 'reported an increase in cat related complaints, impoundments and euthanasia, and have been unable to demonstrate a reduction in cats wandering at large'.⁴¹⁹ Further, they argued that mandatory containment would reduce participation in cat desexing programs and is ultimately 'contrary to the goal of desexing as many cats as possible'.⁴²⁰
- 4.45** The potential counter-productive outcomes associated with mandatory cat containment laws, at either a state or local government level, are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Affordability and practicalities including for those on low incomes or renting

- 4.46** One of the major concerns about mandatory containment was the potential impact on lower-income households and for those in rental properties. Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management, observed that 'cats are an integral part of our communities, especially loved by those facing systematic disadvantage or social inequality'.⁴²¹
- 4.47** Equity considerations were central to concerns about mandatory containment raised by a number of inquiry participants. A sample are noted below.
- The Animal Welfare League NSW argued that 'the imposition of mandatory containment effectively criminalises a large part of the population for desiring to own a pet, while discouraging responsible pet ownership practices such as desexing and identification'.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2.

⁴¹⁸ See, for example, Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 8; Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 4.

⁴¹⁹ Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 5.

⁴²⁰ Submission 37, Getting 2 Zero, p 5.

⁴²¹ Evidence, Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management, 1 April 2025, p 13.

⁴²² Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 5.

- RSPCA NSW highlighted that some rental requirements and a lack of available pet-friendly housing can make containment difficult, concluding that 'Mandatory containment will limit who can be a cat owner and will disproportionately impact people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds'.⁴²³
- The Australian Veterinary Association warned that 'mandatory containment can lead to equity issues, particularly in relation to those who rent, where they may not be able to retain their cat indoors. This could prevent lower socioeconomic families from adopting or retaining a family cat'.⁴²⁴
- Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation informed the committee that more than three-quarters of a million households in New South Wales live on less than \$800 a week, 'Many live in rental properties with poor fencing, no air conditioning and often no screens on windows and doors. How do they afford \$700 to \$2,000 for a cat containment system? Mandated cat containment criminalises cat ownership for low-income residents'.⁴²⁵
- Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero, urged the committee to recognise that the inquiry is about more than welfare management and enforcement, 'it's about people and their connections to cats, ensuring disadvantage does not create more disadvantage'.⁴²⁶
- Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW noted that cats cost less than other pets and warned that 'It's going to a point of being extremely la-di-da and saying that you're only allowed to have a cat if you're rich. That's the bottom line of it'.⁴²⁷

4.48 Four Paws Australia stressed how those on lower incomes are particularly vulnerable to the imposition of mandatory containment, as many struggle with the cost of desexing, microchipping and registering their cats, let alone building an enclosure for them.⁴²⁸ They warned that should these pets be impounded, many families 'may struggle to pay the retrieval fees, leading to permanent loss of their companion animals and additional emotional and financial hardship'.⁴²⁹

4.49 The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation further explained how financial barriers faced by low-income households makes cat containment difficult and discourages semi-owners from taking full responsibility for a cat:

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... Because of lack of affordability, mandated

⁴²³ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 4.

⁴²⁴ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 8.

⁴²⁵ Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, pp 30-31.

⁴²⁶ Evidence, Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero, 1 April 2025, p 30.

⁴²⁷ Evidence, Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW, 16 December 2024, p 9.

⁴²⁸ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

⁴²⁹ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

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.⁴³⁰

- 4.50** Another difficulty faced by those who have a cat and rent their home, is that the need to contain a cat may further limit the availability of suitable rental properties for those with pets.⁴³¹
- 4.51** When questioned about the potential equity issues around mandatory cat containment, Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, advocated for the investment of 'substantial resources into the introduction of changes that include really effective education and communication programs'.⁴³² She recognised that some may need assistance to transition their households. Nonetheless, she stressed that containment was still important, 'We recognise that it does have an impact, but we absolutely think this is something that we need to take action on as a society. Like we have for other issues, we have to find sensitive ways and effective ways to do that'.⁴³³
- 4.52** One suggestion was for social and affordable housing to be designed in a way that considers the need for cat containment, such as the inclusion of enclosed balconies, outdoor cat enclosures, or purpose-built indoor living spaces.⁴³⁴ The Australian Veterinary Association argued that housing design that facilitates containment would empower those who already care for semi-owned or unowned cats, enabling them to become responsible owners.⁴³⁵

Inability to deal effectively with semi-owned and unowned cats

- 4.53** A major concern around mandatory containment was its perceived inability to effectively deal with the issue of semi-owned and unowned cats.⁴³⁶ Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government explained how cat containment works for owned cats, and that different strategies will be needed to manage other parts of the cat population.⁴³⁷
- 4.54** Mr Stephen Albin, Chief Executive Officer, Animal Welfare League NSW warned that 'mandatory cat containment will actually make the problem worse, not better, because you'll have more unowned cats. They'll be out there in the community breeding, often not desexed, not microchipped and causing chaos'.⁴³⁸ Further, the implications of this could be significant, as 'Cat populations grow exponentially. This isn't a little problem. By actually bringing in a mandatory cat containment policy, you can have perverse policy outcomes'.⁴³⁹ While the Animal Welfare League NSW were in favour of encouraging cat containment, they concluded that it

⁴³⁰ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 10.

⁴³¹ Submission 181, Knox AdvoCats, p 2.

⁴³² Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 4.

⁴³³ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 4.

⁴³⁴ Answers to questions on notice, Australian Veterinary Association, 8 May 2025, p 2.

⁴³⁵ Answers to questions on notice, Australian Veterinary Association, 8 May 2025, p 2.

⁴³⁶ Submission 28, Sentient, p 4; Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 23; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 7.

⁴³⁷ Evidence, Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government, 1 April 2025, p 59.

⁴³⁸ Evidence, Mr Albin, 1 April 2025, p 31.

⁴³⁹ Evidence, Mr Albin, 1 April 2025, p 31.

should not be mandatory.⁴⁴⁰ It was their view that desexing programs, community cat management, and public education were much better methods for managing cat populations.⁴⁴¹

- 4.55** Most roaming cats are semi-owned or unowned and do not have an owner to contain them.⁴⁴² The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation was strongly opposed to mandatory cat containment on the basis that it is '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'.⁴⁴³ They contended that helping cat semi-owners to become full owners is 'the key solution to reduce the number of wandering cats and associated issues', and warned that 'mandated cat containment actively prevents this resolution'.⁴⁴⁴

- 4.56** The Australian Veterinary Association also raised concerns about the particular obstacles mandatory containment places in the path of semi-owned and unowned cats becoming owned cats:

It should also be noted that mandatory containment will create barriers to being able to effectively manage unowned cats, due to the inability of cat semi-owners who adopt but are unable to transition their cat successfully into an indoor environment, especially as most unowned cats will not cope with being contained; or many semi-owners already have cats indoors and so bringing another inside would disrupt existing household cats. For those wishing to provide a home to an unowned cat, mandatory containment is another barrier in addition to other requirements for permanent identification, desexing and registration.⁴⁴⁵

- 4.57** A number of inquiry participants stressed that the problem of cat overpopulation needs to be addressed prior to the introduction of any containment policies.⁴⁴⁶ Larger free-roaming cat populations tend to be concentrated in lower socio-economic areas.⁴⁴⁷ For reasons already discussed, containment policies are unlikely to be effective in these areas.⁴⁴⁸

- 4.58** Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management outlined the steps that need to be taken to effectively manage the cat population, the importance of removing the barriers to people becoming owners, and explained why it was important to first deal with the issue of community cats:

The vast majority of the cats that are in this cohort of cats, which are the most difficult to actually manage, are not owned. So the people who are actually caring for them don't consider themselves to be owners, and often they're actually not in a position to contain the cats even if they wanted to. Think about people living in housing commission

⁴⁴⁰ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 2.

⁴⁴¹ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 2.

⁴⁴² Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 23.

⁴⁴³ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 22.

⁴⁴⁴ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 24.

⁴⁴⁵ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 7.

⁴⁴⁶ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 8; Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 14.

⁴⁴⁷ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 5; Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

houses or potentially in rented properties where they actually don't have the ability to change fencing or install things if they can afford it.⁴⁴⁹

4.59 Dr Rayment continued:

What that does mean is we actually need to get in with those people, help them become the owners of the cat so they recognise themselves as the owners, and then facilitate the ownership behaviours that we want from there, at the same time as getting control over the population of cats. Essentially, work with them, drive the numbers down, and actually get on top of the situation instead of reacting to it reflectively after the time—essentially, once the population is out of control. Once they've recognised themselves as owners and we've got the population under control, we are then working on how we go about managing the population of owned cats. So we essentially shrink that population of community cats and turn them into owned cats, and then we have a population of owners that we can work with.⁴⁵⁰

4.60 Mandatory containment may also contribute to more cats in pounds and shelter as semi-owned and unowned cats are impounded. This will add to pressure on pounds and shelters as well as drive up the number of cats that are euthanised (see paragraph 4.64 onwards).⁴⁵¹

4.61 The perceived inability of mandatory containment to deal effectively with the semi-owned and unowned cat population has led to some other jurisdictions moving away from containment policies. Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation advised that cat containment laws had been repealed in a number of states in the United States of America following recognition that most free-roaming cats are not identified so there is no-one that can be prosecuted, 'it just is not an effective solution in reducing free-roaming cats'.⁴⁵²

4.62 For these reasons, some stakeholders were of the view that behaviour change programs were a much more effective strategy for managing the cat population. As an example, RSPCA NSW referred to its Keeping Cats Safe at Home program, which includes a behaviour change element, and noted that this approach was 'more likely to yield meaningful results' as they are designed to reduce the population of semi-owned and unowned cats and encourage voluntary containment.⁴⁵³

4.63 Working with those who already care for semi-owned and unowned cats, including community groups who assist with cat colonies, could have multiple benefits. A number of inquiry participants highlighted that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a cat is wild or domestic, when its fight or flight instinct is activated when trapped.⁴⁵⁴ There were concerns that a stressed and frightened domestic cat which has been trapped and taken to a pound could be

⁴⁴⁹ Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 14.

⁴⁵⁰ Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 14.

⁴⁵¹ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 14.

⁴⁵² Evidence, Dr Rand, 16 December 2024, p 32.

⁴⁵³ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8; Answers to questions on notice, RSPCA NSW, 31 January 2025, p 2.

⁴⁵⁴ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 37; Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 10; Answers to supplementary questions, SAFE Rehoming, 8 May 2025, p 1; Evidence, Ms Rosalie Horton, Senior Coordinator, Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre, 1 April 2025, p 19.

mistaken for a wild cat and euthanised as a result.⁴⁵⁵ However, those who work with, and care for, semi-owned cats often know whether an individual cat could potentially be adopted and liaising with them could prevent some cats unnecessarily entering the system.⁴⁵⁶

Impact on councils, pounds and shelters

- 4.64** Mandatory cat containment policies may result in unrealistic community expectations, as the community thinks that they will not see a roaming cat and the number of cat-related complaints to council rising as a result. The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation argued that 'mandated containment increases cat-related complaints, cat impoundments, cat euthanasia, and costs to local governments and shelters'.⁴⁵⁷
- 4.65** The Australian Institute of Animal Management similarly claimed that councils who have implemented mandatory cat containment elsewhere in Australia 'have reported an increase in cat related complaints, impoundments and euthanasia, and have been unable to demonstrate a reduction in cats wandering at large'.⁴⁵⁸
- 4.66** As a result, cat containment policies are often both expensive and labour intensive for local governments. This is due to the additional workload created by staff needing to respond to complaints and 'trap, house and care for/kill uncontained cats once caught by local government officers or presented to council by members of the public'.⁴⁵⁹ The funding implications of mandatory cat containment policies are explored later in this chapter.
- 4.67** Of particular concern to many stakeholders was the potential impact of mandatory cat containment laws on pounds and shelters due to the increase in the number of surrendered and abandoned cats.⁴⁶⁰ Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient Australia described the mandated cat containment approach in Victoria, as 'a disaster'.⁴⁶¹ She drew attention to the impact of such policies in the middle of a 'cost-of-living crisis', resulting in people abandoning or surrendering their cat when threatened with a fine.⁴⁶² Dr Elliott described how this has caused the impoundment rate to substantially increase in Victoria as a result.
- 4.68** Multiple stakeholders raised concerns that most pounds and rehoming facilities do not have the ability to take in any more cats.⁴⁶³ Local Government NSW stressed that many council facilities are already at capacity. They described the situation of one council which was 'at capacity within four months of opening an expanded facility, with the wait list for surrenders at six months or

⁴⁵⁵ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 36; Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 10.

⁴⁵⁶ Evidence, Dr Rayment, 1 April 2025, p 19.

⁴⁵⁷ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Submission 474, Australian Institute of Animal Management, p 4.

⁴⁵⁹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 5.

⁴⁶⁰ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 14; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

⁴⁶¹ Evidence, Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient Australia, 1 April 2025, p 23.

⁴⁶² Evidence, Dr Elliott, 1 April 2025, p 23.

⁴⁶³ For example, Evidence, Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager, Environment, Local Government NSW, 16 December 2024, p 27; Submission 177, Tweed Shire Council, p 6.

longer'.⁴⁶⁴ They warned that current funding through companion animal registration council budgets is inadequate for managing additional cats.⁴⁶⁵

- 4.69** The specific issues regarding pounds were considered by Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service as part of their inquiry into pounds in New South Wales. That committee found that this state is facing an animal homing crisis, with pounds and rescues severely underfunded and over capacity.⁴⁶⁶
- 4.70** Four Paws Australia cautioned that mandatory containment laws would 'exacerbate this crisis by increasing the strain on an already overwhelmed pound system', resulting in greater euthanasia rates and 'further overwhelming the system'.⁴⁶⁷
- 4.71** RSPCA NSW were similarly apprehensive that mandatory cat containment measures are 'likely to lead to increased abandonment of cats, increased numbers or requests for surrenders, lower rates of adoption and higher euthanasia rates'.⁴⁶⁸ They highlighted that many councils already refuse cat surrenders due to pressure to reduce euthanasia and the cost of pounds.⁴⁶⁹ They warned that 'such behaviour will continue, leading to more cats being abandoned and contributing to growing populations of unowned domestic cats and/or increased pressure on animal welfare organisations and rescue organisations'.⁴⁷⁰ RSPCA NSW stressed that the trapping, culling or impounding of uncontained cats is an 'unacceptable, inhumane and ineffective' method for managing them.⁴⁷¹
- 4.72** Local Government NSW acknowledged that the introduction of mandatory cat containment is likely to result in greater demand for cat-holding facilities in the short to medium term. As a result, they stressed that 'Effort must be focused on helping owners to keep their cats contained in the first place rather than on capturing/processing roaming cats'.⁴⁷²
- 4.73** In contrast, Wollondilly Shire Council argued that effective mandatory cat containment would result in fewer cats in shelters and pounds, as preventing cats from roaming 'significantly reduces unwanted pregnancies, breeding of feral cats and establishment of feral cat colonies, which largely form the majority of cats that are impounded'.⁴⁷³
- 4.74** In recent years, councils have actively sought to decrease their euthanasia rates.⁴⁷⁴ If councils are having to take in more cats that have been found roaming and which are unowned under mandatory cat containment laws, the euthanasia rate is likely to increase. For example, RSPCA

⁴⁶⁴ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 12.

⁴⁶⁵ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 12.

⁴⁶⁶ Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service, NSW Legislative Council, *Pounds in New South Wales* (2024), Finding 1.

⁴⁶⁷ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, pp 12-13.

⁴⁶⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 10.

⁴⁶⁹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 10.

⁴⁷⁰ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 10.

⁴⁷¹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 3.

⁴⁷² Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 12.

⁴⁷³ Submission 348, Wollondilly Shire Council, p 5.

⁴⁷⁴ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 15.

