



Committee Secretariat  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## **Submission: Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia**

This submission has been prepared by the national submissions working group within the Animal Justice Party ('the AJP'). The working group makes this submission on behalf of the AJP with the approval and the endorsement of the Board of Directors. The AJP was established to promote and protect the interests and capabilities of animals by providing a dedicated voice for them in Australia's political system, whether they are domestic, farmed or wild. The AJP seeks to restore the balance between humans, animals and nature, acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of all species, and respect the wellbeing of animals and the environment alongside that of humans and human societies. The AJP advocates for all animals and the natural environment through our political and democratic institutions of government. Above all, the AJP seeks to foster consideration, respect, kindness and compassion for all species as core values in the way in which governments design and deliver initiatives and the manner in which they function. The following submission is underpinned by these fundamental beliefs.

The AJP has policies on *Companion Animals* and *Introduced Animals*. This submission puts forward commentary in line with these policies.

## THE SUBMISSION

The AJP acknowledges that non-native animal species, introduced to Australia by people for varying activities, are modifying the environment, competing with native species and contributing to biodiversity loss and ecosystem decline. These activities include shooting, hunting and fishing (*e.g.* rabbits, foxes, deer, European carp), animal agriculture (*e.g.* sheep, cows, pigs, goats), biocontrol (*e.g.* cane toads) and the use of animals for labour and companionship (*e.g.* horses, donkeys, camels, dogs, cats).

Various non-native species have either escaped, been lost or abandoned, or are permitted to free-roam by humans; some individuals and species have survived and are now free-living in the Australian environment. People are responsible for the impact of these non-native species through poor decision making and accountability, lack of appreciation of actions and disregard for native species and the environment.

While we need to address the impacts of non-native species on Australia's biodiversity, we must not shift the blame by vilifying the non-native species. Australia's Biodiversity Emergency is driven by exploitation, habitat loss (land-use change), pollution, climate damage and non-native species<sup>1</sup>, and these drivers are all in turn driven by human activities and choices.

The AJP holds the position that the treatment of all animals, regardless of their origin, should be humane. This submission addresses 16 key points and recommendations related to the issue of cats in Australia.

### Summary of Recommendations:

1. Refer to non-domesticated cats as "free-living" rather than "feral".
2. Acknowledge sentience and intrinsic right to life of cats regardless of their relationship to humans.
3. Acknowledge the conflation of categories of cats and reject the killing of cats based on their location, category of existence, social connection to humans, or any other factor.
4. Reject all policy based on approximate population estimates, and conduct new surveys of total cat numbers in Australia.

---

1

<https://ipbes.net/models-drivers-biodiversity-ecosystem-change>

5. Reject all over-arching policy based on approximate population density estimates.
6. Acknowledge lack of solid evidence of the direct impact of cats on all Australian wildlife.
7. Native habitat and species conservation in Australia must be addressed holistically, with research and policy focusing on the five drivers of Biodiversity Loss and the causes and impact of widespread habitat loss – not on killing non-native animals.
8. Future research and policy surrounding cat population control should focus on non-lethal methods.
9. Future public awareness and education campaigns must recognise the cruelty caused by derogatory portrayal of cats in the media
10. Future public awareness and education campaigns should focus on the sentience and individual worth of cats in order to foster compassionate wildlife conservation techniques
11. Public awareness and education should be sensitive to all opinions of cats and, at the very least, must be tailored to individual community types – inner-city, suburb, regional, rural, and remote
12. A move toward societal acceptance that the onus is on humans to minimise the impact of cats' predation on wildlife, by minimising the number of cats that exist across all Australian environments
13. Domestic cats should not be bred or sold commercially without robust regulation; pet shops and the in-person and online sales of cats should be regulated to ensure that only desexed and microchipped shelter/rescue animals are sold at prices that only cover the cost of the cats' care, so that breeding cats is a non-profitable activity
14. Australia should begin research into TNR and TDARS adapted to the challenges and conditions unique to Australian landscapes, with particular focus on their efficacy of reducing wildlife predation by cats
15. Funding and media focus should be on the research, development and promotion of fertility control (*e.g.* immunocontraceptives) as a viable but understudied method of humane cat population control
16. Create and promote community and media campaigns that encourage creative, kind ways to keep cats as companion animals and limit cat breeding to minimise predation of native animals
17. Develop and use public consultation strategies that are reasonable, fair, appropriate and demonstrate that community opinion and input is valued and respected

