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SA Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 (Cat Management) Proposed Amendments

The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation (APWF) is a research and advocacy not-for-profit organisation investigating effective and humane strategies aligned with a One Welfare approach to manage urban dogs and cats. Adopting a One Welfare mindset means balancing and optimizing the well-being of animals, people, and their environment. You can read more about us and our vision on our website: <https://petwelfare.org.au>.

The APWF's research is aimed at improving the welfare of dogs and cats and the people who care for them, which includes eliminating euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals in shelters and pounds. We share the outcomes of this research with the community, staff in shelters and pounds, state and local governments, and veterinarians to create positive change for animal welfare and the legislation that governs this.

This submission is in response to the draft amendments of the Dog and Cat Management Amendment Bill 1995, for cat management, which we do not support for reasons mentioned in this submission. The consultation amendments only focus on the powers and functions of councils and/or a person performing a seizing, detaining, or destroying function under the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 or another relevant Act, to eradicate cats from the landscapes within South Australia.

The current explanation guide appears to lack proactive strategies for cat management, as its focus is predominantly on eradication. This is evident by the cover image, which depicts a cat with a bird, reinforcing a narrative centred on elimination rather than proactive cat management strategies. The consultation seems to primarily address the facilitation and expansion of cat culling measures, making it illegal for a person to seize and detain a cat without permission by an Authorised Officer or council.

A crucial element of effective cat management legislation is the accurate definition for cats, ensuring alignment with current best practices.

Definitions for Cats

The APWF recognizes and supports the definitions of cats as delineated in the findings and recommendations from the RSPCA Australia's 2018 report, "Identifying best practice domestic cat management in Australia." These definitions categorize cats as Feral and Domestic (owned, semi-owned, unowned).



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Feral cats-

Feral cats have no relationship with or dependence on humans (neither direct nor indirect), survive by hunting or scavenging for food, and live and reproduce in the wild (e.g., forests, woodlands, grasslands, deserts).

Feral cats do not live in the vicinity of where people live, and they do not receive food from humans intentionally (direct feeding) or unintentionally (e.g. via food waste bins). Feral cats are not found or trapped in the vicinity of where people live or frequent, are not the subject of complaints about nuisance behaviours (eg. fighting, yowling noises, soiling etc). Because they do not live where humans live or frequent and by definition, are not free-roaming cats in urban areas, therefore feral cats do not enter Australian council pounds or animal shelters (although frequently misclassified on behaviour).

Feral cats must be defined by how they live (solely dependent on hunting for supplying all their nutritional requirements) and where they live (remote from humans).

Domestic cats

Domestic cats live around where people live and frequent. Cat management strategies should recognise three subcategories of domestic cats, as recommended by RSPCA (2018 report) including:

- **Owned cats** – these cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable, although sociability varies. These cats are also called pet cats.
- **Semi-owned cats** – these cats are directly dependent on humans and are intentionally fed by people who do not consider they own them. These cats are of varying sociability and are sometimes called stray cats.
- **Unowned cats** – these cats are indirectly dependent on humans and receive food from people unintentionally, such as via food waste bins. These cats are of varying sociability and are sometimes called stray cats.

Research demonstrates that pet cats can respond with more aggressive behaviours to humans when highly stressed than genuinely feral cats. It is critical that before a decision that a cat is euthanised on behaviour, it is given sufficient time to adapt to a stressful environment. Outcome decisions relating to euthanasia based on behavioural characteristics must be deferred to allow the cat sufficient time to habituate to the unfamiliar environment (e.g., shelter or pound), given the likelihood that these cats will experience high levels of fear in a trap cage or unfamiliar environment. By not allowing a stressed cat to settle into the environment, this may result in the cat exhibiting signs of being unsocial and ultimately lead to higher euthanasia.



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Recommendation-

- **Cat definitions be based on RSPCA 2018 report on Best Practice Domestic Cat Management. These are based on how and where cats live, not on presence or absence of socialised behaviour to humans.**
- **Feral cats are defined as cats that have no relationship with or dependence on humans (neither direct nor indirect), survive by hunting or scavenging for food, and live and reproduce in the wild (e.g., forests, woodlands, grasslands, deserts).**
- **The term “feral” not be used to describe cats in shelters or pounds and the term “feral” should align with current RSPCA Australia recommendations and practices. RSPCA have ceased using 'feral' as a category for intake or euthanasia in its classification of cats entering their shelters, recognizing that feral cats do not engage with shelter or pound facilities. The previously used term “feral” as a reason for euthanasia is now recategorized as “behaviour“ (RSPCA Australia Annual Statistics 2022).**
- **Use these definitions as the base for any management programs, recognising the vast difference between the classifications, and therefore, differences in effective management methods for the different classifications of cats**

Do you agree with the introduction of Section 9A – setting out that the Dog and Cat Management Act does not limit or affect feral dog or cat control programs conducted under other Acts or laws?

The APWF does not support the proposed change to Section 9a- Application of the Act. If the Act already allows for the continuation of programs aimed at reducing or eradicating feral dogs and cats under other existing laws, then including a specific provision in this Act may be redundant.

