



Landcare Tasmania Inc. Submission to the Draft Cat Management Amendment Bill 2019

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Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment
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Landcare Tasmania

Landcare Tasmania is the peak body that works to represent, support, strengthen and grow Tasmania's community Landcare. This community works on the ground to improve the health of our natural and working environments and is represented by people from the whole state, supported by over 250 local community groups.

We have supported numerous cat management programs around the state with local community and management groups including a number of information events and control programs around feral, stray and domestic cats. We are contact with the relevant members of the community and experts on this issue and therefore have a full understanding of the impacts of cats on the environment, agriculture and human health.

Overview

We welcome the review of the current Cat Management Act 2009, feel some changes are a step in the right direction but that overall,

Landcare Tasmania has been in consultation with several organizations with an interest in cat management, including discussing the Draft Cat Management Amendment Bill. The comments below are based on the discussions of the groups present at these meetings.

We feel that the amendments in the Draft Cat Management Amendment Bill are insufficient to fully address the issue of cats, domestic, stray and feral, in Tasmania. There are some significant gaps that should be addressed before this draft is finalised. This has also come through strongly in community and membership feedback that we have received via social media, email, phone and face to face.

The issues of cats in Tasmania is a statewide one and the responsibility should not be placed primarily

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on to councils, without funding assistance, and on not for profit organisations (and as a consequence vets). The Cat Management Act should have statewide provisions for cat management and not pass all responsibility to individual councils making cat management both unlikely and confusing. The lack of continuity between councils is currently an issue and this Draft Bill is likely to increase the confusion and lack of action. The community could be, and has indicated to us a keen willingness to be, involved as part of the solution but the expectations placed on them with regards to requirements under the proposed act makes this virtually impossible.

Section 14. Compulsory desexing of cats over the age of four months

Compulsory desexing and microchipping of cats at 4 months is a good change, as is the limiting of the number of cats people can to 4.

Section 14. (d) by omitting from subsection (2)(c) "a prescribed cat" and substituting "a member of a prescribed class of cats";

What are prescribed classes of cats and why are they not subject to desexing. All cats should be desexed unless registered breeders.

Part 3 Keeping of Cats

Insert Cat Containment

Cat containment should be a requirement of cat ownership. All pet owners should be responsible for their pets and not allow them to leave their property. Domestic cats have large impacts on surrounding fauna as well as being a nuisance to neighbours and potential health and agricultural threats.

Part 4 Management of Cats put the onus on neighbours to either not allow a cat into their yard to "impregnate" their own cat or to catch and return, take to a management facility or destroy their neighbour's cats. This "soft" or "carrot" approach is unlikely to make any difference to roaming pet cats and is more likely to lead to an increase in neighbourly disputes. The State Government needs to take responsibility for the legislation and make it compulsory to contain pet cats like they have with dogs. Instead this is being left to the community.

Insert Compulsory Cat Registration

Currently there are at least two companies that supply microchips. This means that there are two databases for cats that are microchipped. Without a central repository for this information it is very difficult to know who the cat belongs to. Compulsory registration of cats, like dogs, would mean that there was a central database for pet cats. It would also provide an important revenue stream for councils to undertake some of the cat management work outlined in the draft bill. Microchipping and desexing of cats is not enough to ensure responsible ownership of cats, which is what this bill should be striving for in terms of domestic cat management.

Part 4 - Management of Cats

Section 17 Property Protection from Cats

Amendment to the definition of primary production is a good one as it removes the limitation of effective cat control to many areas.

Cat Management Facility

There needs to be provision in the act for somewhere for people who cannot euthanize cats to

take them when undertaking trapping. However, this needs to be statewide, government funded, with a lot more facilities available, and there is nothing in the Draft Bill that suggests will happen. No statewide requirement and no funding.

As is seen now, people cannot and will not take cats long distances, it is impractical and costly and, with feral cats especially, difficult and dangerous, as well as being inhumane for any cat trapped. Many in the community will not do this and so either, cat management cannot be undertaken or cats will be released once caught or illegally euthanized. It should therefore NOT be the only legal requirement for people trapping within 1km of a residence, even if more facilities are put in place.