NSW gave evidence that 'If more cats are coming in, then it's inevitable that the euthanasia rates are going to go up'.⁴⁷⁵

- 4.75** A number of stakeholders voiced concerns about the psychological impact of euthanising healthy animals on those who work with animals.⁴⁷⁶ Mr Stephen Albin, Chief Executive Officer, Animal Welfare League NSW, explained that 'If you actually see the impact on humans from euthanising these companion animals, these cats—semi-owned and unowned—it is massive', reflecting that 'For people in that job, the mental health impacts on them are significant'.⁴⁷⁷
- 4.76** Australian Pet Welfare Foundation described how many workers who are involved in 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'.⁴⁷⁸
- 4.77** The Australian Veterinary Association was similarly concerned about the impact on workers, noting an increase in the euthanasia of healthy cats is 'likely to negatively impact the mental health of council workers and veterinary teams, and be unacceptable to the community'.⁴⁷⁹ As a result, they warned that some councils may not accept surrendered cats, leading to an increase in abandonment rates and contributing to unowned cat populations.⁴⁸⁰
- 4.78** There were concerns that the system would simply be unable to handle the additional burdens placed on it should mandatory cat containment be introduced. For this reason, Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient argued that a better approach would focus on properly supporting responsible cat ownership rather than place additional pressure on an already stretched system:

Faced with intakes that overwhelm the capacity of pounds and shelters—especially intakes of young kittens—high levels of euthanasia and convenience killing, limited foster care networks, emotional burnout of staff, and a veterinary shortage, the kind of systemic change we need is fully funded, targeted programs that support responsible cat ownership. The shift in some jurisdictions towards mandated desexing, mandated cat containment, including cat-free suburbs, and the general stick versus carrot approach is placing greater pressure on our existing resources.⁴⁸¹

One component in a suite of measures

- 4.79** Many inquiry participants referred to 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home', a four year project run by RSPCA NSW in partnership with eleven councils in New South Wales, that encouraged and supported people to keep their cat indoors through voluntary containment. The following case study provides an overview of 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home', and the way in which it encouraged the use of containment while also implementing targeted desexing programs.

⁴⁷⁵ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 15.

⁴⁷⁶ Evidence, Mr Albin, 1 April 2025, p 34; Answers to supplementary questions, Four Paws Australia, 9 May 2025, p 3; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Evidence, Mr Albin, 1 April 2025, p 34.

⁴⁷⁸ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 20.

⁴⁷⁹ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

⁴⁸⁰ Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 15.

⁴⁸¹ Evidence, Dr Elliott, 1 April 2025, p 22.

Case study – Keeping Cats Safe at Home

Keeping Cats Safe at Home was a four year human behaviour change project that aimed to encourage a shift towards containment.⁴⁸² It was conducted by the RSPCA and assisted by the NSW Government through its Environmental Trust.⁴⁸³ The project sought to reduce the impact of domestic cats on wildlife by 'encouraging cat caregivers to desex, permanently identify and register their cats and prevent them from roaming'.⁴⁸⁴

The project was conducted in partnership with 11 councils, with a tailored behaviour change strategy developed for each participating local government area. It included a social marketing campaign, school education package and community engagement initiatives. Targeted cat desexing and microchipping programs were used to empower pet owners to manage their cats.⁴⁸⁵

RSPCA NSW advised that significant reductions in roaming cat populations had been achieved, including decreases of 25 per cent in Blue Mountains, 35 per cent in Campbelltown and 50 per cent in Tweed Shire.⁴⁸⁶

Nuisance complaints about roaming cats also fell by over 40 per cent in seven project councils and by more than 60 per cent in four project councils. In particular, cat nuisance complaints in Campbelltown, Hornsby and Parramatta reduced by 56 per cent, 29 per cent and 40 per cent respectively after the first year. Nuisance complaints in Walgett and Weddin reduced by 81 per cent and 84 per cent respectively.⁴⁸⁷

Another area of success was the substantial reduction in the number of cats impounded by councils:

- Blue Mountains: 54 per cent decrease
- Campbelltown: 59 per cent decrease
- Parramatta: 73 per cent decrease
- Kyogle & Walgett: 100 per cent decrease.

The shelter intake 'dramatically decreased' following the introduction of the targeted desexing program.⁴⁸⁸ The targeted desexing approach of 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' was viewed as extremely cost effective. Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW emphasised its many benefits, stressing that it 'is the absolute best outcome that helps the environment, helps people who have got cats, protects animal welfare and is the most cost effective. If you consider catching and euthanising a huge volume of cats, it's going to cost a fortune'.⁴⁸⁹ RSPCA NSW recommended that large-scale, targeted desexing programs, such as the Keeping Cats Safe at Home program, be

⁴⁸² Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14.

⁴⁸³ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 7.

⁴⁸⁴ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 7.

⁴⁸⁵ NSW Government and RSPCA NSW, *Keeping Cats Safe at Home: Project Report 2021-2024*, <https://www.rspcansw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2021-2014-Impact-report-for-Keeping-Cats-safe-at-Home.pdf>

⁴⁸⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, RSPCA NSW, received 31 January 2025, p 2.

⁴⁸⁷ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 9.

⁴⁸⁸ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 10.

⁴⁸⁹ Evidence, Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 15.

supported, due to their effectiveness in reducing the number of uncontained cats, nuisance complaints, shelter intake and euthanasia.⁴⁹⁰

Local Government NSW reflected that "These results demonstrate that for successful reduction and management of cat populations a variety of measures are needed. Cat containment is a valuable tool, but to gain optimal results it is best used in tandem with education and desexing programs".⁴⁹¹

- 4.80** Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager, Environment, Local Government NSW explained that Local Government NSW viewed containment as the end goal of cat population management, which other measures, such as desexing and education, will help achieve:

It may be a case of a long transition period where cat containment is known as the endgame, if you like, or the thing that we're trying to get to, where desexing and the education bring people along, knowing that, at the end of the day, what we're trying to get to is that cats are contained, and they're kept at home, safe and happy.⁴⁹²

- 4.81** Both RSPCA NSW and the Australian Veterinary Association concluded that New South Wales is not ready for mandatory cat containment at the moment.⁴⁹³ Troy Wilkie, RSPCA NSW, gave evidence about the impacts if mandatory cat containment laws were introduced now:

If [cat containment] was brought in immediately—for example, from tomorrow we have cat containment—and the councils were proactive in implementing and policing those laws, you'd be looking at hundreds of thousands of cats being euthanised within a couple of months because there are so many cats that are passively owned. For a person on a low income, if a cat starts coming by, you start feeding it regularly and you've got a bit of a connection with the cat—getting registration, desexing and a health check at retail rates at a vet, you're looking at 700 or 800 bucks. If you're on minimum wage, you just can't not pay rent and not eat that week, so this is not going to happen. It's an insurmountable barrier for that person to take on all of those costs and all of that pressure to do what they intrinsically want to do. Rather than the opposite of policing and enforcing that method, which will create bad outcomes, encouraging and teaching people that they can access subsidised or free desexing and getting the registration done—then they can have that cat, make it theirs, build that connection to the cat so that they want to protect it from cars and other problems in the community—will also protect the environment.⁴⁹⁴

- 4.82** Nonetheless, some of these other strategies, including comprehensive desexing programs, responsible ownership education, and trap, neuter, and return initiatives, as outlined in Chapter 3, may be more effective.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁰ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 13.

⁴⁹¹ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 7.

⁴⁹² Evidence, Ms Cenedese, 16 December 2024, p 26.

⁴⁹³ Evidence, Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 15; Evidence, Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association, 1 April 2025, p 24.

⁴⁹⁴ Evidence, Mr Wilkie, 16 December 2024, p 15.

⁴⁹⁵ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 10.

The experience of other Australian jurisdictions

- 4.83** A number of other jurisdictions allow the use of cat containment policies, notably Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.
- 4.84** As at May 2024, 39 of the 79 councils in Victoria had introduced cat containment regulations. These include the use of:
- curfews (Greater Dandenong and Port Philip councils)
 - containment (Indigo Shire, Bass Coast Shire and Greater Bendigo councils)
 - desexing and 24 hour containment (Swan Hill and Wellington Shire councils).⁴⁹⁶
- 4.85** Cat curfew or containment policies have been permitted in the Australian Capital Territory since 2001, with all cats born since 1 July 2022 required to be contained.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, 17 new suburbs have been declared as cat containment areas for nature conservation reasons.⁴⁹⁸ These areas require cats to be contained irrespective of age.
- 4.86** While Western Australia does not require cats to be contained, cat owners must register, microchip and desex their cats in accordance with the *Cat Act 2011* (WA), with penalties for non-compliance.⁴⁹⁹
- 4.87** Blue Mountains City Council suggested that cat management policies (including phased containment, mandatory desexing, microchipping, and multi-cat licensing) in the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia could help inform the approach to be taken in New South Wales.⁵⁰⁰
- 4.88** However, a number of stakeholders questioned the effectiveness of cat containment policies adopted in other Australian jurisdictions.⁵⁰¹ According to Four Paws Australia, there is 'significant evidence that cat containment laws are ineffective, costly and have a negative impact on people, cats and councils'.⁵⁰² They referred to the RSPCA report, *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia* (2018) which noted that councils with cat containment laws had 'not been able to demonstrate any measurable reduction in cat complaints or cats wandering at large following the introduction of the regulations'.⁵⁰³ They gave the example of Yarra Ranges in Victoria, where in the third year of a 24 hour cat containment policy, it experienced:
- 143 per cent increase in cat-related complaints
 - 68 per cent increase in impoundments

⁴⁹⁶ Submission 172, Blacktown City Council, p 6.

⁴⁹⁷ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 4.

⁴⁹⁸ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 7.

⁴⁹⁹ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 7.

⁵⁰⁰ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 2.

⁵⁰¹ See, for example, Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 15; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

⁵⁰² Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

⁵⁰³ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

- 18 per cent increase in euthanasia rates.⁵⁰⁴

4.89 The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation also gave the example of the City of Casey in Victoria, where after, 20 years after introducing mandated 24/7 cat containment, the 'number of cats impounded was still 296% higher than baseline'.⁵⁰⁵

4.90 Another example was provided by Shoalhaven City Council who reported the experience of a Victorian council that requires cats to be contained between 7 pm and 7 am.⁵⁰⁶ Despite having 75 traps and a dedicated officer for picking up cats, there was still a waiting list. The cost to council per cat was \$400. Thirty per cent were reclaimed and the euthanasia rate was high. Further, 'Of the 30% reclaimed, repeat offenders are ongoing with fines not paid'.⁵⁰⁷ They noted that cat owners have 'little intention to implement containment measures' due to many renting their properties and it being a lower socioeconomic area.⁵⁰⁸

4.91 Animal Welfare League NSW were of the view that cat containment laws had limited success in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory:

When reviewing cat management in Victoria in 2020, the Victorian Government noted that while cat containment laws may have helped reduce some nuisance behaviours, they did not significantly lower cat predation on wildlife. Compliance rates also remained low, and enforcement was a continual challenge. Similarly in the ACT, it has been found that containment laws did not achieve their full potential due to public resistance and inconsistent enforcement.⁵⁰⁹

4.92 The Animal Welfare League subsequently recommended a more flexible, voluntary containment approach with a focus on community engagement and education.⁵¹⁰

Local council containment laws

4.93 Evidence was received from a number of councils expressing their support of cat containment policies being introduced in New South Wales.⁵¹¹ According to Local Government NSW, numerous councils have requested legislative changes to facilitate the better regulation of cats, including enforceable cat containment provisions as well as other provisions that would limit the roaming of cats.⁵¹² They recommended that the *Companion Animals Act 1998* should be amended to:

⁵⁰⁴ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 13.

⁵⁰⁵ Submission 68, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, p 23.

⁵⁰⁶ Submission 176, Shoalhaven City Council, p 8.

⁵⁰⁷ Submission 176, Shoalhaven City Council, p 8.

⁵⁰⁸ Submission 176, Shoalhaven City Council, p 8.

⁵⁰⁹ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 15.

⁵¹⁰ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 15.

⁵¹¹ Submission 29, Georges River Council, p 6; Submission 130, Willoughby City Council, p 2; Submission 374, Hornsby Shire Council, p 2.

⁵¹² Local Government NSW noted that there has been ten conference motions requesting legislative change from the following councils in the last two years: Tweed, Blue Mountains, Eurobodalla, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Tamworth, The Hills, Hornsby, Orange, Albury and Liverpool: Answers to questions on notice, Local Government NSW, 24 January 2025, p 3.

- define cat ownership
- clarify the powers for seizing a cat under section 32
- define cats as domestic, infant or feral.
- enable councils to introduce enforceable cat containment or curfew policies in their local government area
- enable feral cats that do not have a reasonable prospect of being rehomed to be euthanased in accordance with animal welfare ethics and the policy adopted by the relevant council
- add an opt-in provision for councils to issue orders and fines to individuals who repeatedly fail to identify and register kittens or for incidences of animal hoarding.⁵¹³

- 4.94** A number of councils gave evidence about the limitations of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* in its current form.⁵¹⁴ The Northern Beaches Council argued that amendments to the *Companion Animals Act 1998* to provide for local cat containment requirements 'would potentially yield the most immediate, cost effective and significant benefit to councils trying to manage the ecological impacts of domestic cats within a legislative framework that is not currently fit for purpose'.⁵¹⁵
- 4.95** North Sydney Council highlighted that currently the only practical avenue for councils to capture cats in urban areas is through the declaration of a Wildlife Protection Area.⁵¹⁶ However, as this can be 'a lengthy, resource intensive process', they suggested that the *Companion Animals Act 1998* be amended so all remnant natural areas in an urban context are automatically deemed a Wildlife Protection Area.⁵¹⁷
- 4.96** The limitations of the *Companion Animals Act 1998* were also highlighted by the Natural Resource Commission in their preliminary report, *Reducing Risk, Securing the Future*, who viewed the Act as 'ineffective at managing the biosecurity risks posed by cats, including predation and disease transmission'.⁵¹⁸ The report went on to recommend that the Act be amended to enable councils to introduce cat containment policies in their local area.⁵¹⁹
- 4.97** The Invasive Species Council advocated for the *Companion Animals Act 1998* to be amended to enable local governments to enforce anti-roaming laws for domestic cats in their area.⁵²⁰ Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council described the approach to cat containment in Queensland and Victoria, highlighting his view that clear rules are an essential part of ensuring a cultural transition to cat containment:

⁵¹³ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, pp 14-15.

⁵¹⁴ Submission 130, Willoughby City Council, p 2; Submission 177, Tweed Shire Council, p 6; Submission 189, Canterbury Bankstown Council, p 2.

⁵¹⁵ Submission 61, Northern Beaches Council, p 2.

⁵¹⁶ Submission 183, North Sydney Council, p 6.

⁵¹⁷ Submission 183, North Sydney Council, p 6.

⁵¹⁸ Answers to questions on notice, Local Government NSW, 24 January 2025, p 3, quoting Natural Resources Commission, *Reducing Risk, Securing the Future: NSW Invasive Species Management Review: Preliminary Report* (August 2024), p 119.

⁵¹⁹ Answers to questions on notice, Local Government NSW, 24 January 2025, p 3.

⁵²⁰ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December 2024, p 2.

In Queensland, there's a model local government set of rules, which means that cats need to be contained which, I think, 75 of 75 Queensland councils have adopted. But when we've called councils, most of them are unaware that it's a rule. There isn't any real engagement with communities. By contrast, in Victoria, the process that they've gone down is saying to councils that you can bring in rules around containment, and you have to bring in a companion animals management plan that has to be reviewed and reported on annually and remade every four years. That process has allowed a lot of community engagement such that now more than 50 per cent of Victoria councils have those rules.⁵²¹

- 4.98** What clearly emerged among the majority of stakeholders, whatever their preferred approach to cat management, was the need for greater clarity and consistency in the regulatory framework. Mandating cat containment was viewed by some stakeholders as a way of making expectations clear rather than it being viewed as a suggestion only.⁵²²
- 4.99** Some stakeholders were adamant that a cat containment policy would only be effective if it was mandatory and legally enforceable. Narrabri Shire Council stipulated that there needs to be a clear definition of containment in the *Companion Animals Act 1998* with clearly established enforcement pathways for authorised officers.⁵²³
- 4.100** Local Government NSW expressed how embedding cat containment requirements in legislation would create certainty around expectations and incentivise compliance:

For these reasons, local policies or laws that require cat containment make it clear what our society's expectation is and that it is not merely a suggestion but a legal requirement. This in turn enables councils to point to cat containment requirements within their education, compliance and enforcement work. Without a legal requirement for cat containment, there will be no way to follow up or take action in circumstances where cats are willingly left to roam, predate or cause nuisance. Unless there are enforcement provisions in legislation to deter irresponsible behaviour, education on its own will not be effective in reducing the impact of uncontained cats. While there are no offences for permitting a cat to roam, threaten or kill another animal, no incentive exists for cat owners to responsibly manage their animals for that animal's welfare or to protect the welfare of other animals.⁵²⁴

- 4.101** This desire for certainty extended to a request for further details about what will suffice as containment. Local Government NSW and Tamworth Regional Council supported the development of containment and enclosure standards in order to provide clarity for both the community as well as regulators.⁵²⁵
- 4.102** Mr Kerry Robinson OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council, while supportive of allowing councils to make their own mandatory cat containment laws, indicated that they would need financial support to implement such laws: 'If the State wants councils to do things,

⁵²¹ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December 2024, p 3.