## **The prevalence of “feral” and domestic cats in Australia**

### **1. The AJP rejects the labelling of any cats as “feral”.**

Declaring some populations of cats as “feral” is dangerous for all cats. Deprecating language such as “feral” or “pest” takes away from the sentience of large populations of cats and their intrinsic value as individual animals. Devaluing animals and their sentience through language often precedes their slaughter, in the same way dehumanising language often precedes genocide<sup>2</sup>. The use of labels such as “pest” or “feral” is used to vilify and justify the killing of cats. In some states and territories (SA, Queensland and NT), “feral” cats have been listed as a pest species under relevant biosecurity or natural resource management legislation. In Tasmania, “feral” cats are declared an invasive species under the Cat Management Act 2009 (Tasmanian Government 2009), which allows landholders to undertake control measures<sup>3</sup>. In 2017, the Threatened Species Commissioner “declared war” on Australia’s “feral” cats and vowed to wipe out 2 million “feral” cats – providing \$5 million to community groups to serve as active participants in the killing<sup>4</sup>.

**Recommendation:** Refer to non-domesticated cats as “free-living” rather than “feral”.

### **2. All cats have the same right to life, and protection from harm, regardless of their relationship to humans.**

All cats, whether “owned”, “semi-owned”, or “unowned” (the three categories outlined by the RSPCA), are the same species (*Felis catus*)<sup>5</sup>. All cats, as sentient animals, hold the same intrinsic value and right to a life of freedom, and free from harm

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://theconversation.com/theres-a-dark-political-history-to-language-that-strips-people-of-their-dignity-121234>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.rspca.org.au/sites/default/files/website/cat-management-paper/Identifying%20Best%20Practice%20Cat%20Management%20in%20Australia%20-%20Public%20Consultation%20Draft%2005-17.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/national/war-on-“feral”-cats-australia-aims-to-cull-2-million-20170214-gucp4o.html>

<sup>5</sup>

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

**Recommendation:** Acknowledge sentience and intrinsic right to life of cats regardless of their relationship to humans.

**3. Indiscriminate killing is unavoidable as conflation of categories of cats is common, and some cats fall outside of common definitions.**

As defined by the RSPCA<sup>6</sup>, owned cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person, are directly dependent on humans, and are usually sociable although sociability varies. Semi-owned cats are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider they own them, and are of varying sociability, and may be associated with one or more households; Unowned cats are indirectly dependent on humans with some having casual and temporary interactions with humans, and are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and may live in groups. Conflation of defined groups of cats is common from a personal and societal perspective, with individuals and groups placing individual cats in their own individual-determined categories, *e.g.* stray, “feral”, alley-cat, pet, domestic stray, unowned rescue, neighbourhood cat. Colony cats<sup>7</sup> are of particular concern – as unowned, free-roaming cats that do have varying relationships and dependencies on humans, colony cats fall into an “intermediate group” between “feral” and domestic cats: the un-owned, urban stray – different to regular strays as they are reliant on humans to some extent for the provision of regular food, shelter and medical care. Due to the common conflation of cat “types”, and societal sanctioning of killing “feral” cats in Australia (including through the use of

---

6

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

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wlpa.org/the-issues/colony-cats/>

council “feral cat scalp” bounties<sup>8</sup>) cats of all categories are routinely killed in a number of (often cruel) manners<sup>9 10 11 12</sup>.

**Recommendation:** Acknowledge the conflation of categories of cats and reject the killing of cats based on their location, category of existence, social connection to humans, or any other factor.

#### 4. The number of semi-owned and un-owned cats in Australia is unknown.

There are 3.8 million “owned” cats in Australia<sup>13</sup>. Estimations of the number of “feral” cats in Australia range between 2.1 to 6.3 million, depending on rainfall<sup>14</sup>. Previous (and now debunked) government estimates of the number of “feral” cats in Australia were at 15-20 million – and these were the figures used to form policy to kill 2 million cats between 2015 and 2020<sup>15 16</sup>. It is not clear if semi-owned cats are accounted for in surveys of pet (domestic) cats or “feral” cats. The total number of cats in Australia is unknown with wide-ranging estimates.