The current system of 3 non-government cat management facilities is not working, and there is nothing in the Draft Bill that suggests this will change. One in Hobart, one in Launceston and one in Devonport. The three current facilities are oversubscribed, reliant on the good will of volunteers and donors and not open all the time. There is also every chance that they will be unable to carry on into the future, like the Launceston RSPCA. For example, Just Cats in the north have over 900 cats, they are only open 4 days a week from 11am to 3pm and often can't take more cats because they have too many. As they don't euthanize cats, this is unlikely to change. This facility relies on volunteers to work at the two centres, as well as look after cats until they can be rehomed as well as donors to fund the centre and all its expenses. This is not something that is viable in the long term. People are likely to release cats they do bring to Cat Management Facilities if they are closed, increasing cat numbers around these facilities.

The other option often used currently is taking trapped cats to the local vet, who then, due to their requirement for duty of care, need to spend quite a lot of time and resources to either find a cat's owner, treat the cat for injury and then, usually, put the cat down. It is an unfair financial and personal burden on these small businesses and needs to be addressed as an issue.

Humane Destruction Limits

Draft Bill: 17 (8) A person may humanely destroy a cat found on his or her private land – if the land is more than one kilometre from any place used as a place of residence; or in prescribed circumstances.

Including an ability for land owners/managers who are not primary producers or on prohibited land to humanely destroy cats is an important change in the Draft Bill, which we would like to see remain.

However, the one kilometre limit is too large. There are a lot of peri-urban, rural residential and even rural areas that fit into this category which are a major source of cats into the broader landscape. While we recognise that this limit was likely included to reduce the chances of pet cats being euthanized, it also means that many options to control cats with the community and organisations in Tasmania will be severely limited, if not impossible. The requirement of taking cats to a Cat Management Facility means that control programs will not be undertaken or cats will be caught and released, as outlined above. There needs to be provision for people to trap and euthanize cats much closer to residences. If the limit is to remain, an ability to get a permit to euthanize cats needs to be a clear and relatively simple process for well organised cat control programs undertaken closer than one kilometre from residential houses.

Again, compulsory cat containment would significantly reduce the risk of pet cats getting killed. This should be in the legislation and not left to neighbours to try and enforce.

Does the sentence "(a) if the land is more than one kilometre from any place used as a place of residence" mean that the whole property needs to be more than one kilometre from the residence

or just the location where the cat is found on private land, as per Cat Management Regulations 2012 Part 5 Section 22 (see below). If it is the whole property than this significantly decreases further the area of land that can be successfully managed for stray and feral cat. This needs to be more clearly worded and needs to be where the cat is found or the traps are set, not the whole of the property, otherwise people with neighbouring houses right on their boundaries will not be able to control cats on their property even if the area trapped is further than 1km from the neighbouring house.

Cat Management Regulations 2012 Part 5 Section 22: *"For section 17(2)(b) of the Act, a person may trap, seize or humanely destroy a cat found on his or her private land if there is no place genuinely used as a place of residence (other than the residence of the person taking action) within a one-kilometre radius of the location where the cat is found on private land."*

Section 18 (amended) Cats in Prohibited Areas

The insertion of subsection 6 is a good one as it allows people managing conservation land to be able to humanely destroy cats.

Part 7 Breeding of Cats

Section 29 (amended) Restriction on Breeding of Cats

Remove the insertion of subsection 3 allowing permits to be obtained after they have found out their cat is pregnant. A person should not be able to get a permit after a cat has been bred. This then means that anyone who has a cat that is not desexed can apply for a permit after it has become pregnant. Cats need to be desexed or contained until desexed so they do not breed. If a cat is to be bred then a permit should be obtained before the fact.

Suspension or Cancellation of Registered Breeds

Section 31 and 32 of the original act have been replaced. What now happens to cancellation or suspension of registered breeders? This is no longer in the act but needs to be.

Other Comments

Provisions for Landscape Scale Cat Management/Eradication Programs

Provisions need to be put in the act for approval of landscape scale control of cats either through trapping and humanly destroying, and/or baiting, and/or biological control, and/or other control method. Without this provision in the Act, larger landscape scale programs are significantly restricted. Cats are a landscape scale issue, with high population numbers, presence in every habitat and wide ability to roam. Therefore there needs to be much larger, broader programs in place for any positive impacts to be made with cat control. The legislations classification of areas that restrict control practices due to the proximity of homes restricts the effectiveness of area control programs and needs to be amended to reflect the reality of cat movements in the landscape and current and future control techniques other than trapping.

We are happy to discuss further and look forward to having further input into this issue.