Ultimately, the decision to include this provision should be based on whether it serves to enhance the Act's clarity or whether it merely duplicates existing legal assurances without adding substantial value. 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 in urban areas (Barratt 1998, Grayson 2007, Lilith 2010, Maclagan 2018). An ongoing issue is that feral cat impacts are often wrongly attributed to domestic cats, even though these are two distinct and geographically separate populations of cats with different behaviour and ecology.



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It is understood that feral cats have a different management obligation under various legislation such as, including but not limited to, National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972, Wilderness Protection Act 1992, and the Land Management Act. These types of programs, typically shooting, trapping or baiting are not suitable for domestic cats outside these areas. Domestic cats found outside of National Parks and Crown Land should be promptly transferred to local council authorities. It is essential that councils implement proactive and effective strategies in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, including Rescue Groups and Community Feral Cat Networks (CFCNs), to effectively manage cat populations. By adopting these proactive measures and fostering collaborative efforts, we can significantly reduce cat overpopulation, leading to decreased intake at pounds, fewer complaints to councils, lower associated costs, reduced euthanasia rates, and a diminished need for pest management programs.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that domestic cats trapped in National Parks and Crown Land are often the result of abandonment or overflow from overpopulation in metropolitan and peri-urban areas. The presence of these cats in such locations is a direct consequence of human actions. Therefore, there is a critical need for behaviour change within the communities of South Australia to address this issue effectively.

Do you agree with the proposed amendments to Section 63, updating the circumstances where cats may be lawfully destroyed?

The APWF does not support the amendments to Section 63- Power to Destroy Cats in the Dog and Cat Management Act. The proposed change to broaden the terminology to recognise contractors and other persons lawfully performing pest management programs, should not be included as prescribed persons, authorised officers, wardens or inspectors. Contractors are resourced by qualified employees, to provide a specialist service or specific task, working under the prescribed persons supervision for a purpose or project, these resources should not be included as a prescribed person.

The APWF strongly opposes the current and proposed change to Section 63, where a cat may be destroyed if found more than 1 kilometre away from any genuine residence, or neighbouring residence as proposed. The explanation guide claims that landowners in rural areas have not been able to manage feral cat colonies on their own property. Management of cats on rural properties will continue to be unsuccessful until cats are correctly classified and management by appropriate and effective methods. Most farms with stores of feed for livestock have cats living in and around farm buildings and they are valued by the majority of farmers for rodent control. These cats are typically viewed as more effective and safer for working animals and wildlife than baiting for rodent control (unpublished data). These are domestic cats – they live around where humans live and frequent, and usually get some of their food supplied by humans in intentionally or unintentionally (eg dog food). Farmers are reluctant to manage them by lethal



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means – shooting or baiting – but they can be successfully managed by intensive desexing programs to manage the population and decrease risk to wildlife (unpublished research).

According to the SA State Planning Reform rural living, also referred to as ‘country living’ involves housing development in rural areas on the fringes of regional townships and peri-urban areas on the metropolitan fringe. Often this type of living also involves some level of rural activity such as horse keeping, hobby farming or horticulture. Allotment sizes in rural living areas range from 1200 square metres up to 20 hectares, true feral cats will not be residing in peri-urban areas on metropolitan fringe where they would be living around people, these are defined as stray (semi-owned or unowned) and there would be no way to ensure compliance of a 1-kilometre range, placing owned and semi-owned cats at risk of being unlawfully destroyed.

Do you agree with the proposed amendments to section 64, modifying the circumstances where cats may be seized and detained by local councils?

The APWF strongly opposes the requirement for landowners or occupiers to seek approval from the relevant council or an authorized officer to seize or detain cats. The guidelines lack clarity on the specifics of such approval, and there is no provision for where these cats would be detained. This issue is further exacerbated, for example, by the recent closure of the RSPCA Lower Eyre Peninsula shelter leaving the council with a capacity to house only 12 dogs and 12 cats. Last financial year, this RSPCA shelter claims to have accepted only eight cats and does not accept owner-surrendered cats, there is a clear need for the shelter to remain open, with rescue groups and CFCNs taking in 4,550 cats in 2018-19 and the problem increasing since (Chua 2023).

The research data presented by Chua et al. (2023) between 2018-19, council pounds in South Australia took in an estimated 2,913 cats. Combined data from the RSPCA and Animal Welfare League show a total intake of 11,474 cats, while rescue groups, which often take on more responsibility for cat and dog management than councils, accounted for the additional 4,550 cats. This data underscores the critical role that rescue groups play in animal welfare across South Australia.

Moreover, with only 12 out of 69 councils (17%) in South Australia operating their own pounds, there is insufficient capacity to care for these animals detained resulting in higher euthanasia (Chua, 2023). The percentage of councils in other mainland States that operate their pounds are Victoria 48%, NSW 87%, QLD 77%, Western Australia 55%, and NT 18%, with SA the lowest number recorded (Chua 2023).