---

<sup>8</sup> [https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/26/asia/"feral"-cats-australia-intl/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/26/asia/)

<sup>9</sup> <https://cranbournenews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2016-09-21/cat-rescue-not-cruelty/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-02/rspca-victoria-investigates-after-cat-caught-in-illegal-trap/12311832>

<sup>11</sup>

[https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3690372/Cat-Busters-trap-pets-Sydney-Melbourne-shoot-"feral"'s-rural-areas.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3690372/Cat-Busters-trap-pets-Sydney-Melbourne-shoot-)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxUTl\\_xd9u0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxUTl_xd9u0)

<sup>13</sup>

[https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19\\_v1.7\\_WEB\\_high-res.pdf](https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/01/170104103619.htm>

<sup>15</sup>

[https://www.smh.com.au/national/queensland/australian-"feral"-cat-population-millions-smaller-than-thought-2017-0104-gtlqce.html](https://www.smh.com.au/national/queensland/australian-)

<sup>16</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493\\_Conservation\\_or\\_politics\\_Australia's\\_target\\_to\\_kill\\_2\\_million\\_cats](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493_Conservation_or_politics_Australia's_target_to_kill_2_million_cats)

**Recommendation:** Reject all policy based on approximate population estimates, and conduct new surveys of total cat numbers in Australia.

**5. The geographical spread of semi-owned and un-owned cats in Australia is largely unknown and misrepresented in the media.**

Despite headlines like “feral” cats now cover 99.8% of Australia<sup>17</sup>, the reality of cat distribution is much more complex. Published research states there is one “feral” cat per every four square kilometres in Australia, but the density per region – along with the other species found in that area – are necessary to gain a better picture of their distribution.

**Recommendation:** Reject all over-arching policy based on approximate population density estimates.

**The impact of “feral” and domestic cats including on native wildlife and habitats:**

**6. There is limited, misrepresented information on the impact of cats on native wildlife and habitat in Australia**

No large-scale studies have been conducted on the impact of cats on native wildlife in Australia. Despite recent estimates of “feral” cat numbers being between 2.1 to 6.3 million, depending on rainfall,<sup>18</sup> the Australian Wildlife Conservancy in 2012 used a “conservative” population estimate of 15 million to estimate that Australia’s “feral” cats kill 5-30 animals a night each, concluding that a minimum of 75 million animals are killed daily. An oft-cited and headline-grabbing 2017 study<sup>19</sup> of bird predation by Australian cats, found that 272 million birds are killed annually, yet the study also conceded that cats kill only 3.5 per cent of Australia’s total terrestrial bird population, leaving 96.5 per cent apparently free from harm by cats.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jan/04/feral-cats-now-cover-99-per-cent-of-australia>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/01/170104103619.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320717302719>

**Recommendation:** Acknowledge lack of solid evidence of the direct impact of cats on all Australian wildlife.

## **7. Killing cats for wildlife conservation in Australia is political – with cats used as a scapegoat**

Twenty-eight mammals have gone extinct in Australia since European colonisation in 1788, giving Australia the worst record in the world, with our total animal extinctions representing 6–10% of the world’s post-1500 recognised extinctions<sup>20 21</sup>. Major drivers of this decline have been predation by two introduced species, the cat and the red fox, and changed fire regimes; non-native species are overwhelmingly the main cause of animal extinctions in Australia, primarily responsible for at least three-quarters of the mammal losses, about half the bird losses and frog and lizard losses.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Australia’s frogs are being decimated by introduced chytrid fungus.<sup>23</sup> Australia's Threatened Species Strategy, which spearheaded a campaign to kill 2 million cats between 2015 and 2010, focused overwhelmingly on cats’ predation, and the killing of cats for environmental conservation; the strategy mentions “feral” cats more than 70 times, but other drivers of biodiversity loss, such as pollution and habitat loss and fragmentation are conspicuously almost entirely absent.<sup>24</sup>

Land clearing is a politically sensitive issue because significant economic interests (animal agriculture, urban development, and mining) are the main drivers of habitat loss.<sup>25</sup> Australia’s Threatened Species Strategy does not explicitly address these threats, mentioning habitat loss only twice, and failing to mention land clearing at all, despite Australia having one of the world’s worst rates of land clearing.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/strategy-home>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/news/a-review-of-listed-extinctions-in-australia>

<sup>22</sup> <https://theconversation.com/deadly-frog-fungus-has-wiped-out-90-species-and-threatens-hundreds-more-113846>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/112/15/4531#sec-6>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/threatened-species-strategy>

<sup>25</sup> <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6407/1108/tab-figures-data>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.publish.csiro.au/pc/PC15052>