⁵²² Answers to questions on notice, Local Government NSW, 24 January 2025, p 3.

⁵²³ Submission 192, Narrabri Shire Council, p 3.

⁵²⁴ Answers to questions on notice, Local Government NSW, 24 January 2025, p 3.

⁵²⁵ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 10; Submission 274, Tamworth Regional Council, p 2.

the State must fund those things because otherwise you are asking councils to cut existing services'.⁵²⁶

Local decision-making compared to a statewide approach

- 4.103** Inquiry participants were divided as to whether a statewide or local approach was better for managing cat populations. While a statewide approach allows for consistency and easier messaging, a localised approach enables councils to tailor requirements to suit the particular circumstances and needs of their area.
- 4.104** Blue Mountains City Council was firmly of the view that cat containment policies should not be a 'one size fits all' approach, with local councils needing power to have special considerations and practices as relevant to their area.⁵²⁷
- 4.105** On a similar note, Tweed Shire Council argued for councils being able to introduce containment policies 'when and where' they consider it most appropriate in relation to their own context, community need and resourcing.⁵²⁸
- 4.106** It was not just councils who favoured a localised approach, with other inquiry participants, such as the Invasive Species Council, supportive of a localised approach to containment.⁵²⁹
- 4.107** While Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council saw the value of a statewide approach, she was nonetheless in favour of reforms that would empower individual councils to take action, viewing it as the quickest way forward.⁵³⁰
- 4.108** However, other stakeholders pointed to the complexities that could arise if councils are permitted to take an approach to cat management that differed to neighbouring councils. RSPCA NSW was against mandatory cat containment by councils, as 'Cats don't respect local government boundaries'.⁵³¹ Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW described some of the potential issues when statewide rentals laws conflict in practice with the laws of some local government areas:

If you have a statewide law which says you can make a tenant keep an animal outside but then one LGA chooses to opt in for a "contain" policy, the two are not interacting or talking to each other and it creates a lot of problems and conflict.⁵³²

- 4.109** Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager, Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW, also raised concerns about potential inequitable outcomes if councils were allowed to choose whether to implement and enforce cat containment laws, particularly for First Nations communities:

⁵²⁶ Evidence, Mr Kerry Robinson OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council, 1 April 2025, p 12.

⁵²⁷ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 4.

⁵²⁸ Submission 177, Tweed Shire Council, p 8.

⁵²⁹ Evidence, Mr Gough, 16 December 2024, p 2.

⁵³⁰ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 9.

⁵³¹ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 14.

⁵³² Evidence, Mr Wilkie, 16 December 2024, p 14.

Overpolicing happens. It's a matter of inequity in the way the law is applied, and it has inequitable outcomes for that group of people. So when you say councils can choose or not choose to enforce the legislation, that leads down the path of potential inequality. That's a concern for us.⁵³³

- 4.110** Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager, Environment, Local Government NSW expressed similar concerns about the challenges of council-specific mandatory cat containment laws, noting that cats and even people often do not know the boundaries of their local government area. Ms Cenedese also expressed concern about the pressure a council-by-council approach to containment may place on councils:

If council A has implemented containment and council B has not yet, that either puts pressure on councils or that view of inequality could arise. I think it's something that needs to be carefully considered.⁵³⁴

Implementing and enforcing cat containment policies

- 4.111** Local Government NSW was clear that if the legislation was amended to allow cat containment policies, then appropriate enforcement provisions would also be required.⁵³⁵
- 4.112** A concern voiced by some councils was that cat containment policies rely heavily on local government for their management and enforcement.⁵³⁶ Blue Mountains City Council stressed that the enforcement of cat containment policies 'presents logistical, financial, and operational challenges for councils', with increased demands on shelters, pounds and council staff.⁵³⁷
- 4.113** Shoalhaven City Council cautioned that legislation can create 'more community expectation which then needs to be managed in line with what Council can achieve to resolve complaints'.⁵³⁸ They warned that 'If not well thought out, legislation can create many hurdles and obstacles for councils endeavouring to resolve issues, gain compliance and undertake enforcement'.⁵³⁹
- 4.114** RSPCA NSW noted that cat containment laws may be difficult to enforce due to many uncontained cats being unowned, warning that the inability of councils to enforce laws could damage public trust.⁵⁴⁰ They were also of the view that councils are not fully utilising the powers they already have under legislation:

The resource intensiveness and challenges in enforcing these policies may result in councils simply not doing so. As an example, councils already have the power, under the *NSW Companion Animals Act 1998*, to fine cat owners for allowing their cats to roam

⁵³³ Evidence, Dr Ma, 16 December 2024, p 16.

⁵³⁴ Evidence, Ms Cenedese, 16 December 2024, p 29.

⁵³⁵ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 10.

⁵³⁶ Submission 187, Dubbo Regional Council, p 2; Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 6.

⁵³⁷ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 6.

⁵³⁸ Submission 176, Shoalhaven City Council, p 6.

⁵³⁹ Submission 176, Shoalhaven City Council, p 6.

⁵⁴⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, RSPCA NSW, 31 January 2025, p 7; Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8.

in Wildlife Protection Areas. RSPCA NSW is not aware of any councils that are utilising these powers.⁵⁴¹

- 4.115** Animal Welfare League NSW similarly argued that some councils do not fulfil their current obligations in relation to cat management.⁵⁴²
- 4.116** Local Government NSW recognised that the inadequate resourcing of councils to undertake compliance and enforcement activities is a potential barrier to the effectiveness of local cat containment policies.⁵⁴³
- 4.117** Narrabri Shire Council encouraged consideration of 'enforcement alternatives' such as nuisance orders, penalties, and bans. These options would enable councils to take enforcement action against irresponsible owners without increasing pressure on pounds and rehoming organisations.⁵⁴⁴
- 4.118** It was clear that many councils already depend on the work of cat rescues, animal shelters and other charities to help manage cat populations. Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW warned of the implications of adding to the demand on already stretched resources:
- The first thing is, if they can't do anything now, how are they going to police that? Where's that going to come from? Where are those resources going to come from? What is the police force of rangers they're going to hire to catch cats?⁵⁴⁵
- 4.119** A common theme was the need for the adequate resourcing of councils to enable them to fulfil their cat management responsibilities. Willoughby City Council argued that legislative clarity regarding enforcement powers as well as financial support were 'critical' to their ability to effectively manage cat populations.⁵⁴⁶ The funding and resourcing implications for councils are discussed at paragraph 4.123 below.
- 4.120** However, a concern voiced by a number of stakeholders was that the resourcing needed to enforce mandatory cat containment that had no evidence to support its effectiveness could be better employed elsewhere. The Animal Welfare League NSW warned that containment policies impose 'a burden on local authorities to monitor, enforce, and handle complaints related to cat containment, which diverted resources from other animal welfare priorities'.⁵⁴⁷
- 4.121** Wollondilly Shire Council argued that preventing unwanted cats should be the focus of cat management rather than councils 'having to collect/hold/euthanise, which is expensive and fails to reduce incoming numbers'.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴¹ Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 8.

⁵⁴² Evidence, Mr Albin, 1 April 2025, p 31; Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 10.

⁵⁴³ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 6.

⁵⁴⁴ Submission 192, Narrabri Shire Council, p 4.

⁵⁴⁵ Evidence, Ms Vesk, 16 December 2024, p 8.

⁵⁴⁶ Submission 130, Willoughby City Council, p 3.

⁵⁴⁷ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 10.

⁵⁴⁸ Submission 348, Wollondilly Shire Council, p 4.

- 4.122** Four Paws Australia was similarly concerned that the resources required to implement and enforce local cat containment policies could be better directed towards strategies such as targeted desexing and community education programs.⁵⁴⁹ They viewed enforcement of cat containment policies as 'very time-consuming and 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'.⁵⁵⁰

Funding and other resourcing challenges

- 4.123** Many stakeholders emphasised the need for more funding should laws change to allow councils to introduce mandatory laws, especially in relation to the enforcement of containment policies should they be introduced.⁵⁵¹ Funding was presented as an essential component of ensuring that cat management policies were effective.⁵⁵²
- 4.124** The significance of the resource implications for local councils as they enforce compliance was stressed by the Animal Welfare League NSW:

Policies are only as effective as the extent to which they can be enforced. Policing of a mandatory cat containment policy would be substantial. The costs go beyond the additional rangers needed for enforcement by local councils. They extend to the additional costs borne by pounds and shelters in housing and euthanising cats.⁵⁵³

- 4.125** According to Local Government NSW, some councils estimated that implementing and enforcing cat containment policies would cost around \$200,000 to \$300,000 per council each year due to the need for at least one or two additional staff.⁵⁵⁴
- 4.126** The centrality of increased funding was highlighted by Blue Mountains City Council who warned that without state government funding, the resource constraints of local governments would result in cat containment policies being ineffective.⁵⁵⁵ They argued that funding was needed for:
- community education
 - subsidised desexing and microchipping
 - increasing the capacity of pounds
 - cat management training and the employment of staff to enforce cat containment policies

⁵⁴⁹ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 8.

⁵⁵⁰ Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, p 8.

⁵⁵¹ See, for example, Evidence, Ms Gina Vereker, Director, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council, 1 April 2025, p 12; Submission 18, Australian Veterinary Association, p 4; Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 6.

⁵⁵² Submission 189, Canterbury Bankstown Council, p 2.

⁵⁵³ Submission 166, Animal Welfare League NSW, p 5.

⁵⁵⁴ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 9.

⁵⁵⁵ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 3.

- the euthanasia of wild cats and stray cats that cannot be rehomed.⁵⁵⁶

4.127 Mr Kerry Robinson OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council warned that without additional funding, councils would be forced to cut existing services to provide additional cat management services which would require difficult decisions to be made as to priorities:

Which library are you asking has less hours in order to provide that additional service?
Which park are you asking doesn't get mowed so that the community can't play its games on the weekend?⁵⁵⁷

- 4.128** Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero cautioned that the costs of impounding services can be substantial.⁵⁵⁸ She noted that Animal Welfare Victoria found that the average cost per cat for a council to provide impound services is \$516. Referring to the current numbers of impounded cats in Victoria, Ms Thompson concluded 'that could equate to \$15.5 million in costs per year, even when cats are not suitable for rehoming, are not held in care and euthanised. This approach is irresponsible, unethical and ineffective'.⁵⁵⁹
- 4.129** Local Government NSW recommended that capital and operational funding be increased 'to enable upgrading of pound facilities, provision of support services to facilitate rehoming and to assist with educating the community about responsible pet ownership'.⁵⁶⁰
- 4.130** One issue to emerge was how funding should be shared between various councils throughout New South Wales. The current pro rata basis by which companion animal registration fees are currently distributed between councils was presented as favouring the larger councils.⁵⁶¹
- 4.131** In addition, resourcing issues may be more pronounced for smaller councils in regional areas, where cats may roam more freely.⁵⁶² Councils in regional areas may also face challenging socio-economic environments, with the Office of Local Government recognising that they may 'need more of the pie to help them improve their enforcement mechanisms, their pounds and their ability to educate their community'.⁵⁶³
- 4.132** Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager, Environment, Local Government NSW, advocated for a three year statewide grant program to assist councils to 'implement containment policies and responsible ownership programs to increase desexing, identification and registration of cats'.⁵⁶⁴
- 4.133** The Biodiversity Council encouraged the NSW and Commonwealth governments to provide additional funding for cat management, arguing that 'if you established a kind of fund that allowed councils to access grants for this kind of work, you would see a quite rapid uptake and

⁵⁵⁶ Submission 255, Blue Mountains City Council, p 6.

⁵⁵⁷ Evidence, Mr Robinson, 1 April 2025, pp 12 and 20.

⁵⁵⁸ Evidence, Ms Thompson, 1 April 2025, p 31.

⁵⁵⁹ Evidence, Ms Thompson, 1 April 2025, p 31.

⁵⁶⁰ Submission 5, Local Government NSW, p 14.

⁵⁶¹ Evidence, Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government, 1 April 2025, p 56.

⁵⁶² Submission 177, Tweed Shire Council, p 6.

⁵⁶³ Evidence, Mr Whitworth, 1 April 2025, p 56.

⁵⁶⁴ Evidence, Ms Cenedese, 16 December 2024, p 26.

implementation of these kinds of policies by councils'.⁵⁶⁵ Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, put the potential funding into context by highlighting the comparative cost of the current approach, noting that cat borne diseases 'cost the New South Wales economy \$2 billion a year. Nationally, it's \$6 billion a year. If we were to dramatically reduce the number of roaming cats in the suburbs and places where people live, we would actually save more money in averted health costs than the programs would cost us'.⁵⁶⁶

Committee comment

- 4.134** There can be benefits to voluntary cat containment, including for the welfare of individual cats. Contained cats tend to live longer as they are protected from disease, fights with other cats, and collisions with traffic, among other things. The growing community acceptance of cat containment was apparent during the inquiry.
- 4.135** Nearly half of all people with cats already contain their cats and evidence suggests that should significantly increase with the support of education and behaviour change programs.
- 4.136** The committee was greatly encouraged to learn of the positive results achieved by the 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' project conducted by RSPCA NSW in conjunction with select local councils. Behavioural change programs can educate communities about the benefits of cat containment and encourage cat owners to adopt responsible pet ownership behaviours. The success of such programs as 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' demonstrate that positive outcomes can be achieved through a non-punitive approach. Cat containment and appropriate cat management can instead be encouraged by fostering the desired behaviours. It serves as an example of how the most effective strategies utilise a suite of measures to both encourage and support desired behaviours, removing barriers that may otherwise exist.

Finding 5

Educational and behaviour change programs which encourage and support people to voluntarily keep cats indoors were supported by a majority of inquiry participants, and there is some early positive evidence to support the effectiveness of such programs.

- 4.137** While most stakeholders were generally in favour of cat containment, whether New South Wales should adopt any form of punitive, mandatory cat containment or cat curfew laws (either at a state or council level) was a matter of fierce debate.
- 4.138** The committee received a great deal of evidence about how mandatory containment laws and cat curfews at either at a state or local government level are ineffective, particularly when it comes to dealing with the large number of semi-owned and unowned cats who do not have a 'home' in which to be contained. There is no research or evidence to suggest that punitive mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews are effective at reducing the number of free-

⁵⁶⁵ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 4.

⁵⁶⁶ Evidence, Ms Dielenberg, 1 April 2025, p 4.

roaming cats and, given they may not reduce the number of free-roaming cats, there is no evidence that mandatory laws would reduce the impact of cats on native wildlife.

Finding 6

There is insufficient evidence that mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews at a state or local government level are effective in reducing the number of free-roaming cats and therefore reducing impacts on wildlife.

- 4.139** In addition to concerns about the ineffectiveness of mandatory cat containment and cat curfew laws, the committee received evidence about a significant number of counter-productive outcomes associated with mandatory cat containment
- 4.140** In terms of welfare, mandatory containment is not without its risks for cats. Some cats may be contained in an environment that is not appropriate and that does not provide for their needs. Nor does longevity necessarily equate to wellbeing. Thought must be given to cats having access to an enriched environment, that allows ample opportunity for expression of natural behaviours and provides sufficient stimulation. Boredom or stressful environments can result in behavioural issues in cats and a subsequent decline in their wellbeing.
- 4.141** Further, many inquiry participants identified the considerable equity issues presented by a punitive mandatory cat containment law or policy (whether 24 hour containment or a curfew). The committee is concerned about the potential impact of such laws or policies on disadvantaged communities, including lower socio-economic households, who may be unable to afford to contain their cats in a manner that supports their welfare. Cat containment requirements may also present difficulties for those in rental properties where the rental agreement precludes them from keeping a cat indoors or from adapting the property to allow the use of enclosures. The committee was also concerned by evidence that cat containment requirements are likely to have a negative impact on some First Nations communities and raises concerns about the potential over-policing of these communities as a result. We recognise these issues are likely to arise with either state or local government cat containment laws.

Finding 7

Mandatory cat containment laws are likely to create equity issues and have a disproportionate impact on people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and First Nations communities.

- 4.142** The committee is sympathetic that many councils in New South Wales are struggling to manage the number of free-roaming cats in their communities and is relying heavily on rescues and rehoming organisations. However, the committee also heard evidence that the enforcement of mandatory cat containment laws (whether imposed at a state-wide level, or implemented on a council by council basis) may result in significant resourcing and financial pressures for councils. Mandatory cat containment laws and policies will result in more cats being seized and impounded, when cats are found to be roaming in breach of these laws. Council pounds are already stretched and most simply do not have the capacity to house or care for any additional

animals. The committee heard evidence that many councils would require financial support from the NSW Government to implement and enforce mandatory cat containment laws.