We acknowledge that the role of an Authorised enforcement officer requires specialized training and qualifications, extending beyond cat management. However, there is a significant disconnect in the current system where Rescue Groups and not-for-profit organizations are



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managing and rehoming twice as many cats as councils, despite councils having dedicated budgets for domestic animal management. This raises concerns about where the responsibility for cat management truly lies. It appears that the communities are taking on a greater role in caring for and rehoming stray and semi-owned cats than the State of South Australia's councils. This has led to a fragmented approach to cat management, creating a "siloed" and "us versus them" situation, between Rescue Groups, CFCNs and Welfare shelters, which is not the intent of the legislation.

There has been no acknowledgment or recognition in the documentation provided, of the significant work these groups have accomplished in reducing the stray cat population within South Australia. Despite their vital role, these groups have received no funding and have not been consulted, even though they are effectively carrying out this work alongside the RSPCA and AWL. The amendments to the Dog and Cat Management Act must recognize all stakeholders and foster collaboration to address cat overpopulation effectively. If the current "us versus them" situation persists, the issue of cat overpopulation in South Australia will remain unresolved.

The Rescue Groups and Community Foster Care Networks (CFCNs) do not need to have the same powers under the Act as authorized officers. Still, there is a pressing need to develop partnerships with councils and other key agencies to address these issues effectively (Cotterell 2024). A potential solution is to establish formal agreements with these groups, enabling them to continue their vital work in South Australia.

The study by Scotney et al. (2022) highlights the consequences of authorities deciding to conduct a cat cull in the Port of Newcastle, NSW, without consulting community cat carers. This decision not only impacted the cats, but also had severe psychological effects on the carers. The enforcement-focused approach, driven by the perception that the cats posed a risk, resulted in traumatic stress, increased suicide risks, and significant harm to the well-being of the carers. The failure of authorities to engage with and consult these carers gained negative media attention and led to protests, which were reported across Australia and major animal welfare organizations internationally (Alley Cat Allies 2024).

Possible Solution - Section 84Y Agreements

In Victoria, local councils have the authority to capture and hold dogs and cats under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (the Act) for various reasons. Under section 84 of the Act, any person who captures a roaming animal is required to provide it to a council-authorized officer or to a person or organization with an 84Y agreement. This process ensures the animal has the best chance of being reunited with its owner while also addressing any immediate welfare needs (Animal Welfare Victoria 2021).



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Section 84Y of the Act permits local councils to establish written agreements with individuals or organizations, such as shelters, veterinary practices, and foster carers, to assist in the capture, holding, rehoming, or disposal of dogs and cats. These 84Y agreements allow entities other than local councils to manage lost pets and stray animals. Councils have the flexibility to tailor these agreements to meet their specific operational and community needs. Various types of section 84Y agreements are available to address different situations, and they can include some or all of the activities outlined under section 84Y of the Act (Animal Welfare Victoria 2021).

The welfare and management of cats and dogs within local council municipalities can be significantly enhanced by enabling appropriately skilled individuals or organizations to receive and manage lost pets and stray animals. Establishing and formalizing these responsibilities through 84Y agreements allows councils to more effectively allocate their resources and personnel and develop partnerships with CFCNs and Rescue Groups.

The benefits of **84Y agreements** include reducing the burden on councils in managing lost or stray animals within their communities. These agreements also increase the availability of animal management facilities and services within a council area, offering more locations for caring for cats and dogs, as well as providing accessible places for the public to bring in lost animals. Additionally, 84Y agreements facilitate adoptions and expand care options for animals, potentially lowering euthanasia rates and increasing the likelihood of successful adoptions.

Animal Welfare Funds Grant Schemes-

The APWF strongly recommends South Australia following in line with the Victorian Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program, which recognises and supports the welfare of companion animals, along with both council, shelters, veterinary clinics providing low-cost desexing, Rescue Groups/ CFCNs and education on responsible pet ownership. These are targeted grants aimed at assisting vulnerable people.

The 2023-24 Victorian State budget committed to \$5 million over 4 years, to support pet shelters and animal rescue and rehoming organisations, and since 2020-21 has dedicated \$12 million to animal welfare. This type of approach shows not only a commitment to animal welfare in the State, but a commitment and understanding of the causes of free-roaming cats in urban areas, and therefore effective solutions.



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Recommendation-

- **To incorporate agreements similar to the Victorian 84Y agreements into the Dog and Cat Management Act, to support the work already undertaken with Rescue Groups and CFCNs, and work in partnerships.**
- **To provide a grant scheme, similar to Victoria, where Rescue Groups and CFCNs can apply for financial assistance for the work they undertake with community cats.**
- **Develop partnerships and consult with all stakeholders, providing a transparent process for seeking approval from the relevant council or an authorised officer to seize or detain a cat.**
- **To ensure there is no financial burden, by way of a permit cost, that will be incurred for seeking approval from a council or authorised officer, to seize or detain a cat with other agencies, Rescue Groups or CFCNs.**

Do you agree with the proposed amendments to section 64A – detailing the circumstances for disposal of a seized cat?

Residents who trap cats and council officers doing cat trapping for nuisance or wandering cats have not been provided with science-based guidelines or training on which to assess these cats “wild” or “uncontrollable”, only informal assessment processes. All cats that present to council pounds and animal welfare shelters have the potential to exhibit anti-social behaviours if stressed, making it impossible to determine the difference between a stray, semi-owned, owned or feral cat, or between a cat that will be adoptable or one that will be unlikely to be adopted after 2-5 weeks of habituation in a non-stressed environment (Slater 2010).