The Threatened Species Commissioner’s cull target of 2 million cats is not explicitly linked to direct conservation outcomes. It is extremely difficult to measure how many cats have been killed, especially on a large scale, in an accurate, reliable way – particularly given the number of cats in Australia is so debated to begin with, which would make linking killing cats to any conservation outcomes difficult.<sup>27</sup>

Cats are a convenient scapegoat to Australia’s troubled environmental conservation management, and allows governments to continue to ignore the threat and impact of widespread, ongoing habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, and the unmentionable Animal Agriculture – already overlooked in the Threatened Species Strategy.<sup>28</sup>

**Recommendation:** Native habitat and species conservation in Australia must be addressed holistically, with research and policy focusing on the five drivers of Biodiversity Loss and the causes and impact of widespread habitat loss – not on killing non-native animals.

#### **8. Killing cats for conservation purposes in Australia is inhumane in principle, and not proven to be effective**

The AJP posits that killing cats for conservation purposes is inhumane in principle. Further, Australia’s government-sanctioned five-year cat killing has had no proven impact on the biodiversity and spread of native species.<sup>29</sup> Despite the recent development of baits attractive to cats, no broadscale and enduring mechanism with acceptably small non-target effects has yet been developed for the control of “feral” cats – meaning any program to bait cats would result in the painful death of cats and non-target species, for no proven gain.<sup>30</sup> While research concludes broadscale cat baiting would provide the greatest conservation benefit to native

---

<sup>27</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493\\_Conservation\\_or\\_politics\\_Australia's\\_target\\_to\\_kill\\_2\\_million\\_cats](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493_Conservation_or_politics_Australia's_target_to_kill_2_million_cats)

<sup>28</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493\\_Conservation\\_or\\_politics\\_Australia's\\_target\\_to\\_kill\\_2\\_million\\_cats](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493_Conservation_or_politics_Australia's_target_to_kill_2_million_cats)

<sup>29</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493\\_Conservation\\_or\\_politics\\_Australia's\\_target\\_to\\_kill\\_2\\_million\\_cats](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331214493_Conservation_or_politics_Australia's_target_to_kill_2_million_cats)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/112/15/4531#sec-5>

Australian mammals, it also concedes the risk of this strategy to other cats and other native species.<sup>31</sup> Exclusion fencing has shown to be costly but effective<sup>32 33</sup> and the AJP supports its use in a temporary, controlled manner specific to individual revegetation and species-reintroduction programs.

**Recommendation:** Future research and policy surrounding cat population control should focus on non-lethal methods.

### **Public awareness and education in relation to the “feral” and domestic cat problem:**

#### **9. The Australian media is responsible for the vilification of cats**

Through emotive and violent imagery and language, the Australian media overwhelmingly portrays “feral,” and even stray cats, as bloodthirsty, calculated killers - and Australia as a land “teeming” with these unlikeable pests.<sup>34 35 36 37</sup> Cats are blamed for their instinctive hunting behaviour, and are made to pay for their “crime” with their lives – despite predation being a natural part of many native animals’ lives too. The AJP rejects the speciesist notion that cats are inherently worthless because they are an introduced species and/or they have no significant relationship with individual humans.

**Recommendation:** Future public awareness and education campaigns must recognise the cruelty caused by derogatory portrayal of cats in the media

---

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/112/15/4531#sec-5>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/112/15/4531#sec-5>

<sup>33</sup> <https://theconversation.com/why-australia-needs-to-kill-cats-116654>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.miragenews.com/committee-sinks-claws-into-problem-of-”feral”-and-domestic-cats-in-australia/>

<sup>35</sup>

<https://science.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/fire-ravaged-kangaroo-island-teeming-”feral”-cats-it%E2%80%99s-bad-news-little-marsupial>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-02/trigger-happy-marion-nuisance-cat-by-law-knocked-back/12416518>

<sup>37</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/26/asia/”feral”-cats-australia-intl/index.html>

## 10. Many communities see cats only as a problem to be eradicated by any means

The vilification of cats, and lack of broader public awareness of damaging media messaging, has resulted in many communities feeling vindicated in killing cats. Vigilante cat-hunting groups take pride in not only killing “feral” cats, but the conflating of “feral” and domestic cats.