- 4.143** In addition, having large numbers of impounded or seized cats may result in an increase in euthanasia rates. This would not only be a poor animal welfare outcome, but also results in additional costs for councils who are struggling. There is no appetite amongst the community for any growth in euthanasia rates, especially where the NSW Government has been working to reduce euthanasia rates for many years. In addition, the committee recognises the evidence it received regarding the mental health impacts of euthanising healthy animals on those who work with them, many of whom have chosen to work in their profession because of a love and concern for the welfare of animals.

Finding 8

The killing of healthy cats has a severe impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pound, shelter, veterinary and rescue staff and volunteers.

- 4.144** The committee recognises there are limited government resources, and these should be spent on cat management strategies that are likely to be the most effective.
- 4.145** Ultimately, the committee is not convinced of the value of investing in a mandatory containment policy at either a state or council level at this stage given evidence received that containment will not be effective and is likely to have counter-productive outcomes. The committee notes that some jurisdictions have stepped back from mandatory cat containment policies for this reason. It is noteworthy that the Government itself has recognised that semi-owned and unowned cats make mandatory cat containment problematic and ineffective at resolving the challenges of free-roaming cats and their impacts on wildlife.
- 4.146** The committee notes that the state is facing a pound crisis, a cost of living crisis, a vet shortage crisis, council funding challenges and ongoing barriers to keeping animals in rentals, all of which would be exacerbated and become more challenging if the Government, or local governments were to introduce mandatory cat containment laws. The committee recognises that each of these challenges must be addressed, and appropriate supports for lower socio-economic and vulnerable groups must be put in place, before mandatory cat containment laws can be considered. These challenges exist regardless of whether cat containment laws are introduced at a state-wide level, or on a council-by-council basis. Further to this, the committee accepts the evidence of RSPCA NSW that having different cat containment policies in different council areas will create practical enforcement issues.
- 4.147** On that basis the committee is concerned that New South Wales may not be ready to adopt state-wide or council-level mandatory cat containment laws.

Finding 9

New South Wales may not be ready to adopt mandatory cat containment laws, whether these laws are statewide or at a local government level.

- 4.148** In light of the above, the committee believes it would be premature to introduce any form of mandatory cat containment laws at this time, given education and behaviour change programs such as ‘Keeping Cats Safe at Home’ have proven to be effective but have so far only been rolled out on a small scale. To see the full benefit of these programs in promoting voluntary cat containment, a broader roll-out of these types of education and behaviour change programs is required.
- 4.149** The committee reiterates its sympathy to the challenges faced by councils in relation to managing cat populations in their local communities. To address this, we encourage the NSW Government to work closely with councils to implement the desexing programs discussed in Chapter 3, as well as education and behaviour change programs to encourage voluntary cat containment and responsible pet ownership within communities. This would ideally be delivered alongside other supports to enable people to keep their cats safely contained, such as supporting people to install cat enclosures or ‘catios’, as well as desexing programs discussed in Chapter 3.
- 4.150** The committee therefore recommends that the Government:
- notes a desire from a number of councils to have greater regulatory options regarding containment to better address community concerns in their local area, but also notes the inherent risks of the increased impoundment of cats and other concerns relating to mandatory cat containment
 - should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained.

Recommendation 10

That the Government should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained.

- 4.151** The committee recognises that adopting a One Health/One Welfare approach to cat management is paramount to improving outcomes for both animals and humans. Cats can influence human health and the health of other animals and the environment around them, and vice-versa. All of these aspects must be considered when developing cat management policies and strategies in order that they are both effective as well as appropriate for the varied situations involved.

Finding 10

NSW Government and councils should manage cats in a way that supports the health and wellbeing of people, animals, and the environment.

Appendix 1 Submissions

No.	Author
1	Mr Robert Heron
2	Urban Kittens Rescue Group
3	Lions Club of Clarence - Environmental
4	Sydney Dogs & Cats Home
5	Local Government NSW
6	Name suppressed
7	Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney
8	Blue Mountains Greens
9	Blue Mountains Bird Observers Inc.
10	Name suppressed
11	Animal Defenders Office Inc.
12	The Glebe Society Incorporated
13	BirdLife Australia
14	Biodiversity Council
15	Name suppressed
16	RSPCA NSW
17	Mrs Jo-anne Wright
18	Australian Veterinary Association
19	Name suppressed
20	Animal Care Australia Inc.
21	Australian Wildlife Society (AWS)
22	Clarence Environment Centre Inc
23	Ms Katy McMurray
24	Australian Land Conservation Alliance
25	Hunter Valley Cat Haven
26	Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group
27	Confidential
28	Sentient
29	Georges River Council
30	Pet Nurture
31	Mrs Therese Wilk

No.	Author
31a	Mrs Therese Wilk
31b	Mrs Therese Wilk
32	Tamworth Birdwatchers Inc
33	Name suppressed
34	Companion Animal Network Australia
35	Munibung Hill Conservation Society
36	Tamworth Water Security Alliance
37	Getting 2 Zero
38	Name suppressed
39	WIRES
40	Chris' Cat Rescue
41	Campus Cats NSW
42	Miss Marissa Bennett
43	Name suppressed
44	Animal Services Australasia
45	Illawarra Cat Rescue Support
46	Willoughby Environmental Protection Association, Inc (WEPA)
47	Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC)
48	Agape Outreach Inc
49	Confidential
50	Cumberland Bird Observers Club
51	Confidential
52	Animal Rehoming Tablelands
53	Hunter Bird Observers Club
54	Confidential
55	Ms Christine Pierson
55a	Ms Christine Pierson
56	Friends of the Pound (Tweed) Inc.
57	Name suppressed
58	Name suppressed
59	Oatley Flora & Fauna Conservation Society
60	Tommy's Rescue
61	Northern Beaches Council
62	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
63	Mrs Ashleigh Dunn

No.	Author
64	Mrs Virginia Burns
65	Miss Amanda Andrews
66	Mr Barry Watson
67	Ms Michelle Gable
68	Australian Pet Welfare Foundation
69	Name suppressed
70	Name suppressed
71	Name suppressed
72	Name suppressed
73	Mrs Tania Katsanis
74	Name suppressed
75	Brad del-Munns
76	Name suppressed
77	Ms Natalie Ciric
78	Name suppressed
79	Name suppressed
80	Name suppressed
81	Ms Ella Koch
82	Name suppressed
83	Mr Steve Garthwin
84	Name suppressed
85	Ms Melissa White
86	Name suppressed
87	Terry Howard
88	Ms Kirsten Darling
89	Name suppressed
90	Name suppressed
91	Mrs Rachel Sussman
92	Ms Jane Kenny
93	Cat Protection Society of NSW
94	NSW Government
95	Name suppressed
96	Ms Anastasia Yatras
97	Name suppressed
98	Name suppressed

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99	Name suppressed
100	Jeanette Vizzard
101	Name suppressed
102	Ms Dorin Suciu
103	Name suppressed
104	Name suppressed
105	Mrs Victoria Thompson
106	Name suppressed
107	Confidential
108	Susan Pasmik
109	Name suppressed
110	Mrs Janet Allan
111	Name suppressed
112	Name suppressed
113	Name suppressed
114	Adrian and Janine Polhill
115	Name suppressed
116	Miss Kerry Radford
117	Name suppressed
118	Mrs Lisa Roberts-Daintree
119	Ms Clare Partington
120	Mr Brad Nesbitt
121	Name suppressed
122	Mrs Nicole Ferrara
123	Mr Mathew Bell
124	Dr Catherine Settle
125	Mr Marc Cottee
126	Confidential
127	Name suppressed
128	Bronwyn Walker
129	David Wrenford
130	Willoughby City Council
131	Ms Mary Ann Gourlay
132	Sandy Collins
133	Mr Brian McDonald

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138	Name suppressed
139	Name suppressed
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141	Carrie Brown
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143	Elisabeth Dark
144	Name suppressed
145	Name suppressed
146	Diana Shirling
147	Name suppressed
148	Adrian Spragg
149	Name suppressed
150	Name suppressed
151	Name suppressed
152	Roger Griffiths
153	Confidential
154	Sally Clarke
155	Name suppressed
156	Name suppressed
157	Susan Philp
158	Judith Hopper
159	Name suppressed
160	Andrew Edwards
161	Gillianne Tedder
162	Confidential
163	Alice Baker
164	Rosie Connor
165	Name suppressed
166	Animal Welfare League (AWL) NSW
167	C.A.T.S. Inc Cats Assistance To Sterilise
168	Name suppressed

No.	Author
169	Animal Liberation
170	Blue Mountains Conservation Society
171	F.A.W.N.A. (NSW)
172	Blacktown City Council
173	Cat Adoption Sydney Inc
174	Australian Plants Society NSW (Nowra group)
175	Country Women's Association of NSW
176	Shoalhaven City Council
177	Tweed Shire Council
178	Confidential
179	Catmint Cottage Sydney Rescue Incorporated
180	The Stray Cats Project Inc.
181	Knox AdvoCats
182	Community Helping Campbelltown Cats
183	North Sydney Council
184	Inner City Strays Inc
185	Confidential
186	Birdlife Shoalhaven
187	Dubbo Regional Council
188	World League for Protection of Animals (WLPA)
189	Canterbury Bankstown Council
190	SAFE Rehoming
191	Byron Environment Centre Inc (BEC)
192	Narrabri Shire Council
193	No Kill Collective
194	Mrs Ruth Norris
195	FOUR PAWS Australia
196	Banksia Park Bushcare
197	Love Rescue Collaborate
198	Confidential
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200	Daniela Osiander
201	E Meyer
202	NSW Young Lawyers Animal Law Sub-Committee
203	Matthew Ross

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204	Sandra Finlay
205	Julie Holcombe
206	Judy McHutchison
207	Margaret Hamon
208	Alana Parkins and family
209	Amanda McLean
210	Kate McLaren
211	Anthony Gooley
212	Lindsay Mason
213	Anthony Learmonth
214	Wayne Kelly
215	Joanne Gerritsen
216	Alison Suprano
217	Name suppressed
218	Name suppressed
219	Lea Kannar-Lichtenberger
220	Elizabeth Reichstein
221	Walter and Margaret Lamond
222	Matt Adderley
223	Vicki Ross
224	Jane Lemann
225	Stuart Carter
226	Sue Proust
227	Olivier La Mer-Adair
228	Name suppressed
229	Name suppressed
230	Gary and Julie Reid
231	Mr John Seddon
232	Dr Sylvia French
233	Confidential
234	Name suppressed
235	Confidential
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237	Name suppressed
238	Name suppressed

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243	Name suppressed
244	Name suppressed
245	Miss Dorlene Haidar
246	Name suppressed
247	Name suppressed
248	Miss Heather Davis
249	Ms Celia Smith
250	Miss Kayt Fitzpatrick
250a	Miss Kayt Fitzpatrick
251	Name suppressed
252	Name suppressed
253	Name suppressed
254	Ms Susan Tanner
255	Blue Mountains City Council
256	Name suppressed
257	Mrs Melinda Dillon
258	Mr Hasan Kamali
259	Ms Susie Header
260	Ms Alice Milson
261	Dr Anthony Cleary
262	Ms Marie Humphries
263	Miss Sharon Richards
264	Name suppressed
265	Dr Eric Dale
266	Ms Stephanie Carrick
267	Ms Martine Moran
268	Mr Graham Lalchere
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270	Ms Vanessa Cullen
271	Confidential
272	Miss Angelina Bayer

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273	Mr Dave Livett
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275	Name suppressed
276	Ms Roslyn Dorrington
277	Mr Martin Derby
278	Mr Matt McLeod
279	Name suppressed
280	Name suppressed
281	Ms Barbara Kelly
282	Name suppressed
283	Ms Elizabeth Ellis
284	Name suppressed
285	Name suppressed
286	Name suppressed
287	Name suppressed
288	Mrs Catherine Diver
289	Joelle Patten
290	Miss Rosy Fischer
291	Ms Janice Haviland
292	Annette Conabere
293	Eco Network Port Stephens and Mambo Wanda Wetlands Reserves, and Landcare Committee
294	Lake Macquarie City Council Staff
295	Name suppressed
296	Name suppressed
297	Confidential
298	Name suppressed
299	Mr Paul Hemsworth
300	Name suppressed
301	Confidential
302	Mr Martin Kenny
303	Name suppressed
304	Ms Sophie Sevim
305	Colleen Wysser - Martin
306	Name suppressed

No.	Author
307	Name suppressed
308	Name suppressed
309	Name suppressed
310	Confidential
311	Name suppressed
312	Name suppressed
313	Name suppressed
314	Name suppressed
315	Ms Meredith Brownhill
316	Name suppressed
317	Name suppressed
318	Name suppressed
319	Ms Julie Parker
320	Name suppressed
321	Ms Amanda Collier
322	Miss Wanda Gordon
323	Tamworth Open Garden Trail Assoc.
324	Mr Martin McNally
325	Name suppressed
326	Ms Janet Oliver
327	Name suppressed
328	Name suppressed
329	Ms Astrid Stephens
330	Mr Alan Ginns
331	Name suppressed
332	Ms Soo Balbi
333	Name suppressed
334	Ms Donna Gaskill
335	Ms Claudia Ford
336	Jordan Lane
337	Annabel Peeling
338	Confidential
339	Name suppressed
340	Professor Peter Sainsbury
341	Name suppressed

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345	Name suppressed
346	Mrs Leeanne Tyler-Olsen
347	Name suppressed
348	Wollondilly Shire Council
349	Meng Li
350	Gaurav Vasdeva
351	Name suppressed
352	Dr Raina Mason
353	Mrs Ellie Robertson
354	Name suppressed
355	Name suppressed
356	Michael Calver
357	Name suppressed
358	Name suppressed
359	Name suppressed
360	Name suppressed
361	Name suppressed
362	Mr Rohan Laxmanlal
363	Name suppressed
364	Mr Murray Sharp
365	Ms Jo Hobson
366	Dr komathy sathiyapal
367	Name suppressed
368	Mx Talia "Kinney" Kinney
369	Ms Mary Forbes
370	Name suppressed
371	Mr Warwick Schofield
372	Name suppressed
373	Ms Lana Williams
374	Hornsby Shire Council
375	Mr Amitav Dash
376	Confidential

No.	Author
377	Mrs Karen Bebbington
378	Name suppressed
379	Ms Sophie Lee
380	Mr Garth Wimbush
381	Ms Jamila Viandier
382	Mr David Yazbek
383	Beneta Stephenson
384	Lan Nguyen
385	Name suppressed
386	Confidential
387	Confidential
388	Name suppressed
389	Dr Cynthia Harris
390	Mrs Laura Noble
391	Name suppressed
392	Ms Stacey Bolton
393	Name suppressed
394	Mr Patrick Murphy
395	Ms Nicole Dennis
396	Confidential
397	Ms Lynette Desmond
398	Name suppressed
399	Name suppressed
400	Ms Kim Furness
401	Elizabeth Milner
402	Name suppressed
402a	Confidential
403	Name suppressed
404	Ms Jackie Wolf
405	Kimberley Batson
406	Name suppressed
407	Mr David Goudie
408	Ms Kathleen McCaughtrie
409	Name suppressed
410	Name suppressed

No.	Author
411	Name suppressed
412	Mrs Julie Henson
413	Name suppressed
414	Miss Federica Caregnato
415	Name suppressed
416	Mrs Lilly Froud
417	Name suppressed
418	Name suppressed
419	Ms Diane Nicholson
420	Mr Sean Gavin
421	Name suppressed
422	Name suppressed
423	Ms Simone Cooper
424	Miss Jessica Walzak
425	Name suppressed
426	Name suppressed
426a	Name suppressed
427	Ms Jan O'Leary
428	Name suppressed
429	Name suppressed
430	Cordelia Hsu
431	Name suppressed
432	Name suppressed
433	Name suppressed
434	Jan Kendall
435	Jean du Ross
436	Ms Penelope Milson
437	Mr Shreshtha Jain
438	David Re
439	Dr Lynette Allen
440	Ms Louise Webb
441	Name suppressed
442	Ms Tiffany Toth
443	Name suppressed
444	Name suppressed