A common assessment for a cat in a trap is if the cat displays behaviour of trying to climb the walls of the trap cage or displays aggression (rather than being still and quiet), then the cat may be deemed uncontrollable and may be euthanised immediately. Uncontrolled or anti-social behaviour may also be attributed to the conditions within the facilities they are housed. Other contributing factors may be the type of facility, the temperature within the facility, noise levels, and where they are housed, making it impossible for anyone to accurately assess a cat’s sociability merely on sight or interaction of a human with a stressed cat (Slater 2010).

Sociability and adaptability cannot be judged in a highly stressful environment, such as in a trap cage; frightened pet cats may display more aggressive behaviours towards humans than truly feral cats (Slater 2013; Jacobson 2022).



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Cats require an average of five days to five weeks in a non-stressful environment before adoptability can be assessed (with a range from a minimum of 3 days to five weeks or longer to assess adoptability) (Rochlitz 1998, Kessler 1997, Ellis 2014, DiGangi 2022, Jacobsen 2022, Slater 2013 and Kerr 2018). When cats are in a trap cage or recently admitted to a shelter or pound and exhibit behaviours such as hissing, growling or striking, this represents a normal fear response to an unfamiliar environment. This does not mean the cat is a feral cat, an unsocialised cat or unsuitable for adoption (Overall 2013). Importantly, behaviour towards humans is an invalid test of whether a cat is feral or domestic, and this classification should be made on where and how cats live. Feral cats do not live around where people live or frequent and therefore are not the source of complaints from the public about nuisance behaviours. Cats should be assessed as domestic or feral based on where and how they live. If the cat is trapped in response to a complaint about nuisance behaviours, it is a domestic cat, regardless of its behaviour to humans.

Outcome decisions based on behavioural characteristics must be deferred to allow the cat sufficient time to habituate to the unfamiliar environment (e.g., shelter or pound), given the likelihood that these cats will experience high levels of fear in a trap cage or unfamiliar environment, and that different behaviours will be observed after habituation has occurred.

Cats should be given the opportunity for multiple behaviour assessments over time. Cats that are still showing fearful behaviours such as hissing, growling or striking after being given reasonable habituation time should be moved out of the shelter/pound facility environment to a more suitable environment such as foster care and given more time to habituate. Barn/working/factory cats are other options that should be considered for these cats.

If it is impossible to determine the difference between the different definitions of cats (feral, stray and owned) based on behaviour, it poses the question of how many cats are incorrectly identified by their behaviour and euthanised immediately or soon after admission? When RSPCA Qld changed its assessment from 24 hours to 72 hours, the number of cats classified as feral and euthanized decreased from 1178 to 132 per year (Kerr 2018). In association with increased time for assessment of behaviour and increased use of behaviour modification programs and foster care, cats euthanized for behavioural reasons decreased by 85%, including a marked decrease in the number of cats euthanised because the cat was deemed feral. It is important to note that since this study was published, RSPCA no longer uses the term “feral” as a category for cats entering the shelter or as a reason for euthanasia. Instead, behaviour is used as the reason for euthanasia for cats unlikely to be adopted because they are fearful, timid, shy or aggressive when stressed.

We understand there are responsibilities of government agencies and local councils to implement programs for the management of cats, depending on the landowner and whether the



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cats to be managed are feral or domestic. However, these management programs differ greatly depending on the location and classification of cats, from traditional trap, impound, and euthanize or rehome, to programs using baiting and shooting.

Feral cats are live remotely in from humans and survive and reproduce by hunting or scavenging for food to supply all their nutritional needs. They do not have contact with humans where humans live and frequent, and are not dependent on them for food or shelter. Since feral cats do not live in areas frequented by humans, they are not the subject of complaints relating to nuisance behaviours or wandering cats, because they are not found in areas where humans are living or frequenting. This information is based on the Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats, published by the Commonwealth of Australia in 2015.

It is important to recognize that cats in indigenous communities, around farm buildings, mining sites and other more remote areas where there are humans, should be classed as domestic cats. Effective management can only be achieved when the value to humans either through companionship and/or as working cats, is considered. For example, in a current study being conducted by APWF of free desexing offered for cats on dairy farms, all farmers stated that cats are considered important working animals because they effectively eliminate costs associated with damage caused by rodents, particularly to dairy wiring, and they reduce food safety issues associated with rodents.

Farmers stated that cats are the preferred method of rodent control and were preferred over rodent poison because of factors such as cost, baiting's impact on wildlife, and its threat to pets and children. Of note, they mentioned that baits are tax deductible but currently cats are not. All farmers viewed the cats as working animals and stated they are a necessity on the farm, with one farmer stating his cats did more work than his working dogs (which are tax deductible). Following desexing of the cats, farmers perceived an improvement in the cats' impact on wildlife with comments stating that they see less (if any) wildlife being killed by the cats after desexing. Following desexing they also noted an improvement in the cats' health and behaviour with improved body condition, less fighting, more friendly behaviour and less roaming. Most farmers have some sort of bond with some of the cats and these cats have names, they talk to them, they pet them.