<sup>38</sup>

Bush Heritage shoot, bait, trap and euthanase cats in various locations around the 10.1 million hectares of land they maintain around Australia.<sup>39</sup> The Sporting Shooters’ Association of Australia has a specialised sub-branch for conservation and wildlife management that was set up to undertake “feral” animal control on public land, and says that 80 per cent of its 185, 000 members report that they hunt, with the majority of these hunting for pest control – and encourages shooters: “if the chance arises to hunt a “feral” cat, take it! [Cats] deserve quick despatch from a bullet”.<sup>40</sup>

The AJP posit many other Australians would be appalled at the violent, widespread, often indiscriminate killing of cats if these practices were more well-known. In addition, the link between animal violence and human violence, such as child abuse, elder abuse and domestic violence, is well-documented.<sup>41 42</sup>

**Recommendation:** Future public awareness and education campaigns should focus on the sentience and individual worth of cats in order to foster compassionate wildlife conservation techniques

## 11. Public opinion of cats is complex and varies by geographic and demographic factors

---

<sup>38</sup> <https://cranbournenews.starcommunity.com.au/news/2016-09-21/cat-rescue-not-cruelty/>

<sup>39</sup>

<https://www.bushheritage.org.au/who-we-are/about/annual-reports#:~:text=Is%20the%20total%20area%20of%20national%20parks%20or%20nature%20refuges.>

<sup>40</sup> <https://ssaa.org.au/news-resources/hunting/>“feral”-felines-the-ultimate-killing-machines

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.animallaw.info/article/link-cruelty-animals-and-violence-towards-people>

<sup>42</sup> <https://ndaa.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Link-Monograph-2014-3.pdf>

It is naïve to assume Australians are either devoted cat lovers or staunch environmentalists and cat-killers. Many devoted cat “owners” who regard domestic cats as valued companions requiring care and protection also advocate strongly for the killing of “feral” cats. These conflicting, complex views can make it difficult to reach broad agreement on cat management strategies.<sup>43</sup> Geographic and demographic factors influence how the Australian public view and treat cats as a general group, and categorised by their relationship to humans.

**Recommendation:** Public awareness and education should be sensitive to all opinions of cats and, at the very least, must be tailored to individual community types – inner-city, suburb, regional, rural, and remote

### **The interaction between domestic cat ownership and the “feral” cat problem, and best practice approaches to the keeping of domestic cats in this regard:**

#### **12. The predation of “feral” cats is the fault and responsibility of humans, not “feral” cats**

“Feral” cats exist and therefore hunt in native Australian habitat as a direct result of Australia’s Colonial introduction of cats to the Australian landscape and continuing tradition of keeping domestic cats as companion animals. “Feral” cats are not guilty and deserving of persecution by default of existing and carrying out instinctual behaviours, in a landscape they were introduced to by people.

**Recommendation:** A move toward societal acceptance that the onus is on humans to minimise the impact of cats’ predation on wildlife, by minimising the number of cats that exist across all Australian environments

#### **13. Domestic cats are considered a commodity in Australian society**

Despite Australia having millions of unhomed cats that are killed by various means, people continue to breed, buy and sell cats in Australia. The AJP rejects the haphazard, unregulated buying and selling of any animal for profit. Haphazard, unregulated breeding of animals for

---

43

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

profit – and the interrelated objectification of animals - often results in heinous welfare conditions for the animals being bred and sold.

**Recommendation:** Domestic cats should not be bred or sold commercially without robust regulation; pet shops and the in-person and online sales of cats should be regulated to ensure that only desexed and microchipped shelter/rescue animals are sold at prices that only cover the cost of the cats' care, so that breeding cats is a non-profitable activity

#### **14. Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) programs are under-studied in the Australian context**

Trap-neuter-release (TNR) is an ethical approach to the management of populations of free-roaming cats of varying sociability, with Trap, Desex, Adopt or Return and Support (TDARS) considered a more appropriate tool for urban cat management in Australian conditions.<sup>44</sup>

The factors that affect the potential efficacy of TNR (for example, the immigration rate and environment) vary considerably between different areas and countries; the majority of reported studies of TNR are from the USA, and all but one being from outside of Australia<sup>45</sup> An increasing body of evidence suggests that long-term TNR programs can effectively reduce free-roaming cat populations, especially those programs that include an adoption program, monitoring and desexing of new cats arriving into the colony<sup>46</sup>

**Recommendation:** Australia should begin research into TNR and TDARS adapted to the challenges and conditions unique to Australian landscapes, with particular focus on their efficacy of reducing wildlife predation by cats.