No.	Author
445	Name suppressed
446	Ms Diane Townley
447	Susan Strodl
448	Name suppressed
449	Mrs Natasha Brown
450	Name suppressed
451	Name suppressed
452	Mrs Zoe Butler
453	Ms Laurie Beck
454	Confidential
455	Mrs Erin Sleeth
456	Name suppressed
457	Confidential
458	Name suppressed
459	Mrs Lily Meier
460	Name suppressed
461	Name suppressed
462	Ms Judy Medway
463	Name suppressed
464	Name suppressed
465	Name suppressed
466	Ms Susan Cuneo
467	Mrs Paula Thurston
468	Name suppressed
469	Claudia Hayes
470	Confidential
471	Name suppressed
472	Mr Seth Coffey
473	Name suppressed
474	Australian Institute of Animal Management
475	Mr Reece Luxton
476	Name suppressed
477	Name suppressed
478	Ms Carolyn Davies
479	Name suppressed

No.	Author
480	Ms Jillian Davies
481	Mr Ian Dunwoodie
482	Name suppressed
483	Ms Lucia Smith
484	Name suppressed
485	Name suppressed
486	Miss Mia Davies
487	Mrs Karen Johnson
488	Confidential
489	Mrs Maria Ferraro
490	Name suppressed
491	Name suppressed
492	Francisco Lay
493	Noelia Luongo
494	Mrs Samantha Ryan
495	Name suppressed
496	Name suppressed
497	Mrs Claudia Madison
498	Name suppressed
499	Ms Tiffani Long
500	Mrs Emma Grundy
501	Claire Lilla
502	Ms Constance Papadakis
503	Name suppressed
504	Jennifer Horsburgh
505	Name suppressed
506	Mr Norman Webb
507	Ms Elke Taylor
508	Name suppressed
1222a	Mr Karl Augustine
509 to 1146	Short submissions (<i>Public and name suppressed</i>)
1147 to 1196	Short submissions (<i>Confidential</i>)
1197 to 1249	Short submissions (<i>Public and name suppressed</i>)
1250	Short submission (<i>Confidential</i>)
1251	Name suppressed

Appendix 2 Witnesses at hearings

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Monday, 16 December 2024 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Mr Jack Gough	Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council
	Professor Sarah Legge	Professor, Charles Darwin University, Honorary Professor, Australian National University, Principal Research Fellow, University of Queensland, Member, Invasive Species Council Conservation and Science Committee and Member, Australian Government Threatened Species Scientific Committee.
	Ms Kristina Vesk	Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW
	Dr Gemma Ma	Community Veterinarian and Project Manager – Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW
	Mr Troy Wilkie	Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW
	Dr Colin Salter	Policy Lead, Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service
	Ms Susy Cenedese	Strategy Manager Environment, Local Government NSW
	Dr Jacquie Rand BVSc (Melb), DVSc (Guelph), MANZCVS	Emeritus Professor, Companion Animal Health, University of Queensland and Executive Director & Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation
	Ms Michelle Grayson	Cat Representative, Animal Care Australia
	Ms Karri Nadazdy	Assistant to the President, Animal Care Australia
Tuesday, 1 April 2025 Preston Stanley Room Parliament House, Sydney	Emeritus Professor Helen Swarbrick	President, Campus Cats NSW
	Dr John Kanowski	Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy
	Mr Joey Clarke	Senior Science Communicator, Australian Wildlife Conservancy

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Ms Jaana Dielenberg	Community and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council
	Mr Kerry Robinson OAM	Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council
	Ms Rosalie Horton	Senior Coordinator, Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre
	Ms Gina Vereker	Director, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
	Dr Diana Rayment	Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management (via videoconference)
	Dr Amy Lee	NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association (via videoconference)
	Dr Nick Taylor	Division Committee Member, Australian Veterinary Association (via videoconference)
	Dr Rosemary Elliott	President, Sentient
	Mr Stephen Albin	Chief Executive Officer, Animal Welfare League
	Ms Nell Thompson	Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero (via videoconference)
	Ms Tara Ward	Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office
	Ms Louise Ward	Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia
	Mr Timothy Crossman	President and General Manager, SAFE Rehoming
	Mrs Lisa Riordan	Team Leader, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats
	Mr Ludovic Barbier	Lead Cat Caretaker, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats
	Ms Stephanie Bates	Owner and Manager, Westie Cat Support Services
	Ms Leah Michael	President, World League for Protection of Animals
	Ms Anna Hall	Manager World League for Protection of Animals
	Mr Brett Whitworth	Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government
	Ms Erica van den Honert	Executive Director, Sector Development, Office of Local Government

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Richard Kingswood	Director, Biodiversity and Ecological Health Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
	Ms Janelle Brooks	Director, Conservation Programs Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
	Mr Peter Goth	Acting (Joint) Executive Director, Strategy and Engagement, Agriculture and Biosecurity Group, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
	Dr Kim Filmer	Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
	Dr Steven McLeod	Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Appendix 3 Minutes

Draft minutes no. 11

Friday 11 October 2024

Animal Welfare Committee

via videoconference at 1.02 pm

1. Members present

Ms Hurst, *Chair*

Mr Nanva, *Deputy Chair*

Mr Borsak

Ms Boyd (participating)

Mr Fang

Mrs MacDonald

Mr Primrose (from 1.04 pm)

Ms Suvaal

2. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 7 August 2024 – Email from Riley Ferguson, private individual to committee, regarding management of cats in national parks (*attached*).

3. Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

3.1 Terms of reference

The committee noted that on 21 September 2023, it agreed to the following self-referred terms of reference for an inquiry into cat management:

That, following the conclusion of the inquiry into the 'Proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park', the Animal Welfare Committee inquire into and report on the management of cat populations in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings
- (b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers
- (c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions
- (d) effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives
- (e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies
- (f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs
- (g) impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system
- (h) outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories
- (i) options for reducing the feral cat population
- (j) any other related matter.

The committee further noted that it resolved that:

- the cat management inquiry not be publicised by the secretariat (on an inquiry webpage or via a media release) until its commencement, after the inquiry into the Proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park is finalised, and
- the committee meet after the inquiry into the Proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park has been finalised to resolve matters concerning the conduct of this inquiry.

3.2 Closing date for submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That submissions close Friday 22 November 2024.

3.3 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the secretariat circulate to members the Chairs' proposed list of stakeholders to provide them with the opportunity to amend the list or nominate additional stakeholders, and that the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

3.4 Approach to submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That, to enable significant efficiencies for members and the secretariat while maintaining the integrity of how submissions are treated, in the event that 50 or more individual submissions are received, the committee may adopt the following approach to processing short submissions:

- All submissions from individuals 250 words or less in length will:
 - have an individual submission number, and be published with the author's name or as name suppressed, or kept confidential, according to the author's request
 - be reviewed by the secretariat for adverse mention and sensitive/identifying information, in accordance with practice
 - be channelled into one single document to be published on the inquiry website
- All other submissions will be processed and published as normal.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 1.08 pm until Friday 25 October 2024, 10.30 am, Room 1254 (report deliberative - inquiry into proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park).

Arizona Hart

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 14

Monday 16 December 2024

Animal Welfare Committee

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, 9.20 am

1. Members present

Ms Hurst, *Chair*

Mr Nanva, *Deputy Chair* (until 11.54 am)

Ms Boyd (participating)

Mr Fang (via videoconference)

Ms Higginson (participating)

Mr Lawrence (via videoconference)

Mrs MacDonald

Mr Primrose

Ms Suvaal (via videoconference) (until 11.55 am)

2. Apologies

Mr Borsak

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That draft minutes no. 13 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 28 October 2024 – Email from the Office of Ms Sue Higginson nominating Ms Higginson as a participating member on the inquiry into the management of cat populations
- 19 November 2024 – Email from Ms Tamara Renshaw to the committee, advising of her concerns with the trapping and culling of brumbies
- 21 November 2024 – Email from Professor Caroline Gross, Chair, NSW Threatened Species Scientific Committee, noting the committee's invitation to make a submission to the inquiry into the management of cat populations
- 30 November 2024 – Email from Mr Mark Slater, Executive Director, Animal Services Australasia declining the committee's invitation to appear as a witness at the hearing for the inquiry into the management of cat populations on 16 December 2024
- 3 December 2024 – Email from Ms Liz Gemes, Senior Advocacy Officer, Australian Veterinary Association, declining the committee's invitation to appear as a witness at the hearing for the inquiry into the management of cat populations on 16 December 2024
- 4 December 2024 – Email from Ms Lis Ashby, Policy and Innovation Lead at the Biodiversity Council, requesting that representatives of the Council give evidence to the inquiry into the management of cat populations on 16 December 2024
- 9 December 2024 – Email from Ms Victoria Jack, NSW Campaigns Manager, The Wilderness Society, declining the committee's invitation to appear as a witness at the hearing for the inquiry into the management of cat populations on 16 December 2024
- 9 December 2024 – Email from Mr Martin McNally, requesting to give evidence to the inquiry into the management of cat populations on 16 December 2024.

5. Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales**5.1 Public submissions**

The committee noted the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 1-5, 7-9, 11-14, 16-18, 20-26, 28-30, 31a, 32, 34-37, 39-42, 45-48, 50, 52-53, 56, 59-68, 75, 77, 81, 83, 85, 91-94, 96, 100, 102, 105, 108, 110, 114, 116, 118-120, 122-125 and 128-135.

5.2 Partially confidential submissionsPartially confidential – name suppressed

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying in submissions nos. 6, 10, 15, 19, 38, 43, 57-58, 69-72, 74, 76, 78-80, 82, 84, 86, 89-90, 95, 97-99, 101, 103-104, 106, 109, 111-113, 115, 117, 121, 125 and 127.

Partially confidential – at the request of the author

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 44, with the exception of sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

Partially confidential – at the recommendation of the secretariat

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 33 and 73, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

5.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That the committee keep submission nos. 27, 49, 51, 54, 107 and 126 confidential, as per the request of the authors.

6. Election of Acting Deputy Chair

The committee noted the expected departure of Mr Nanva. The Chair called for nominations for Acting Deputy Chair for the duration of the meeting following the departure of Mr Nanva.

Mr Nanva nominated Mrs MacDonald to be Acting Deputy Chair of the committee for the duration of the meeting following his departure.

There being no further nominations, the Chair declared Mrs MacDonald elected Acting Deputy Chair for the duration of the meeting following the departure of Mr Nanva.

7. Public hearing – inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Sequence of questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the media and the public were admitted at 9.26 am.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Jack Gough, Advocacy Director, Invasive Species Council
- Professor Sarah Legge, Professor, Charles Darwin University, Honorary Professor, Australian National University, Principal Research Fellow, University of Queensland, Member, Invasive Species Council Conservation and Science Committee and Member, Australian Government Threatened Species Scientific Committee.

Mr Gough tendered the following documents:

- Briefing note: 'Safe cat, safe wildlife: Fostering responsible pet ownership in New South Wales'
- Summary of state and territory regulatory frameworks for managing the impact of domestic cat populations and their impact on wildlife by the Invasive Species Council – February 2023.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of NSW.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Gemma Ma, Community Veterinarian and Project Manager – Keeping Cats Safe at Home, RSPCA NSW
- Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW.

Mr Wilkie tendered the following documents:

- Excerpt from 2024-25 NSW Budget – 'Our plan for Regional New South Wales'
- Circular to Councils, 23 April 2021, 'Cat management requirements for councils', Office of Local Government

- Media release, Hon Alister Henskens MP, Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade, Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology, Minister for Sport, Minister for Skills and Training, 'Funding available for scientific researchers', 3 March 2023
- Media release, Hon Victor Dominello MP, Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government and Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, Minister for Local Government, 'Over \$20 million additional funding for animal welfare', 2 March 2023
- Media release, Hon Dominic Perrottet MP, Premier of NSW, Hon Dugald Saunders MP, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Western NSW and Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, Minister for Local Government, 'Record investment of \$40.6 million for animal welfare and rehoming', 4 February 2023
- 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home: Impact Report', RSPCA, December 2023
- Position paper, 'Cat containment', RSPCA, 28 October 2023
- Gemma Ma and Lynette J. McLeod, Journal Article, 'Understanding the factors influencing cat containment: identifying opportunities for behaviour change', 12 May 2023
- Gemma Ma, Lynette L McLeod and Sara J Zito, Journal Article, 'Characteristics of cat semi-owners', 21 July 2023
- Brooke P.A. Kennedy, Anna Clemann and Gemma Ma, Journal Article, 'Feline encounters down under: investigating the activity of cats and native wildlife at Sydney's North Head', 27 August 2024.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr Colin Salter, Policy Lead, Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Ms Susy Cenedese, Strategy Manager Environment, Local Government NSW.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Jacquie Rand BVSc (Melb), DVSc (Guelph), MANZCVS, Emeritus Professor, Companion Animal Health, University of Queensland and Executive Director & Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation
- Ms Michelle Grayson, Cat Representative, Animal Care Australia
- Ms Karri Nadazdy, Assistant to the President, Animal Care Australia.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Emeritus Professor Helen Swarbrick, President, Campus Cats NSW.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 2.58 pm and the witnesses withdrew. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee accept and publish the following documents:

- Briefing note: 'Safe cat, safe wildlife: Fostering responsible pet ownership in New South Wales'
- Summary of state and territory regulatory frameworks for managing the impact of domestic cat populations and their impact on wildlife by the Invasive Species Council – February 2023
- Excerpt from 2024-25 NSW Budget – 'Our plan for Regional New South Wales'
- Office of Local Government, Circular to Councils, 23 April 2021, 'Cat management requirements for councils'

- Hon Alister Henskens MP, Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade, Minister for Science, Innovation and Technology, Minister for Sport, Minister for Skills and Training, Media release, 'Funding available for scientific researchers', 3 March 2023
- Hon Victor Dominello MP, Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government and Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, Minister for Local Government, Media release, 'Over \$20 million additional funding for animal welfare', 2 March 2023
- Hon Dominic Perrottet MP, Premier of NSW, Hon Dugald Saunders MP, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Western NSW and Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, Minister for Local Government, Media release, 'Record investment of \$40.6 million for animal welfare and rehoming', 4 February 2023
- RSPCA, 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home: Impact Report, December 2023
- RSPCA, Position paper, 'Cat containment', 28 October 2023
- Gemma Ma and Lynette J. McLeod, Journal Article, 'Understanding the factors influencing cat containment: identifying opportunities for behaviour change', 12 May 2023
- Gemma Ma, Lynette L McLeod and Sara J Zito, Journal Article, 'Characteristics of cat semi-owners', 21 July 2023
- Brooke P.A. Kennedy, Anna Clemann and Gemma Ma, Journal Article, 'Feline encounters down under: investigating the activity of cats and native wildlife at Sydney's North Head', 27 August 2024.

8. **Adjournment**

The committee adjourned at 2.59 pm, *sine die*.

David Rodwell

Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 15

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Animal Welfare Committee

Preston Stanley Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.01 am

1. **Members present**

Ms Hurst, Chair

Mr Borsak (via videoconference)

Ms Boyd (participating) (via videoconference from 9.40 am)

Mrs Carter (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)

Mr Barrett (substituting for Mr Fang)

Ms Higginson (participating) (until 1.00 pm; from 2.06 pm)

Dr Kaine (substituting for Mr Lawrence) (via videoconference until 9.09 am)

Mr Primrose

Ms Suvaal (in person until 9.23 am) (via videoconference from 9.38 am to 1.00 pm, then from 2.47 pm)

2. **Apologies**

Mr Nanva

3. **Previous minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That draft minutes no. 14 be confirmed.

4. **Correspondence**

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 10 December 2024 – Letter from Suzanne Orr MLA, ACT Legislative Assembly to Chair, responding to invitation to make a submission

- 13 December 2024 – Email from Mary Ann Gourlay to committee, requesting publication of attachment to submission
- 17 December 2024 – Email from Margaret Cummings to Chair, regarding The Tiger Project
- 9 January 2025 – Email from Sarah Allinson to committee, regarding cat management
- 14 January 2025 – Email from Cameron Elyard, regarding cat management
- 19 January 2025 – Letter from Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of New South Wales to committee, clarifying evidence given at hearing on 16 December 2024
- 22 January 2025 – Email from Kat Allan to committee, regarding cat management
- 22 January 2025 – Email from Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation to committee, providing copies of four unpublished journal articles
- 24 January 2025 – Email from Elizabeth Byrne, regarding cat management
- 24 January 2025 – Email from Haemish Bongers, Coordinator Parking and Rangers, Georges River Council to secretariat, regarding willingness to appear at a future hearing
- 1 February 2025 – Email from Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation to secretariat, providing copy of journal article
- 4 February 2025 – Email from Martin McNally to secretariat, requesting publication of attachment to submission
- 12 February 2025 – Letter from the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC to Clerk, enclosing government response to brumbies report
- 11 March 2025 – Email from Anna Hernell, Team Supervisor – Ranger Support, Shoalhaven City Council to secretariat, declining the invitation to appear as a witness at the hearing on 1 April 2025
- 15 March 2025 – Email from Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, to secretariat, regarding the publication of articles
- 24 March 2025 – Email from Mr Paul Stuart, Animal Control Officer, Canterbury Bankstown City Council to secretariat, declining the invitation to appear as a witness at the hearing on 1 April 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That the committee keep the four journal articles provided in correspondence from Professor Jacquie Rand, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, dated 22 January 2024, confidential, as per the request of the author, as it contains sensitive information.