Therefore, based on this information, it is recommended that animal welfare agencies lobby the Australian Tax office to include cats on farms as working cats and costs of desexing, microchipping, health care, including vaccination, be tax deductible. This would assist farmers in managing cats around farm buildings by desexing which will benefit the wellbeing of animals, humans and the environment. Stopping kittens being born reduces the risk of toxoplasmosis oocysts being shed and contaminating the environment (Dubey 2010), reduces the risk of kittens being born to die (75% of free-living kittens die before 6 months of age (Stoskopf 2004),



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thereby improving animal welfare, and reduces the need for lethal management which farmers often view as unpleasant and decreases job satisfaction. One farmer said shooting them using a professional shooter was costly and impractical because the cats just scatter, and trapping and then shooting required letting the cat settle in the cage and then shooting it, which they didn't enjoy. Another farmer stated he banged the kittens' heads against a post for population control but couldn't do it once their eyes were open because it was too disturbing for him. Managing cats around farm buildings by desexing and providing food also will reduce the risk they relocate to areas with natural vegetation to predate on wildlife to provide their nutritional requirements. If the cats are fed to meet their nutritional needs, they do not need to eat rodents or wildlife to fulfill their nutritional needs, decreasing the risk of toxoplasmosis transmission, and wildlife predation.

Truly feral cats need to be managed to protect native wildlife and the measure of success should not be the number of cats killed but based on populations of species of conservation concern being preserved or increasing, where appropriate for carrying capacity of habitat. Habitat protection is a vital component of wildlife protection. As a priority, science-based non-lethal methods of management of feral cats should be implemented in preference to lethal methods such as 1080 baits and poison traps, which also inadvertently target native species. for managing feral cats that improve the survival of native species of conservation concern and that do not target species, because use of

Recommendation-

- **Classify cats as feral or domestic based on how and where they live according to RSPCA guidelines (2018).**
- **Correctly define domestic cats as those living around where humans live and frequent, and develop guidelines and training based on recommendations by veterinary behaviorists and scientific literature for assessment of adoptability of cats entering shelters and pounds, especially those impounded through council trapping processes.**
- **Animal welfare agencies to lobby the Australian Tax office to include cats on farms as working cats and costs of desexing, microchipping, health care, including vaccination, be tax deductible.**
- **Assist farmers managing cats around farm buildings by providing subsidized desexing programs.**
- **As a priority, implement use of non-lethal methods in preference to lethal methods for managing feral cats that improve the survival of native species of conservation concern and that do not target species. The most commonly used poison is 1080 and the use of 1080 baits and poison traps inadvertently poison native species as well.**



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Provide your views on what future actions you would like to see considered for cat management in South Australia

The APWF advocates for the expansion of innovative desexing initiatives, such as that undertaken in the city of Banyule (Cotterell 2024). These programs need clear measurable objectives for each year over 3 to 5 years. These programs must be targeted to suburbs of high pound/shelter intake or cat-related calls, and microtargeted within these areas to locations where cats and kittens are most at risk of being impounded or surrendered from. These initiatives also need to be of sufficient intensity. If only targeted to problem suburbs, then approximately 30 cats/1000 residents per year need to be desexed but if intense microtargeting is also applied in these suburbs, then similar decreases in impoundments and euthanasia can be achieved with desexing 10 cats/1000 residents annually. It is critical that budgeting and resources, particularly AMO time, guide the size of the areas to be targeted. Insufficient intensity and/or targeting will mean objectives will not be achieved by desexing programs, often termed Community Cat Programs (CCPs) and the success of these programs are highly dependent on strong local partnerships.

Enhancing relationships with local veterinarians and welfare agencies can facilitate the expansion of low-cost or free desexing services, which are particularly crucial for residents who cannot afford or access veterinary clinics. These programs should be adaptive to the specific needs and constraints of the communities they serve. A limiting factor for roll-out of these programs across South Australia maybe access to sufficient veterinary capacity for the required volume of desexing. Therefore, high-volume clinics need to be supported that include pre-pubertal desexing. Animal welfare agencies also need encouragement, and potentially funding, to prioritise development of high-volume desexing clinics that are open to the public. Effective cat management transcends the capabilities of any single agency or organisation, it is a community-centric challenge that requires collaborative efforts among all stakeholders.

The highest cat impoundments per 1000 residents are often in regional areas which are also low socioeconomic (Chua 2023, Alberthson 2016). It is essential that affordable desexing services are available in regional communities with limited access to veterinary care. This may include mobile clinics for towns with no veterinary clinic in the area, and would also service farming communities. Alternatively, transporting multiple cats in a suitable van to a regional veterinary clinic for desexing is safe for up to two hours of travel, and commonly practised in more remote areas of USA not serviced by a local veterinary clinic. Desexing and transport services could be augmented by fostering robust partnerships among stakeholders, including local veterinary practices. It is crucial to address the economic barriers to cat desexing, especially for low-income earners.