---

44

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

45

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

46

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

## 15. Immunocontraceptives are the most humane method of cat population control

Population control of cats will likely depend on the development of new non-surgical methods for sterilisation.<sup>47</sup> Attempts to sterilise cats and dogs with contraceptive vaccines date back to the 1980s; although advances have occurred, there are no vaccines that are sufficiently developed for practical use.<sup>48 49</sup> At least two reproductive antigens, zona pellucida and GnRH, have been identified as possible targets for fertility control in cats.<sup>50</sup> The responsiveness of cats to fertility control via GnRH suppression should encourage researchers and cat control stakeholders to continue efforts to optimize vaccines that induce multi-year contraception following a single dose in a high proportion of treated cats.<sup>51 52</sup>

**Recommendation:** Funding and media focus should be on the research, development and promotion of fertility control (*e.g.* immunocontraceptives) as a viable but understudied method of humane cat population control

## 16. Australians can reconcile their love of cats and wildlife through responsible cat ownership

Australians love cats, having 3.8 million as companion animals,<sup>53</sup> and are also increasingly concerned about the environment – polls show Australia’s level of environmental concern is higher than in other countries, with 29% of respondents ranking the environment as the most important issue, up from 9% in 2016.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1439-0531.2012.02079.x>

<sup>48</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1439-0531.2012.02079.x>

<sup>49</sup> [https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Moodie1995\\_cat\\_biocontrol\\_review.pdf](https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Moodie1995_cat_biocontrol_review.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5567843/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5567843/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098612X15594989>

<sup>53</sup>

[https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19\\_v1.7\\_WEB\\_high-res.pdf](https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ANIM001-Pet-Survey-Report19_v1.7_WEB_high-res.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> <https://theconversation.com/we-must-rip-up-our-environmental-laws-to-address-the-extinction-crisis-116746>

Responsible cat “ownership” is paramount, and should include early-age desexing cats; indoors-only cats<sup>55</sup>; curfewing “outdoor” cats at night; installing cat-proof fencing and cat-runs where possible; and understanding how to react in a situation where wildlife may need rescuing.<sup>56</sup> Responsible cat “ownership” is dependent on circumstance, largely geographic location – *e.g.* it is necessary for people with domestic cats in wildlife-sensitive areas to keep cats indoors at all times; while people with cats in the inner-city may feel comfortable to supervise their cat in a backyard.

The AJP advocates for community and media campaigns that encourage creative, kind ways to keep cats as companion animals, while limiting their breeding and minimising predation of native animals in order for compassionate conservation to flourish in the Australian context.<sup>57</sup>

**Recommendation:** Create and promote community and media campaigns that encourage creative, kind ways to keep cats as companion animals and limit cat breeding to minimise predation of native animals

### **A comment on Community Consultation**

The Australian public expects that community engagement is appropriately publicised for a reasonable period of time for appropriate consideration and review by the community. This important consultation was open for a mere 6 weeks; and this was during a once-in-lifetime global crisis - the COVID-19 pandemic. Australians have had their lives turned upside down, families and friends are isolated from one another, all industries and businesses are in turmoil and the Australian economy has a massive deficit; and the crisis is not yet over. Melbourne is in lockdown and all residents are wearing facemasks when outside of their homes and the situation in Sydney is worsening each day. The AJP is appalled and disappointed that the Federal Government chose to run this consultation during this crisis.

---

<sup>55</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/15/keep-pet-cats-indoors-say-researchers-who-found-they-kill-230m-native-australian-animals-each-year>

<sup>56</sup> <https://catprotection.org.au/responsible-cat-ownership/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-16/catio-protects-western-ringtail-possum-from-cats/12440316>

**Recommendation:** Develop and use public consultation strategies that are reasonable, fair, appropriate and demonstrate that community opinion and input is valued and respected

In conclusion, the AJP argues that the current treatment of “feral” and domestic cats lacks moral consideration of the suffering incurred by these sentient beings when they are poisoned and killed. The AJP considers this to be the result of human activities and choices, and expects Australian’s to be accountable, not shift blame by vilifying the animals they introduced to Australia. The AJP advocates for humane methods that treat all animals with respect, dignity, compassion, and kindness.

***Sasha Janes***

National Submissions Manager

Animal Justice Party

Email: [submissions@animaljusticeparty.org](mailto:submissions@animaljusticeparty.org)