5. Inquiry into the proposed aerial shooting of brumbies in Kosciuszko National Park

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the corrected minutes no. 12 of 25 October 2024 be readopted.

6. Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

6.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 55, 87-88, 136, 140-141, 143, 146, 148, 152, 154, 157-158, 160-161, 163-164, 166-167, 169-177, 179-180, 182-184, 186-196, 199-216, 219-227, 230-232, 236, 239, 242, 245, 248-250a, 254-255, 257-263, 265-268, 270, 272-274, 276-278, 281, 283, 288-294, 299, 302, 304-305, 315, 319, 321-324, 326, 329-330, 332, 334-337, 340, 344, 346, 348-350, 352-353, 356, 362, 364-366, 368-369, 371, 373-375, 377, 379-384, 389-390, 392, 394-395, 397, 400-401, 404-405, 407-408, 412, 414, 416, 419-420, 423-424, 427, 430, 434-440, 442, 446-447, 449, 452-453, 455, 459, 462, 466-467, 469, 472, 474, 475, 478, 480, 481, 483, 486, 487, 489, 492-494, 497, 499-502, 504, 506-507.

6.2 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 137-139, 144-145, 149-151, 155-156, 159, 165, 168, 217-218, 228-229, 234, 237-238, 240-241, 243-244, 246-247, 251-253, 256, 264, 269, 275, 279-280, 282, 284-287, 296, 298, 300, 303, 306-309, 311-314, 316-318, 320, 325, 327-328, 331, 333, 339, 341-343, 345, 347, 351, 354-355, 357-361, 363, 367, 370, 372, 378, 385, 388, 391, 393, 398-399, 402, 403, 406, 409-411, 413, 415, 417-418, 421-422, 425-426a, 428-429, 431-433, 441, 443-445, 448, 450-451,

456, 458, 460, 461, 463-465, 468, 471, 473, 476, 477, 479, 482, 484, 485, 490, 491, 495, 496, 498, 503, 505, 508.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 137-139, 144-145, 149, 151, 155-156, 159, 165, 168, 217-218, 228-229, 234, 237-238, 240-241, 243-244, 246-247, 251-253, 256, 264, 269, 275, 279-280, 282, 284-287, 296, 298, 300, 303, 306-309, 311-314, 316-318, 320, 325, 327-328, 331, 333, 339, 341-343, 345, 347, 351, 354-355, 357-361, 363, 367, 370, 372, 378, 385, 388, 391, 393, 398-399, 402, 403, 406, 409-411, 413, 415, 417-418, 421-422, 425-426a, 428-429, 431-433, 441, 443-445, 448, 450-451, 456, 458, 461, 463-465, 468, 471, 473, 476, 477, 479, 482, 484, 485, 490, 491, 495, 496, 498, 503, 505, 508.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 31, 147, 181, 197, 295, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information or potential adverse mention which are to remain confidential, as per the request of the author or as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

6.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the committee keep submission nos. 79, 96, 142, 153, 162, 178, 185, 198, 233, 235, 271, 297, 301, 310, 338, 376, 386, 387, 396, 402a, 454, 457, 470, 488 confidential, as per the request of the author, as they contain identifying and/or sensitive information.

6.4 Short submissions

The committee noted that the following short submissions were published as single document by the committee clerk as per the resolution of the committee: short submissions 509 to 1146.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying information in submissions nos. 822 to 1143.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That the committee authorise the publication of short submission nos. 1197 to 1249 as a single document.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying information in short submissions nos. 1206, 1245 to 1249.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That the committee keep short submission nos. 1147 to 1196, 1250 confidential, as per the request of the author, as they contain identifying and/or sensitive information.

6.5 Pro forma submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee publish a copy of each of pro forma A and pro forma B on the inquiry webpage, noting the number of responses received.

6.6 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice from Animal Care Australia, received 10 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Dr Colin Slater, Wildlife Information and Rescue Service, received 10 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, received 10 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Professor Helen Swarbrick, President, Campus Cats NSW, received 17 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of New South Wales, received 19 January 2025

- answers to questions on notice from Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, received 22 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Local Government NSW, received 24 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from RSPCA NSW, received 31 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Sarah Legge, Invasive Species Council, received 9 February 2025.

The committee noted that the following supplementary material provided by witnesses were published under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- copies of three presentations and powerpoint slides provided by Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, received 22 January 2025
- correspondence from Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, providing copies of three presentations and powerpoint slides, received 22 January 2025, providing copies of three presentations and powerpoint slides
- RSPCA NSW, *Keeping Cats Safe at Home – final report*, 2025, received 31 January 2025.

6.7 Submission 474

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That submission 474 be republished to include the additional pages provided by the submission author.

6.8 Transcript clarification

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the committee authorise:

- the publication of correspondence from Ms Kristina Vesk, Chief Executive Officer, Cat Protection Society of New South Wales, clarifying evidence given at hearing on 16 December 2024, dated 19 January 2025, on the inquiry webpage
- the insertion of a footnote on page 10 of the transcript for 16 December 2024 noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence.

6.9 Election of Acting Deputy Chair

The Chair noted the absence of the Deputy Chair for the meeting.

The Chair called for nominations for a member to act as Deputy Chair for the purposes of the meeting.

Ms Suvaal moved: That Mr Primrose be elected as Deputy Chair of the committee.

There being no further nominations, the Chair declared Mr Primrose elected Deputy Chair.

6.10 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr John Kanowski, Chief Science Officer, Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Mr Joey Clarke, Senior Science Communicator, Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Community and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council.

Ms Boyd joined the meeting.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Kerry Robinson OAM, Chief Executive Officer, Blacktown City Council
- Ms Rosalie Horton, Senior Coordinator, Blacktown Animal Rehoming Centre
- Ms Gina Vereker, Director, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
- Dr Diana Rayment, Director and Treasurer, Australian Institute of Animal Management (via videoconference).

Dr Rayment tendered the following document:

- Australian Institute of Animal Management, 'The intertwined lives of cats and people'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association (via videoconference)
- Dr Nick Taylor, Division Committee Member, Australian Veterinary Association (via videoconference)
- Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Stephen Albin, Chief Executive Officer, Animal Welfare League
- Ms Nell Thompson, Coordinator, Getting 2 Zero (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Suvaal left the meeting.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Tara Ward, Volunteer Managing Solicitor, Animal Defenders Office
- Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Suvaal rejoined the meeting.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Timothy Crossman, President and General Manager, SAFE Rehoming
- Mrs Lisa Riordan, Team Leader, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats
- Mr Ludovic Barbier, Lead Cat Caretaker, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats
- Ms Stephanie Bates, Owner and Manager, Westie Cat Support Services
- Ms Leah Michael, President, World League for Protection of Animals
- Ms Anna Hall, Manager World League for Protection of Animals.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Brett Whitworth, Deputy Secretary, Office of Local Government
- Ms Erica van den Honert, Executive Director, Sector Development, Office of Local Government
- Mr Richard Kingswood, Director, Biodiversity and Ecological Health Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
- Ms Janelle Brooks, Director, Conservation Programs Branch, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
- Mr Peter Goth, Acting (Joint) Executive Director, Strategy and Engagement, Agriculture and Biosecurity Group, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Kim Filmer, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Steven McLeod, Manager, Vertebrate Pest Research, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.05 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Carter: That the committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:

- Australian Institute of Animal Management, 'The intertwined lives of cats and people'.

6.11 Next steps

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee hold the report deliberative before the end of July 2025, with proposed dates to be circulated by the secretariat via email.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm, *sine die*.

Talina Drabsch
Committee Clerk

Tuesday 12 August 2025
Animal Welfare Committee
Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney at 10.00 am

1. Members present

Ms Hurst, *Chair*
Mr Nanva, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Barrett (substituting for Mr Fang)
Mr Borsak
Mr Lawrence (via videoconference)
Mrs MacDonald
Mr Primrose
Ms Suvaal (via videoconference)

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Borsak: That draft minutes no. 15 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 2 April 2025 – Email from Claire Higgins, Senior Departmental Liaison Officer, Office of the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC to secretariat, providing information from Mr Emile Serhan about cat management
- 3 April 2025 – Email from Melissa Moyle to the Hon Peter Primrose MLC, providing information for committee about cat management
- 10 April 2025 – Letter from Mr Emile Serhan to committee, providing information about cat management
- 10 April 2025 – Email from Kate Blount to committee, providing information about cat management
- 11 April 2025 – Email from Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, regarding publication of papers and response to social media post by Invasive Species Council
- 14 April 2025 – Letter from Deborah Rouse to committee, regarding concerns about the hearing on 1 April
- 17 April 2025 – Email from Kat Allan to secretariat, providing information about relevant media

- 24 April 2025 – Email from Paul Bourne to committee, suggesting strategies for cat management
- 29 April 2025 – Email from Martin McNally to committee, providing copy of submission to the review of companion animal law
- 8 May 2025 – Email from Lisa Brittain, Operations Manager, Maggie's Rescue to Chair, raising concerns about BARC
- 28 May 2025 – Email from Emeritus Professor Jacquie Rand, Executive Director and Chief Scientist, Australian Pet Welfare Foundation to secretariat, regarding report by Biodiversity Council
- 26 July 2025 – Email from Sera Loko to committee, regarding concerns about RSPCA

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That the committee keep the correspondence from Sera Loko, regarding concerns about RSPCA, dated 26 July 2025, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying and sensitive information and potential adverse mention.

4. Inquiry into management of cat populations in New South Wales

4.1 Public submission

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 1251.

4.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice from Ms Jaana Dielenberg, Communication and Engagement Manager, Biodiversity Council, received 28 April 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Ms Rosalie Horton, Senior Coordinator Rehoming Centre, Blacktown City Council, received 29 April 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Office of Local Government, received 2 May 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from SAFE Rehoming, received 8 May 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Sentient, received 5 May 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Australian Veterinary Association, received 8 May 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Animal Welfare League, received 14 May 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Four Paws, received 14 May 2025.

The committee noted that the following correspondence relating to answers to questions on notice was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- correspondence from Richard Kingswood, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, advising of no further response, received 29 April 2025
- correspondence from Lisa Riordan, Community Helping Campbelltown Cats, providing addition information, received 2 May 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee authorise the publication of answers to questions on notice and the attachment from Westie Cat Support Services, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

4.3 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted her draft report entitled *Management of cat populations in New South Wales*, which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Chapter 1

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 1.16 be amended by omitting 'Animal Liberation highlighted that' and inserting instead 'Animal Liberation believed that'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 1.17 be omitted: 'WIRES categorised cats slightly differently, using the term, 'free-living cats' to describe those which 'live freely in and outside peri-urban areas, primarily away from and unconstrained by people and communities'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 1.18 be omitted:

'Other concerns regarding the use of 'feral' stemmed from its potentially pejorative undertones. Ms Louise Ward, Programs Lead, Four Paws Australia raised concerns that referring to some cats as 'feral' could potentially give 'a licence for a whole range of what we would describe as cruel practices, whether it's poisoning or trapping and killing'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 1.28 be amended by inserting at the end: 'However, owners would have responsibilities under their General Biosecurity Duty stated in the Biosecurity Act 2015'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Barrett moved: That the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted before paragraph 1.50:

'The committee agrees that cat management could be assisted by uniformity surrounding the terminology. As such, the committee feels NSW should align its terminology with the national *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024* produced by the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, divides cats into two groups - feral and pets.

Recommendation X

NSW should align its terminology with the national *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024* produced by the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, divides cats into two groups - feral and pets.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 2

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.36 be omitted: 'By contrast, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation highlighted the use of dated studies that 'extrapolated the proportion of native species that were killed—which is good—to all pet cats, whether they were contained inside or not'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.40 be omitted:

'However, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation was highly critical of the conclusions in oft-cited data on the impact of domestic cats on Australian wildlife, noting that it results in overestimates:

...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'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.44 be omitted:

'According to the Invasive Species Council, it is 'irrefutable' that wild cats impact wildlife. Evidence that the impact is lethal was provided by a number of witnesses:

- Research cited by RSPCA found that wild cats are estimated to be responsible for approximately 456 million individual native animal deaths each year (Murphy et al., 2019).
- The Centre for Ecosystem Science UNSW Sydney indicated that an analysis of the stomach contents of 270 cats in Sturt National Park, near Tibooburra in New South Wales, showed that wild cats consumed 'many native wildlife species including small reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals and nomadic birds that arrive in wet seasons'.
- The Biodiversity Council reported that deaths from the cat-borne disease, toxoplasmosis, have been observed in koalas, wombats, wallabies, possums, bandicoots and bilbies'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.45 be omitted:

'In contrast, Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association cautioned that the studies on the impact of wild cats on wildlife are limited. While there is a strong focus on predation estimates, there is less data on which prey wild cats are hunting compared with domestic or semi-owned

cats, and their real-life impact on wildlife populations. Dr Lee cited the example of a New Zealand study that used cameras on cats and found that cats were hunting insects and small reptiles, rather than animals or birds of greater conservation concern. Dr Lee maintained that more data is needed on which subcategories of cats are impacting which animal species and the nature of those impacts, in order to develop effective and targeted strategies'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 2.48 and 2.49 be omitted:

'However, the RSPCA observed that biodiversity impacts will vary according to location and that, in urban settings, introduced species may more likely fall prey to cats than native wildlife:

The impact of domestic cats on biodiversity also depends greatly on the cats' location. In highly urbanised settings, there is evidence that introduced species are more commonly hunted than native species. A Canberra survey of cat owners found that 75% of owned cats hunted, with 64% of prey being rodents, 14% native birds and 10% introduced birds and a few reptiles and frogs (Barratt, 1998). Cat predation on introduced black rats was shown to have a positive effect on tree-nesting birds in remnant bushland in metropolitan Sydney (Matthews et al., 1999). In urban locations, land clearing and other human activities have been found to have a greater impact on wildlife populations than predation by cats (Lilith et al., 2010; Lunney et al., 2007).

Four Paws Australia also claimed that the narrative that cats are a primary cause of biodiversity decline is incorrect, driven by limited reliable data, and overlooks other research that has shown that 85 per cent of animals preyed on by cats were introduced species. They also noted research that indicated cats may selectively prey on sick or old animals'.

