



House of Representatives
Standing Committee on the Environment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au

27th July 2020

Dear Inquiry Committee,

Submission to the inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia

Landcare Tasmania is the peak body that works to represent, support, strengthen and grow Tasmania's community Landcare movement. This community works on the ground to improve the health of our natural and working environments. It is represented by people from the whole state, supported by over 260 local community groups who are members of Landcare Tasmania, and has almost 5,000 regular members and volunteers.

We have supported a number of 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 engage with relevant members of the community and experts on this issue and have a thorough understanding of the impacts of cats on the environment, agriculture and human health.

A working group has been formed from the Landcare Tasmania Members Council to assist in consolidating up to date resources, precedent approaches and training and support to empower community Landcare groups to reduce the negative impacts of feral and stray cats across Tasmania's environmental, agricultural and economic landscapes.

Issues identified by our membership, and addressed in the submission, include:

- Primary and secondary impacts of stray and feral cats on native wildlife
- Cat containment and lack of addressing domestic/ stray cats
- Current lack of state-wide regulation
- Need for compulsory cat registration
- Cat management facility shortfalls
- Planning required for landscape scale cat control
- Support for local government cat management
- Increased RD &E into alternative control methods for feral cats

These issues are addressed in our submission attached.



Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rod Knight".

Rod Knight

CEO

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Landcare Tasmania submission to inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia

27 July 2020

1. The prevalence of feral and domestic cats in Australia;

Landcare Tasmania - Member Group Observations

- Our member groups have undertaken density studies to determine localised population densities. Within the Upper Meander Valley catchment of Tasmania, within a bush-pasture interface, the local group attained the alarming results of 10-12 cats per square kilometre¹.
- A recent two week pilot trapping program initiated by the Sulphur Creek/ Preservation Bay Landcare group and Central Coast Council had disturbingly captured 13 feral and 4 domestic cats, within a 5.4km stretch of penguin rookery coastline.²
- Residents of West Tamar region have reported consistently high populations of feral cats in bushland areas³. This has coincided with:
 - reductions in the populations of Tasmanian Devils due to DFTD
 - significant loss of small weight range marsupials (e.g. Eastern Barred Bandicoot)
 - observation of larger marsupial death or illness due to toxoplasmosis
 - impacts on lambing success in local flocks due to toxoplasmosis
- Camera trapping across the region through a number of studies, including those recorded in Feralscan the Tasmanian Land Conservancy's Wildtracker program and University research projects, have revealed widespread evidence of feral and stray cats in rural and peri-urban areas⁴.
- Landcare Tasmania Member groups have found that comprehensive data relating to the prevalence of the domestic cats in Tasmania is difficult to obtain due to inconsistent micro-chipping sources and no current requirement for cat registration.

¹ Data obtained from Upper Meander Catchment Landcare Group; refer to their separate submission to this inquiry.

² Refer to Attachment A - Sulphur Creek / Preservation Bay Landcare + Central Coast Council Cat Control Project Summary

³ Submission comments from West Tamar Landcare and Northern Area Advisory Group (a West Tamar Council community advisory group).

⁴ Lyall, JM 2018, 'Native and invasive mammalian carnivores in a forestry and agricultural landscape in northwest Tasmania', Research Master thesis, University of Tasmania.



Recommendations/Suggested Solutions:

- **Cat Registration should be legislated to ensure data is recorded on numbers, locations and breeds of all domestic cats within the state; as currently is the case for dogs.**
- **Further monitoring is required to establish accurate population densities and trends. It is suspected that as Tasmanian Devil populations decline, predator pressure on feral cats has also declined.**
- **Financial support should be provided to community groups working with councils to continue monitoring and trapping programs based upon successful pilot programs as evidenced in Kingborough, Meander Valley, West Tamar, Kentish and Central Coast municipalities.**

2. Impact of feral and domestic cats including on native wildlife and habitats

Community observations and scientific evidence

- Feral and stray cats are widely presumed to be a driver for local extinctions. Community groups in the West Tamar consider cats to have been a key factor in decline in prevalence of small weight range marsupials, other mammals and resident and migratory birds⁵. This is supported by bandicoot density studies performed by Upper Meander Catchment Landcare Group over several recent years. One site, had 15 bandicoots trapped and recorded originally, in the following year only one was trapped and the next annual check produced none, the past two years have captured none consistently. 28 feral cats were recently removed from that same vicinity.
- Key species threatened by cats include the endangered Eastern Barred bandicoot, a species impacted by predation and transmission of toxoplasmosis – which is fatal for this species⁶. Input from a previous head of a wildlife sanctuary stressed that even a close escape scratch for a marsupial has a *high risk* of toxoplasmosis, or other disease, transmittance, leaving the animal to a slow and painful death. The wildlife sanctuary had Southern Brown and Eastern Barred bandicoots brought in (along with occasional potoroos, bettongs, native rodents etc) several times a week with scratches that needed immediate treatment before the infection spread. These were the lucky few that were found; suggesting the statistics regarding wildlife deaths from cats may be heavily under-recorded. There are unfortunate incidences of domestic cats ‘playing’ with wildlife. Owners have carefully released the impacted native animal but were often not aware of the minor, but potentially life-threatening, claw marks.⁷

⁵ Submission comments from West Tamar Landcare and Northern Area Advisory Group (a West Tamar Council community advisory group)