Such initiatives are essential for broadening access to desexing services, thereby reducing the



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numbers of unwanted cats. For measurable outcomes to be achieved, it is essential cat desexing initiatives be microtargeted to locations where cat-related calls or impounded cats are emanating from. Positive, assistive engagement of AMOs with disadvantaged individuals in the community with unsterilised (entire) cats is critical for maximizing the effectiveness of these programs.

The Banyule model (Cotterell 2024) exemplifies successful microtargeted desexing practices that have meaningfully reduced intake and euthanasia rates by engaging with disadvantaged communities and individuals. High volume desexing clinics located in areas of most need such as the Westside Desexing clinic, will need to be subsidized until they are established and are cost neutral. However, many cat carers in disadvantaged suburbs, particularly those caring for multiple cats, will not be able to pay the veterinary costs even at these high-volume clinics, if clinic prices cover all costs. Therefore, subsidies will be still needed for these cats to be desexed for free or at very low costs. AMOs are interacting with this demographic, and therefore grants to councils to enable cats in these situations to be desexed would be highly effective. It is likely a proportion of these people will also need assistance with transporting their cats to the surgery, which would be better use of AMOs time than transporting them for impounding.

While programs aimed at encouraging desexing are a positive step, subsidized desexing programs that are not targeted to those most in need may have little to no measurable effect (Frank 2007). These programs may only provide a cheaper option for those who were already planning on getting their cats desexed. It is critically important that programs are microtargeted to locations of need, and do not have barriers or conditions, such as requiring a pension or government-issued card. Vouchers for subsidised desexing at local veterinary clinics may not provide access to affordable desexing services. Unfortunately, many people in disadvantaged areas still cannot afford cat desexing due to the shortage of veterinarians and the increased cost of veterinary services. Based on RSPCA NSW experience (per comm, Ma 2023), only half the residents who had cats desexed in a targeted and microtargeted program had benefits cards. To properly address the issue of cat overpopulation, partnerships with the community and other stakeholders must be formed to develop community-based solutions that are microtargeted to locations most needed. The APWF fully supports place-based cat desexing programs. Microtargeting the suburbs with the highest nuisance cat-related calls and cat impoundments is one crucial element of these programs; the second component, just as crucial, is outreach provided within the community by those operating the programs.

Changed management practices are urgently needed. Only approximately 7% of cats entering facilities managed by local governments (pounds) and animal welfare organizations are reclaimed by their owner, with the remainder either rehomed or euthanized (Rand Unpublished 2024). This trap-adopt/kill management leads to the



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unnecessary euthanasia of healthy and treatable cats and kittens. In Australia, 33% of the cats that entered shelters and municipal animal facilities in 2018 to 2019 were euthanized. This situation is psychologically distressing for animal management officers and shelter and pound staff who are responsible for euthanizing numerous healthy and treatable cats and kittens, as well as the people caring for these cats. Cat management also imposes financial burdens on local governments and animal welfare groups.

More consideration also needs to be given to the now well-documented negative mental health impacts on compassionate people who care about animals i.e. carers who feed stray cats, staff involved in killing healthy and treatable animals and AMOs required to continually trap cats at multi-cat sites and transport them for euthanasia [8,27,49] “AMOs spend their time trapping cats, then become a taxi for a cat killing program because there is no room left for them”. In shelters where there is a commitment to low euthanasia rates, timid and fearful stray cats are often held for weeks to months in an at-tempt to socialize and rehome them. When that fails, the negative impact of their sub-sequent euthanasia on shelter carers can be massive. In view of the profound mental health impacts including increased risk of suicide, it is recommended that legislative barriers are removed, so that cats can be legally sterilized, even if their caretakers can-not take ownership, and RTF be permitted, particularly in areas where there are no species of conservation concern or proof provided of a negative effect of cats on local wildlife populations.

Current state and local government laws relating to domestic cat management are simplistic and reflect a lack of understanding of the issues and hence, effective solutions. For example, there is a belief that free-roaming cats are mainly the result of irresponsible cat owners, and therefore the issue needs to be managed by legislation such as mandated containment and its enforcement. However, for enforcement to be effective, there must be an identifiable owner and the reality is that most free-roaming cats in urban areas have none. Furthermore, in low socioeconomic areas the costs of cat proof fencing are often too prohibitive for cat owners and semi-owners to comply with. Mandated sterilization is also not effective, not because of lack of motivation or responsibility but lack of money - household income is the strongest predictor of whether a cat is sterilized. To reduce free-roaming domestic cats, legislation and policy need to reflect an understanding of the true causes of the problem and must pursue solutions that are shown scientifically to be effective. Messaging must help the community, and its leaders understand the underlying issues and support evidence-based legislation. Messaging that demonizes cats only leads to legislation and bylaws that are barriers to solving the problem, such as mandated containment and cat limits.



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Supporting councils to develop and implement local by-laws

Mandatory Containment and Enforcement of Local By-laws

The APWF strongly recommends keeping cats contained indoors at night, and during the day, if possible, on their owners' property in a comfortable environment that meets their physical and mental needs. However, the APWF is against mandated cat containment (night curfews and 24/7) because it results in increased cat-related complaints, impoundments, and euthanasia, as well as higher costs and enforcement difficulties for local governments. Additionally, mandated cat containment fails to reduce the overall number of wandering cats in the short and long term, both in Australia and internationally, and is a barrier to solving the free-roaming cat problem.