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead: 'However, others such as RSPCA NSW and Four Paws Australia observed that biodiversity impacts were overstated and may vary according to location. [FOOTNOTE: Submission 16, RSPCA NSW, p 2; Submission 195, Four Paws Australia, pp 4-5].'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.50 be omitted:

'Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, recounted an instance of unintended consequences for biodiversity when cats were rapidly removed from an island off the coast of Australia:

There was an island on the south-east coast of Australia which the Federal Government wanted to try to eradicate cats from. They were going to spend \$3 million or \$4 million; it ended up costing tens of millions...They got rid of the cats and the rat population

surged and ate the birds anyway. So the birds they were trying to save died. If you strongly intervene and radically try to change an environment, it's going to rebalance in different ways.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.51 be omitted: 'As noted earlier in this chapter, a common theme in evidence was the need for comprehensive, long-term, well-designed, granular studies, including field studies, about the impacts of cats on native wildlife. Such calls were sometimes accompanied by concerns that cats were bearing a disproportionate amount of blame for biodiversity impacts. Many witnesses asserted that other factors (climate change, habitat destruction and fragmentation, clear-felling estates for housing, vehicle collisions, even dog attacks) presented a greater threat to native wildlife than cats' and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'As noted earlier in this chapter, animal rights organisations particularly emphasized the need for comprehensive, long-term, well-designed, granular studies—including field research—on the impacts of cats on native wildlife. However, their concerns should be critically examined, as they often reflect a bias in favour of cats. It is important to note that these organisations are not scientific, research, or expert ecological or wildlife management bodies. Their expressed worries that cats were being unfairly singled out and blamed disproportionately for biodiversity declines, while many of their witnesses argued that other factors such as climate change, habitat destruction and fragmentation, land clearing for housing, vehicle collisions, and even dog attacks posed greater threats to native wildlife than cats, must therefore be considered with some caution.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.52 be omitted: 'For example, WIRES gave evidence that biodiversity changes due to habitat destruction and fragmentation is the key driver of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. WIRES advised that a relatively small percentage of animals that came into care did so because of cats predating wildlife'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.53 be omitted: 'Further, the Animal Defenders Office submitted that the impacts of cats on biodiversity must be seen in the context of human-induced impacts on the environment, such as land clearing, deforestation and climate change.⁵⁶⁷ The Animal Defenders Office referenced the impact of the 2019–2020 bushfires in eastern Australia on an estimated three billion animals,

⁵⁶⁷ Submission 11, Animal Defenders Office, p 3.

highlighting that those bushfires 'brought "the most dramatic loss of habitat for threatened species and devastation of ecological communities in postcolonial history", and affected the habitat of 832 native animal species'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.54 be omitted:

'WIRES and the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation referred to statistics that demonstrated support for the claim that there were significantly greater threats to wildlife than that posed by cats:

- WIRES, which describes itself as the leading wildlife rescue organisation in Australia, shared that only three per cent of their calls regarding injured wildlife in the Greater Sydney area are related to harm from cats, and about half of those are from the larger Sydney metropolitan area.⁵⁶⁸
- The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation relayed statistics from the NSW Wildlife Rehabilitation Dashboard:

In 2022-23, when they last reported, of species that were threatened/endangered that needed rescuing, 484 were because of loss of suitable habitat, 310 for car accidents, 109 for collisions with windows, 98 from dog attacks and 37 from cat attacks.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.55 be omitted: 'The global animal welfare organisation, Four Paws, which conducts a range of community cat and sterilisation programs across Europe and Southeast Asia, argued that Australia vilified cats in ways not evident in other countries where they operate. While the organisation recognised that cats do impact native wildlife, they asserted that blaming cats for most species' extinctions ignores the 'primary threat' on native animals of deforestation and land clearing for agriculture and housing developments'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.56 be omitted: 'Four Paws Australia also cited a recent report by Greenpeace and the RSPCA Queensland which detailed the impacts of habitat destruction on native wildlife in Queensland and New South Wales. The report noted that a significant proportion of the 24,000 wildlife

⁵⁶⁸ Evidence, Dr Colin Salter, Policy Lead, Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service, 16 December 2024, p 22.

patients admitted each year to the wildlife hospital 'are as a result of the long-term and ongoing effects of habitat destruction and fragmentation'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That Finding 1 be omitted: 'There is an urgent need to implement cat management strategies in New South Wales to address the overpopulation of cats in New South Wales, both in urban environments and in the wild' and the following new finding be inserted:

'Finding 1

There is an urgent need to prioritise cat management strategies in New South Wales, with control efforts guided by the severity of impact cat predation has on native wildlife—particularly species listed as endangered, vulnerable, or otherwise at risk. Effective intervention is critical across both urban and wild environments, where unchecked cat populations continue to pose a significant threat to biodiversity and conservation outcomes'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 2.60 be amended by inserting 'cat welfare focused' before 'witnesses pointing to significant limitations in the available data'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 2.61 be amended by omitting: 'Some stakeholders were concerned that data that fails to differentiate between the impacts of different cat populations, and across different types of environments, is being used to inform conclusions about predation tolls, and establish a causal link between cats and species extinctions. To this end'.

Question put and negated.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 2.63 and 2.64 be omitted:

'Evidence from the Government's Wildlife Rehabilitation Data Dashboard shows that the principal reason threatened and endangered animals required rescuing in 2022–2023 was loss of suitable habitat, followed by car accidents, collisions with windows, dog attacks and then, cat attacks. The lower incidence of cat attacks is consistent with evidence from the leading wildlife rescue organisation WIRES, who reported that only three per cent of calls regarding injured wildlife in the Greater Sydney area are related to harm from cats.

The committee also accepts the claims of many inquiry participants that the destruction of habitat and the fragmentation caused by deforestation and land clearing have greater impacts on wildlife and biodiversity than predation by cats. This accords with the evidence given by WIRES that asserted that the main driver of rescue and rehabilitation is biodiversity changes due to habitat destruction and fragmentation'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 2.65 be omitted: 'The committee also notes that the Biodiversity Council reported that the most effective strategy for maintaining native animal populations in the landscape was improved habitat. Areas that had more complex, higher quality habitat had less cats and healthier populations, and a bigger variety of native mammals.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That Finding 2 be omitted: 'The key threat to wildlife in New South Wales is habitat destruction and fragmentation, caused primarily by deforestation and land clearing. Despite this, cat management strategies are still needed' and the following new finding be inserted:

'Finding 2

While some organisations seek to question the scale of threat to wildlife in NSW posed by cats, the committee agrees that cats form 'a persistent, ongoing, and critical threat to native wildlife and ecosystems' and furthermore, there was universal agreement cat management strategies are urgently needed' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 94, NSW Government, p 13].

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 2 be omitted 'The key threat to wildlife in New South Wales is habitat destruction and fragmentation, caused primarily by deforestation and land clearing. Despite this, cat management strategies are still needed' and the following new finding be inserted:

'Finding 2

Key threats to wildlife in New South Wales include not only introduced species, but also habitat destruction and fragmentation, and a holistic approach to native animals is required'.

Question put and passed.

Chapter 3

Mr Borsak moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 3.49:

'However, it must be noted that the cost of desexing a single cat has been estimated at \$7,500. This is a hugely significant figure when taken into context of the millions of cats—domestic, semi-domestic, and wild—across the state. For example, desexing just 200,000 cats would amount to an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion, highlighting the immense financial challenge involved in large-scale cat management efforts. One also needs to consider the humaneness and practicality of such activities on a large scale. The fact remains even a desexed feral cat will account for the death of thousands of native species'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.50 be omitted:

'When asked what proportion of an area's semi-owned or unowned cat population would need to be sterilised to reduce the wildlife impact, Dr Gemma Ma of RSPCA NSW explained that regional areas require a more intensive approach those urban locations:

Generally, it is recommended you desex about 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the population in the area to start to control the population. We are noticing that we need to do a much higher intervention intensity in regional areas than we do in urban areas because we have to account for that migration into the population from the bush. We need to desex about 50 cats per 1,000 population out in places like Walgett and Weddin compared to doing one to five cats per 1,000 population in the urban areas. The migration into the area really stuffs up your intervention because it means you have to desex a whole lot more cats and it's less effective'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.74 be amended by omitting 'Four Paws Australia, who argued that' and inserting instead 'Four Paws Australia, who asserted that.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.90 be amended by inserting at the end: 'Many stakeholders acknowledged that managing wild/feral cats requires a different approach than domestic cats, whether owned, semi-owned, or unowned.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 3.101:

'However, noting that conservation fencing costs approximately \$50,000 per kilometre, it is obviously fiscally impossible to implement this approach across the entirety of the estate and for all species and communities requiring protection from feral cats. This does not count the ongoing cost of scrutiny and maintenance of these fences'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.102 be omitted: 'The threat of wild cats is identified as a management priority for 38 threatened entities under the 'Saving our Species' program established by the NSW Government.⁵⁶⁹ Wild cats are managed under the program by removing them from those sites where they directly impact species and ecosystems. Various control methods are used, including trapping, shooting, baiting, Felixer cat grooming trap trials and detection dogs' and for the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'The threat of wild cats is identified as a management priority for 38 threatened entities under the 'Saving our Species' program established by the NSW Government.³⁴¹ On-going attempts to manage feral cats is undertaken in the program with varying success by removing them from those sites where they directly impact species and ecosystems. Various control methods are used, including trapping, shooting, baiting, Felixer cat grooming trap trials and detection dogs'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.103 be amended by omitting 'Whether lethal strategies should be used to control the wild cat population was passionately contested by some inquiry participants.' and inserting instead 'Whether lethal strategies should be used to control the wild cat population was passionately contested by the inquiry participants from the animal rights sector'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the Government ensure that cat management programs are underpinned by sound evidence, and that appropriate objectives and metrics are set to evaluate their effectiveness' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 1

That the Government ensure cat management programs are underpinned by sound, peer-reviewed scientific evidence, with clear objectives and measurable metrics established to evaluate their effectiveness'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.123 be amended by omitting 'the most effective way to reduce' and inserting instead 'an effective way to reduce'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

⁵⁶⁹ Submission 94, NSW Government, p 15.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.127 be amended by omitting 'as the main cat management policy. It is the only approach that has been proven to work and' after 'The committee agrees with RSPCA NSW and the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation that targeted desexing programs should be implemented and funded'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.127 be amended by inserting at the end 'such programs should be one of a suite of measures employed, prioritised where they can have the greatest impact.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That Finding 3 be omitted: 'Desexing programs were broadly supported by the large majority of inquiry participants, and have been proven to be an effective cat management strategy' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Desexing programs were broadly supported by the large majority of inquiry participants and have been proved to be an effective cat management strategy. However, the cost of implementing desexing programs across the entirety of New South Wales is prohibitive and impractical, other strategies are essential.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That Recommendation 2 be omitted:

'That the Government provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out free and subsidised desexing programs throughout the state, including desexing of 'owned' cats for those on lower incomes, and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Government encourage councils to take responsibility for managing cats within their local areas and assist with the implementation of desexing programs, including desexing of 'owned' cats for low-income households and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing initiatives.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 2 be amended by omitting 'and large-scale, targeted community cat desexing programs' after 'That the Government provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out free and subsidised desexing programs through the state, including desexing of 'owned' cats for those on lower incomes'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That the following new recommendation be inserted after Recommendation 3 or before paragraph 3.129:

'Recommendation X

To assist rural and regional councils with desexing programs, the NSW Government should investigate ways to provide additional support including but not limited to encouraging metropolitan veterinarians and mobile desexing programs to regularly visit rural and regional areas, providing this does not have a negative impact on local service providers.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.128 and Recommendation 3 be omitted:

'In order to support the operation of these large scale, targeted desexing programs, we will need to expand the state's capacity for high-volume desexing through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices. The committee accordingly recommends that the Government expand the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.'

Recommendation 3

That the Government expand the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.'

and the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted instead:

'In order to support the operation of large-scale, targeted desexing programs, it is necessary to expand the state's capacity for high-volume desexing through animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices. The committee accordingly recommends that the Government investigate expanding the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through these channels.'

Recommendation 3

That the Government investigate expanding the capacity for high-volume desexing in New South Wales through government animal welfare agencies, veterinary schools, and private veterinary practices.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.129 be amended by omitting the words 'The committee notes committee notes evidence received from organisations such as RSPCA and the Cat Protection Society that the current registration requirements, including that cats be registered to an individual, can be a barrier to community cat desexing programs.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That Recommendation 4 be amended by omitting 'operation of community cat desexing programs' and inserting instead 'operation of cat desexing programs'.

Question put and negatived.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 3.130 and 3.131 be omitted:

'There were strong opinions about the efficacy of trap, neuter and return programs. Nonetheless, the committee accepts that its use will at the very least help slow the growth of the current cat population. While the committee acknowledges concerns around the 'return' part of these programs, it is clear that these cats are not randomly released, but are returned with provision of some form of continued care available.'

'The committee does not support the 'abandonment' of any animal. However, the committee accepts the evidence of organisations such as WIRES and Four Paws that many of these programs involve the ongoing care of cats, often with the goal of transitioning cats from 'semi-owned' to 'owned', and therefore would not be a form of abandonment. The committee believes it is important the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* is clarified to remove any ambiguity and make it clear that these programs are legal.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.132 be amended by inserting at the end 'in rescue and rehoming'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That Recommendation 5 be omitted: 'That the Government provide funding to cat rescue and rehoming organisations to support desexing, care and rehoming costs' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead 'That the government encourage local councils to provide funding to cat rescue and rehoming organisations to support desexing, care and rehoming costs.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.135 and Recommendation 7 be omitted:

'It is abundantly clear that there is already an oversupply of cats in New South Wales. Unfortunately, this results in the euthanasia of healthy cats as homes are unable to be found and pounds and rehoming shelters are stretched beyond limit. In order to encourage the rehoming of as many of these cats as possible, and reduce the number of cats being dumped and ending up being euthanised in pounds, the committee recommends that the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming and the sale of cats from breeders in pet shops.'

Recommendation 7

'That the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming and the sale of cats from breeders in pet shops.'

and the following new paragraph and Recommendation 7 be inserted:

'It is clear that there is already an over abundance of cats in New South Wales. Unfortunately, this results in the euthanasia of healthy cats as homes are unable to be found and pounds and rehoming shelters are stretched beyond limit. In order to encourage the rehoming of as many of these cats as possible, and reduce the number of cats being dumped and ending up being euthanised in pounds, the committee

recommends that the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming.

Recommendation 7

That the Government explore legislative options to regulate the breeding of cats, including consideration of outlawing kitten farming.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That:

a) paragraph 3.136 be amended by omitting:

'including those relating to: providing funding for large scale targeted desexing programs; allowing the registration of community cats to organisations; the legalisation of trap, neuter and return programs; providing support to lower income earners with companion animals; allowing animals in rentals; removing annual permit fees for undesexed cats; reviewing pet registry fees; and providing funding for rescues'

b) Recommendation 8 be amended by omitting:

- 'review the need for reforms to ensure that community cats do not have to be microchipped and registered to an individual, and can be microchipped and registered to an organisation'
- 'seek to amend the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* to clarify that Trap Neuter Return programs are legal'
- 'remove the 'annual permit fee' for undesexed cats over four months old, to remove this barrier to adopting, microchipping and registering community cats'
- 'review the fees and processes associated with the companion animal registration framework, with a view to reduce costs'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Borsak moved: That paragraph 3.136 and recommendation 8 be amended by omitting:

'A number of the issues examined in this inquiry overlap with those that were considered in detail by Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Services as part of its inquiry into pounds in New South Wales. That committee made a number of recommendations that, if implemented by the Government, would also assist the intent of the outcomes of this inquiry regarding the effective management of cat populations in New South Wales. To that end, the committee recommends that the Government implement relevant recommendations set out in the pound inquiry report, including those relating to: providing funding for large scale targeted desexing programs; allowing the registration of community cats to organisations; the legalisation of trap, neuter and return programs; providing support to lower income earners with companion animals; allowing animals in rentals; removing annual permit fees for undesexed cats; reviewing pet registry fees; and providing funding for rescues.'

Recommendation 8

That the Government implement relevant recommendations set out in the Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Services report for the inquiry into pounds in New South Wales, including that the Government:

- provide grants to councils and rescue and rehoming organisations to carry out large scale targeted desexing programs across the state, including community cat desexing programs, with a specific focus on disadvantaged communities and areas with large homeless cat populations
- review the need for reforms to ensure that community cats do not have to be microchipped and registered to an individual, and can be microchipped and registered to an organisation
- seek to amend the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* to clarify that Trap Neuter Return programs are legal
- further investigate the need to provide lower income earners with companion animals specific funding support, with a focus on the evidence linking financial hardship to the surrendering of companion animals in pounds, and make funding available to assist lower income earners to pay for:
 - microchipping and registration fees
 - food
 - behavioural training
 - impoundment fees
 - secure containment
 - veterinary services, including desexing
- urgently introduce legislation to ensure tenants can rent with animals and to ensure these laws place the onus on the landlord to apply to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal if they want to refuse an animal
- remove the 'annual permit fee' for undesexed cats over four months old, to remove this barrier to adopting, microchipping and registering community cats
- review the fees and processes associated with the companion animal registration framework, with a view to reduce costs
- provide ongoing grant funding to rescue and rehoming organisations.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 3.138 be amended by omitting 'The effectiveness of lethal methods is limited in addition to raising significant concerns about animal welfare. We are convinced by evidence that the use of 1080 poison in baits is cruel and inhumane'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak, Mr Barrett, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Primrose, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Borsak moved: That Recommendation 9 be omitted: 'That the Government invest in research and trials for humane means of fertility control, such as immune-contraceptives and gene drive technology' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 9

That the Government should not invest in research and trials for humane means of fertility control, such as immune-contraceptives and gene drive technology'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 4

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.35 be omitted: 'Another concern was the potential negative impact on certain First Nations communities where containment conflicts with 'cultural practices that regard cats as semi-owned, potentially disrupting traditional relationships with animals and creating barriers to cultural expression'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Lawrence, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That:

- a) paragraph 4.67 be amended by omitting 'As a result, cat containment policies' and inserting instead 'Some argued cat containment policies'.
- b) Paragraphs 4.68 to 4.73 be deleted:

'Of particular concern to many stakeholders was the potential impact of mandatory cat containment laws on pounds and shelters due to the increase in the number of surrendered and abandoned cats. Dr Rosemary Elliott, President, Sentient Australia described the mandated cat containment approach in Victoria, as 'a disaster'. She drew attention to the impact of such policies in the middle of a 'cost-of-living crisis', resulting in people abandoning or surrendering their cat when threatened with a fine. Dr Elliott described how this has caused the impoundment rate to substantially increase in Victoria as a result.