For cat containment to be successful, clear measurable goals need to be first identified such as reduced wandering and nuisance cats and/or reduced risk of wildlife predation. For successful implementation it is critical to recognize the source of the problem, geographic locations where the issues are greatest, and barriers in these areas for residents to successfully contain their cats. For example, free-roaming domestic cats and cat-related complaints are greatest in disadvantaged areas. In these areas, many free-roaming cats are semi-owned cats or unidentified-owned cats with disadvantaged owners. Mandated containment will not achieve the hoped for goals, because firstly, most free-roaming cats in these areas are unidentified.

Secondly, many disadvantaged residents simply have no ability to comply, and therefore mandated containment becomes a social justice issue. In areas where free-roaming cats are most numerous and problematic, many residents live in low-cost rental properties that have inadequate fencing for cat containment, and may have no screens on windows and doors or air-conditioning. Containment fencing is often in the range of \$700 to \$2000 or more and is simply not affordable for community members to comply with cat containment mandates. Unfortunately, no subsidy is available to encourage their purchase, and cheaper options, such as PVC pipe installations, may require specific skills that some individuals do not possess. Additionally, many community members live in apartment blocks without access to a yard, leaving them with only communal spaces where they cannot put an enclosure. This is particularly common in social housing, where residents may not have flyscreens on windows and, therefore, cannot physically contain their cats, and fencing is inadequate to fit even inexpensive PVC tubing.

Promoting simple low or minimum-cost solutions such as bedtime feeding is likely to get more compliance, especially effective night-time compliance. Night-time containment is effective at protecting vulnerable wildlife, because it is a time when cats and threatened and endangered species most susceptible to cat predation (nocturnal mammals such as squirrel gliders and



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phascogales) are most likely to interact.

Bedtime feeding of cats is recommended as a highly effective way to assist cat owners at minimal to no additional cost to keep owned pet cats safely inside at night and prevent potential wildlife predation and nuisance behaviours such as fighting. This involves feeding cats inside at bedtime and ensuring all doors and windows are shut for the night, providing many owners with a way to safely confine their cat in the house/dwelling overnight. Bed-time feeding should be widely promoted to raise awareness among cat owners to increase cat containment at night, however, containment should not be made mandatory. This is because containment may not be achievable, for example, for owners with no air-conditioning and inadequate screening on windows and doors, and no suitable secure area. In addition, mandating containment leads to increased costs and enforcement difficulties for local governments and other unintended negative consequences including severe mental health impacts on community residents and staff associated with euthanising healthy cats and kittens. Mandated cat containment also prevents the resolution of the problem of wandering cats by creating a significant obstacle for cat semi-owners to take full ownership of the stray cats they are feeding.

Electronic fencing (hidden fencing) may be less expensive for some properties. It is not subject to restrictions for modifying rental properties, and key components can be relocated to another property. If used correctly electronic fencing is not associated with welfare issues and therefore it should be legalized in SA where it is not yet permitted (Kasbaoui 2016).

Mandating cat confinement creates a false hope within the community that the problems will be fixed once implemented and enforced. However, enforcement cannot occur when there is no owner for a cat, and effective enforcement requires an owner to be issued with the infringement or notice. In the relatively few cases where an owner or semi-owner is identified, they often have no ability to comply. Infringements issued by the council noncompliance can further financially burden cat owners without achieving containment. It is interesting that it is mentioned cat management should be in line with the introduction of tougher rules, similar to those for dogs.” It is easy to prove ownership of a dog, as it is generally in a backyard or behind a fence or gate, proof of ownership for cats is very difficult when a cat could be on another property to where it resides, or even on a different street. Dogs and cats are in no way similar when it comes to ease of proof of ownership for enforcement purposes, ease of containment, proportion of rental properties with suitable fencing for dogs but not cats, and relative risks to the community for free-roaming dogs versus cats, for example attacks on humans.

Mandating cat containment is seen as a popular solution to the free-roaming cat and nuisance problem. However, this is because the community does not understand the cause of the problem (low socioeconomic, semi-owned and unidentified owned cats), nor do they understand the adverse impacts of such a program on staff mental health and job satisfaction,



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nuisance complaints and costs to councils and welfare agencies. They also do not understand that evidence from Victoria demonstrates they are not effective, while microtargeted desexing programs are successful at reducing the problem.

The expansion of local cat confinement laws will not solve the issue of semi-owned and stray domestic cats, as has been shown in previous instances such as Yarra Ranges Council and Casey Council (Victoria) (APWF 2023). Furthermore, some councils have produced reports stating that curfews are unenforceable (Hobsons Bay Council, Hume City Council). In the City of Yarra Ranges (Victoria), in the 3rd year after mandating 24/7 cat containment, cat-related complaints increased by 143%. Yarra Ranges Council acknowledged that the significant increase in cat complaints was likely the result of the introduction of a 24-hour cat curfew in 2014. In addition, impoundments increased by 68%, and euthanasia increased by 18% (human population only increased by 2%) (Yarra Ranges 2021).