Multiple stakeholders raised concerns that most pounds and rehoming facilities do not have the ability to take in any more cats. Local Government NSW stressed that many council facilities are already at capacity. They described the situation of one council which was 'at capacity within four months of opening an expanded facility, with the wait list for surrenders at six months or longer'. They warned that current funding through companion animal registration council budgets is inadequate for managing additional cats.

The specific issues regarding pounds were considered by Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service as part of their inquiry into pounds in New South Wales. That committee found that this state is facing an animal homing crisis, with pounds and rescues severely underfunded and over capacity.

Four Paws Australia cautioned that mandatory containment laws would 'exacerbate this crisis by increasing the strain on an already overwhelmed pound system', resulting in greater euthanasia rates and 'further overwhelming the system'.

RSPCA NSW were similarly apprehensive that mandatory cat containment measures are 'likely to lead to increased abandonment of cats, increased numbers or requests for surrenders, lower rates of adoption and higher euthanasia rates'. They highlighted that many councils already refuse cat surrenders due to pressure to reduce euthanasia and the cost of pounds. They warned that 'such behaviour will continue, leading to more cats being abandoned and contributing to growing populations of unowned domestic cats and/or

increased pressure on animal welfare organisations and rescue organisations'. RSPCA NSW stressed that the trapping, culling or impounding of uncontained cats is an 'unacceptable, inhumane and ineffective' method for managing them.

Local Government NSW acknowledged that the introduction of mandatory cat containment is likely to result in greater demand for cat-holding facilities in the short to medium term. As a result, they stressed that 'Effort must be focused on helping owners to keep their cats contained in the first place rather than on capturing/processing roaming cats.'

Question put and negatived.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 4.77 and 4.78 be omitted:

'Australian Pet Welfare Foundation described how many workers who are involved in 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'.

The Australian Veterinary Association was similarly concerned about the impact on workers, noting an increase in the euthanasia of healthy cats is 'likely to negatively impact the mental health of council workers and veterinary teams, and be unacceptable to the community'. As a result, they warned that some councils may not accept surrendered cats, leading to an increase in abandonment rates and contributing to unowned cat populations.'

Question put and negatived.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 4.82 and 4.83 be omitted:

'Both RSPCA NSW and the Australian Veterinary Association concluded that New South Wales is not ready for mandatory cat containment at the moment.⁵⁷⁰ Troy Wilkie, RSPCA NSW, gave evidence about the impacts if mandatory cat containment laws were introduced now:

If [cat containment] was brought in immediately—for example, from tomorrow we have cat containment—and the councils were proactive in implementing and policing those laws, you'd be looking at hundreds of thousands of cats being euthanised within a couple of months because there are so many cats that are passively owned. For a person on a low income, if a cat starts coming by, you start feeding it regularly and you've got a bit of a connection with the cat—getting registration, desexing and a health check at retail rates at a vet, you're looking at 700 or 800 bucks. If you're on minimum wage, you just can't not pay rent and not eat that week, so this is not going to happen. It's an insurmountable barrier for that person to take on all of those costs and all of that pressure to do what they intrinsically want to do. Rather than the opposite of policing and enforcing that method, which will create bad outcomes, encouraging and teaching people that they can access subsidised or free desexing and getting the registration done—then they can have that cat, make it theirs, build that connection to the cat so that they want to protect it from cars and other problems in the community—will also protect the environment.

Nonetheless, some of these other strategies, including comprehensive desexing programs, responsible ownership education, and trap, neuter, and return initiatives, as outlined in Chapter 3, may be more effective'.

Question put and negatived.

⁵⁷⁰ Evidence, Mr Troy Wilkie, Senior Government Relations Manager, RSPCA NSW, 16 December 2024, p 15; Evidence, Dr Amy Lee, NSW Division President, Australian Veterinary Association, 1 April 2025, p 24.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.135 be amended by omitting 'There can be benefits to voluntary cat containment' and inserting instead 'There can be benefits to cat containment'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.137 be amended by omitting 'Behavioural change programs can educate communities about the benefits of cat containment and encourage cat owners to adopt responsible pet ownership behaviours. The success of such programs as 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' demonstrate that positive outcomes can be achieved through a non-punitive approach'.

Question put and negated.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 4.138, 4.139 and Finding 6 be omitted:

'While most stakeholders were generally in favour of cat containment, whether New South Wales should adopt any form of punitive, mandatory cat containment or cat curfew laws (either at a state or council level) was a matter of fierce debate.

The committee received a great deal of evidence about how mandatory containment laws and cat curfews at either at a state or local government level are ineffective, particularly when it comes to dealing with the large number of semi-owned and unowned cats who do not have a 'home' in which to be contained. There is no research or evidence to suggest that punitive mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews are effective at reducing the number of free-roaming cats and, given they may not reduce the number of free-roaming cats, there is no evidence that mandatory laws would reduce the impact of cats on native wildlife.

Finding 6

There is insufficient evidence that mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews at a state or local government level are effective in reducing the number of free-roaming cats and therefore reducing impacts on wildlife'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question put and negated.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Finding 6 be omitted: 'There is insufficient evidence that mandatory cat containment laws or cat curfews at a state or local government level are effective in reducing the number of free-roaming cats and therefore reducing impacts on wildlife' and the new following finding be inserted instead:

'Finding 6

Mandatory cat containment, supported by education, enforcement, desexing and pet registration, is best practice when it comes to reducing the impact of roaming pet cats on native wildlife'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That:

- a) paragraph 4.140 be omitted: 'In addition to concerns about the ineffectiveness of mandatory cat containment and cat curfew laws, the committee received evidence about a significant number of counter-productive outcomes associated with mandatory cat containment.'
- b) paragraph 4.142 and Finding 7 be omitted:

'Further, many inquiry participants identified the considerable equity issues presented by a punitive mandatory cat containment law or policy (whether 24 hour containment or a curfew). The committee is concerned about the potential impact of such laws or policies on disadvantaged communities, including lower socio-economic households, who may be unable to afford to contain their cats in a manner that supports their welfare. Cat containment requirements may also present difficulties for those in rental properties where the rental agreement precludes them from keeping a cat indoors or from adapting the property to allow the use of enclosures. The committee was also concerned by evidence that cat containment requirements are likely to have a negative impact on some First Nations communities and raises concerns about the potential over-policing of these communities as a result. We recognise these issues are likely to arise with either state or local government cat containment laws.

Finding 7

Mandatory cat containment laws are likely to create equity issues and have a disproportionate impact on people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and First Nations communities.'

Question put and negated.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Finding 7 be omitted: 'Mandatory cat containment laws are likely to create equity issues and have a disproportionate impact on people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and First Nations communities' and inserting instead the following new recommendation:

'Finding 7

Care should be taken to ensure that the progressive introduction of pet cat containment laws does not create inequities or have a disproportionate impact on people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and first nations communities'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.143 be amended by omitting 'is likely to result in significant resourcing' and inserting instead 'may result in significant resourcing'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.143 be amended by omitting 'Mandatory cat containment laws and policies will result in more cats being seized and impounded, when cats are found to be roaming in breach of these laws'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.144 be amended by omitting 'In addition, having large numbers of impounded or seized cats will likely result in an increase in euthanasia rates, as has been the experience in other jurisdictions where cat containment laws have been introduced. This is not only a poor animal welfare outcome, but also results in additional costs for councils who are struggling.' and inserting instead 'In addition, having large numbers of impounded or seized cats may result in an increase in euthanasia rates. This would not only be a poor animal welfare outcome, but also results in additional costs for councils who are struggling.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 4.146 be omitted: 'Ultimately, the committee is not convinced of the value of investing in a mandatory containment policy at either a state or council level at this stage given evidence received that containment will not be effective and is likely to have counter-productive outcomes. The committee notes that some jurisdictions have stepped back from mandatory cat containment policies for this reason. It is noteworthy that the Government itself has recognised that semi-owned and unowned cats make mandatory cat containment problematic and ineffective at resolving the challenges of free-roaming cats and their impacts on wildlife'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mr Borsak, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraphs 4.147, 4.148 and Finding 9 be omitted:

'The committee notes that the state is facing a pound crisis, a cost of living crisis, a vet shortage crisis, council funding challenges and ongoing barriers to keeping animals in rentals, all of which would be exacerbated and become more challenging if the Government, or local governments were to introduce mandatory cat containment laws. The committee recognises that each of these challenges must be addressed, and appropriate supports for lower socio-economic and vulnerable groups must be put in place, before mandatory cat containment laws can be considered. These challenges exist regardless of whether cat containment laws are introduced at a state-wide level, or on a council-by-council basis. Further to this, the committee accepts the evidence of RSPCA NSW that having different cat containment policies in different council areas will create practical enforcement issues.

On that basis the committee finds that New South Wales is currently not in a position to adopt state-wide or council-level mandatory cat containment laws.

Finding 9

New South Wales is currently not in a position to adopt mandatory cat containment laws, whether these laws are statewide or at a local government level.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Barrett, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Borsak, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That

- a. paragraph 4.148 be amended by omitting 'On that basis the committee finds that' and inserting instead 'On that basis the committee is concerned that'
- b. paragraph 4.148 be amended by omitting 'New South Wales is currently not in a position' and inserting instead 'New South Wales may not be ready'
- c. Finding 9 be amended by omitting 'New South Wales is currently not in a position' and inserting instead 'New South Wales may not be ready'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Barrett moved: That paragraph 1.149 be omitted: 'In light of the above, the committee believes it would be premature to introduce any form of mandatory cat containment laws at this time, given education and behaviour change programs such as 'Keeping Cats Safe at Home' have proven to be effective but have so far only been rolled out on a small scale. To see the full benefit of these programs in promoting voluntary cat containment, a broader roll-out of these types of education and behaviour change programs is required'.

Question put and negatived.

Mr Primrose moved: That paragraph 4.151 be omitted: 'The committee therefore recommends that the Government:

- should not, at this stage, consider changing the law to allow state-wide or council-level mandatory cat containment
- instead should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained.'

and the following be inserted instead:

'The committee therefore recommends that the Government:

- notes a desire from a number of councils to have greater regulatory options regarding containment to better address community concerns in their local area, but also notes the inherent risks of the increased impoundment of cats and other concerns related to mandatory cat containment.
- should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 10 be omitted: 'That the Government should not, at this stage, consider changing the law to allow state-wide or council-level mandatory cat containment'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak, Mr Barrett, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Ms Hurst.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 10 be omitted: 'That the Government and councils should adopt a One Health/One Welfare approach to cat management' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Finding 10

NSW Government and councils should manage cats in a way that supports the health and wellbeing of people, animals, and the environment'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Borsak moved: That Recommendation 11 be omitted: 'That the Government should explore options to work with councils and rehoming organisations to fund educational, behaviour-change programs and other support programs (such as the provision of cat enclosures) to encourage people to keep cats indoors or contained' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 11

That the Government encourage councils and rehoming organisations to implement educational and behaviour-change programs, along with support initiatives (such as providing cat enclosures), to promote keeping cats indoors or contained'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Borsak.

Noes: Mr Barrett, Ms Hurst, Mr Lawrence, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Nanva, Mr Primrose, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That:

The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;

Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions be kept confidential by the committee;

Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions related to the inquiry be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;

The secretariat is tabling the report on Monday 18 August 2025;

The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

Question put and passed.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 1.05 pm, *sine die*.

Alice Wood
Committee Clerk

Appendix 4 Dissenting statements

Hon Emma Hurst MLC, Animal Justice Party

As Chair of this Inquiry, it is disappointing and frustrating to have to write a dissent to this Inquiry Report.

This Inquiry did important work in examining the contested issues surrounding cat management in NSW. Overall, I believe our Inquiry Report has made strong findings and recommendations - backed by the best science and evidence – that can act as a blueprint for the NSW Government on how to humanely take action to reduce the number of homeless cats, and ensure the best outcomes for humans, animals and the environment.

Unfortunately, parts of this Inquiry Report have been watered down and distorted by amendments from the Shooters Party, passed with the support of the NSW Labor Government.

For example, they voted to delete evidence from peak organisations such as the Australian Veterinary Association, Four Paws, WIRES, the Animal Defenders Office and the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation regarding the limitations of scientific evidence and research regarding the impacts of cats on wildlife. This included, for example, evidence from WIRES that only three per cent of calls regarding injured wildlife in the Greater Sydney area are related to harm from cats. As a result, parts of this report are now unbalanced - they do not reflect the genuine evidence heard at this Inquiry, and perpetuate the false narrative that cats are the primary cause of biodiversity loss when clearly the primary causes are habitat loss caused by deforestation and climate change.

The majority of the committee also voted to remove important evidence about concerns associated with the use of the term ‘feral’, again contributing to a dangerous narrative regarding cats and that creates confusion for the extensive research into how to best approach different cat populations.

The Shooters Party also voted to remove a section highlighting the cruelty of 1080 poison, turning their back on their political party’s previous opposition to 1080 which I am certain will cause concern for many of their members who oppose this cruel killing method.

I was disappointed that the majority of committee members voted to remove aspects of the Inquiry Report related to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR programs have proven around the world to be effective in reducing homeless cat populations and were supported by a broad range of stakeholders. TNR programs often include the adoption of cats taken off the streets, and always provide for ongoing care to cats who are not able to be adopted. Therefore, the law should be clarified to remove any ambiguity, and ensure these programs can operate effectively as a cat management strategy.

I was also disappointed that the committee chose to omit my proposed recommendation which reiterated the key recommendations of the Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service Inquiry into Pounds, given the significant overlap between the work of these two Inquiries. I encourage anyone reading this Inquiry Report to also have reference to the Pound Inquiry Report.

The key takeaway from this Inquiry was that – despite strong views from some stakeholders - NSW is not ready for mandatory cat containment laws. The evidence simply does not support mandatory containment as an effective cat management strategy. We received significant evidence that mandatory

cat containment laws are ineffective at reducing the number of free-roaming cats – and therefore, ineffective at reducing any impacts of cats on wildlife – and would have significant negative unintended consequences, particularly for vulnerable sections of the community. I strongly caution the NSW Government against bowing to pressure to adopt punitive and ineffective mandatory cat containment laws as a short-sighted solution to the complex cat management challenges our state is facing.

Hon Scott Barrett MLC, The Nationals

While in deliberation of this report, I disagreed strongly with much of the evidence that was presented and subsequently included. However, as these were generally presented in a way that made it clear this was the opinion of one group or another, for balance, I supported leaving this evidence in the report. I must stress this is not a sign that I supported what was said or the organisations that made these claims, just supported not removing this evidence.

In terms of terminology, the committee missed an opportunity to provide clarity in NSW around the different classes or groups of cats. It is acknowledged in the report that “Different groups often use different terminology when referring to sub-groups of cats, which can cause confusion.” To help clear up this confusion, NSW should consider aligning with the national *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*, produced by the federal Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, which divides cats into two groups - feral and pets.

Parts of the report seek to diminish the impact of feral cats by comparing their impact to other factors. While I readily acknowledge things like habitat destruction and land clearing re having hugely negative impacts on our native fauna, this should never be used as an excuse to minimise efforts or fail to take steps to eliminate feral cat populations. I agree a holistic approach needs to be take when protecting our native animals, but this was a report into cat management and that’s where the focus should have been.

Perhaps most disappointingly in the report was the lack of support in indicated for mandating cat containment. This is clearly an option that should be strongly considered by Government and was strongly supported by several witnesses.

We should absolutely be looking at mandatory cat containment, through giving the councils to adopt such measures under relevant legislation. To not see stronger support for this is upsetting for many of those who gave evidence that such steps would go a long way to help councils manage the impact by cats as well as provide clear clarity about people’s responsibilities when to comes to managing their domestic cats, often underestimated by cat owners.