In the City of Casey (Victoria), 20 years after introducing mandated 24/7 cat containment, the number of cats impounded was still 296% higher than baseline (from 264 cats in 1998 to 1,047 cats in 2019/20), more than double the rate of the human population increase. In 2000, Casey received 349 cat nuisance and related complaints which had increased to 376 complaints in 2020/2021 (Casey Council 2001 & 2021 a, b) (APWF 2023). Therefore, mandated containment is not effective over 3 years or 20 years in reducing complaints associated with free-roaming cats, cat impoundments and therefore costs to councils. This failure reflects the impracticality for owners of semi-owned or stray cats to contain cats, and the financial and logistical barriers faced by cat residents in disadvantaged urban environments including in social housing.

Therefore, it is important to consider alternative solutions that are both effective and feasible for all community members.

Recommendation-

- **We recommend a more nuanced approach that includes supporting the construction of affordable and simple cat enclosures where there are species of conservation concern around urban and peri-urban areas, and exploring subsidies for those in need and promoting bedtime feeding where feasible.**
- **Implement proactive programs to support cat confinement within the community, rather than implementing further laws that will fail.**

Microchipping, Desexing, and Visible Identification (Collar and Tag)

Responsible cat owners generally comply with requirements to desexing and microchipping, but individuals who feed or care for stray cats often lack the resources to do so. While



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microchipping is essential for identifying and tracking down owners, the effectiveness is diminished if owners do not keep their contact details up-to-date. Although microchipping and desexing are considered responsible pet ownership basics, this does not address the existing populations of unowned or semi-owned domestic cats that continue to reproduce unchecked and will continue to do so. In line with RSPCA recommendations and published research, for cat safety should wear a collar with a breakaway clip or a securely fitting buckle collar, which will reduce the chance of a cat getting stuck or injured. A further recommendation is they advise against using collars that will lose elasticity over time. Bells on collars will initially reduce the number of birds and small mammals caught, though clever cats soon adapt their stalking behaviour to minimise the noise warning and are not shown to have the desired effects long term (RSPCA 2022)

Recommendation-

- **Implement free and low-cost microchipping targeted to communities contributing to high stray intake into the pound or shelter is effective. These are usually underserved communities. Combine these events with “check a chip” so pet owners can update their contact details for their pet on the microchip database.**
- **Provide free engraved ID tags and collars for cats, so all pets have visual identification and therefore neighbours can return pets directly to owners without impounding and the subsequent risk that they will not be reclaimed because of prohibitive fines or euthanised.**
- **Adopt a process for wandering or trapped cats, so any cat wearing visible ID, the owner is contacted directly and returned to the person, bypassing the pound.**

Limit on the Number of Cats per Household and Nuisance Cat-Related Calls

It is essential to recognize that a local law limiting the number of cats per property differs significantly from a cat hoarding situation. Cat limits (typically 2-4 per household) and the costly permits required to exceed these limits, should be abolished. There is no evidence a higher number of cats owned by a household correlates to a higher volume of nuisance calls or public health issues. An irresponsible owner of 1 cat may generate more complaints than a responsible owner of 10. Any enforcement concerns should focus on the impact of owned cats, not the number of them (Rand Unpublish 2024). Existing laws prohibiting creating a nuisance or a public health hazard are adequate, and cat limits are unnecessary. Moreover, cat limits and costly permits will not necessarily stop residents from feeding and maintaining “excess” cats, but may well deter them from ever taking full ownership.



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A study in Victoria, involving 22 cases, describes animal hoarding as the accumulation of a large number of animals beyond the owner's capacity to provide adequate care (Ockenden 2014). This extreme form of hoarding is challenging to resolve, often linked to underlying issues such as depression, anxiety, and mental illness, with traumatic life events like the loss of a family member triggering the behaviour. Resolving these cases requires substantial resources from various agencies and often results in the removal of cats, which then impacts council or welfare shelters' capacities. Without specific behavioural change interventions, there is a nearly 100 percent chance of reoffending. Addressing these situations necessitates more than just Animal Management Officers (AMOs) involvement; it requires the involvement of social services, including social workers and other support services. Limiting the number of cats on a property is a further mandate that will not address the unowned and semi-owned cat population. It is assumed if an owner can be identified, the owner would be directed to rectify the noncompliance or receive an infringement, which may not result in compliance, but may result in further costs for the council to try and retrieve the financial total through a court process. This does not guarantee or may not result in compliance of a nuisance cat or excess cats at a property. While responsible cat owners comply with these requirements, the reality is that if every cat owner or carer adhered to them, we wouldn't be facing the current issues.

With only 7% of cats being reclaimed from pounds in Australia (Chua, 2023) and a growing overpopulation problem, existing programs are ineffective regardless of the mandates imposed. To address this, we must shift our approach from reactive complaint management to proactive cat programs in partnership with the community and local cat welfare shelters. This strategy will help keep cats out of shelters and pounds, thereby increasing their capacity to care for cats in need and reducing costs, intake, and euthanasia totals for both councils and not-for-profit organizations.

Recommendation-

➤ **Partnerships are developed and maintained for behavioural change interventions for cat hoarding-specific properties and appropriate processes are documented for ongoing management.**

Best wishes,

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