⁶ Silvana S. Bettiol, David L. Obendorf, Mark Nowarkowski, and John M. GoldsmidSource, ‘Pathology of Experimental Toxoplasmosis in Eastern Barred Bandicoots in Tasmania’, *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*, 36(1):141-144. Published By: Wildlife Disease Association

URL: <http://www.bioone.org/doi/full/10.7589/0090-3558-36.1.141>

⁷ Comments from Jason Graham, past Head Keeper of Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary



- Bird and mammal observation after coordinated trapping programs undertaken by volunteers in Tasmania indicates that small bird populations can recover quickly after cat populations are reduced, but marsupials in particular are very slow to recover due to the combined effects of predation and toxoplasmosis.
- Cattle, horses, pigs and sheep are all impacted by toxoplasmosis. Upper Meander Catchment Landcare group has obtained data on surrounding sheep farms; with reported heavy lambing losses associated with large prevalence of feral cats (18 trapped on one farm, 28 on the neighbouring property).⁸
- Toxoplasmosis is also a disease that affects the human population and transmission of this disease through cats. This disease is linked to birth defects and miscarriage, mental dysfunction and chronic illness in humans.
- Upper Meander group has found that Statewide average for toxoplasmosis in feral cats is 86%; with multiple areas recording 100% infection.
- This is consistent with published scientific studies showing Tasmania to have one of the highest rates of toxoplasmosis infection in the world. A 2014 study found 84% of 266 cats tested positive for toxoplasmosis – one of the highest rates ever recorded in Australia and significantly higher than most other countries⁹. This finding is important, as the study systematically sampled regions across Tasmania, rather than a localised area.
- Cats are known to be more prevalent on the edges of farmland and continuing loss of native vegetation habitat, which provides refuge for small mammals, gives the cats a predatory advantage¹⁰.
- There is also evidence that this meso-predator release has been a factor in the rapid decline of the Eastern Quoll (*Dasyurus viverrinus*) in Tasmania¹¹, and it's subsequent listing as Endangered under the EPBC Act.

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions:

- **Further density studies of wildlife need to be co-ordinated Statewide in parallel to monitoring and trapping programs for feral and stray cats. Landcare Tasmania can assist with supporting community Landcare member groups to deliver this outcome.**
- **Data on the prevalence and impact of toxoplasmosis (on wildlife, farming stock and humans) needs to be collated and communicated to the broader public, including the critical importance of inspecting wildlife for scratches and, if found, immediately contacting wildlife specialists.**

⁸ Data obtained from Upper Meander Catchment Landcare Group; refer to their separate submission to this inquiry.

⁹ Fancourt Bronwyn A., Jackson Robert B. (2014) Regional seroprevalence of *Toxoplasma gondii* antibodies in feral and stray cats (*Felis catus*) from Tasmania. *Australian Journal of Zoology* 62, 272-283.
<https://doi.org/10.1071/ZO14015>

¹⁰ Lyall, JM 2018, 'Native and invasive mammalian carnivores in a forestry and agricultural landscape in northwest Tasmania', Research Master thesis, University of Tasmania.

¹¹ Bronwyn A. Fancourt, Clare E. Hawkins, Elissa Z. Cameron, Menna E. Jones, Stewart C. Nicol (2015). Devil Declines and Catastrophic Cascades: Is Mesopredator Release of Feral Cats Inhibiting Recovery of the Eastern Quoll? *PLOS ONE*, 11 March 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0119303>



- **Consideration needs to be given to staged removal of feral cats in certain areas to address potential minor pest populations (i.e. prey of cats) expanding due to reduction of predatorion and risks of expanding numbers of juvenile cats (chief transmitters of toxoplasmosis) predominating, whilst adults are slowly removed.**

3. The effectiveness of current legislative and regulatory approaches

Current State legislation and regulation is inadequate and ineffective

- The current Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2009, and the proposed Draft Cat Management Amendment Bill currently before State Parliament, are insufficient to address the impacts of domestic, stray and feral cats in Tasmania. There are some significant gaps that should still be addressed. This position is strongly support through community and membership feedback that we have received via social media, email, phone and face to face.
- The management of cats in Tasmania is a Statewide issue and the responsibility should not be placed, as currently stands, primarily on local 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 effective cat management unachievable and confusing. The lack of consistency between councils is currently an issue and the proposed Draft Amendment Bill is likely to increase the confusion and lack of action. The Tasmanian community has indicated a strong willingness to be involved in finding and implementing solutions to the impacts of cats in Tasmania. However, the expectations that would be placed on them under the proposed amendments to the Act will this virtually impossible.
- West Tamar Landcare have also noted that the legislation was designed to put the responsibility for cat management on to local government (cat management areas etc.). According to Mayor of West Tamar Council there was no consultation with local government, there is no funding provided and local government has therefore declined to be involved.¹² This is also supported by the published public submissions of 14 councils from around the state – most referring to similar concerns¹³; heavily undermining the performance of the Act.
- Current legislation requires captured cats to be delivered to accredited Cat Management Facilities. There are currently only three Cat Management Facilities in the state - Spreyton (RSPCA - 20 cat capacity), Longford (Just Cats - 900 cat capacity + foster care– has been full for several months) and Hobart (Ten Lives - doesn't accept feral cats). They are not government funded but are often at capacity and rely on charitable donations to run. It is extremely unlikely that people will drive anything up to 200 km to deliver a captured cat for disposal.

¹² Submission comments from West Tamar Landcare and Northern Area Advisory Group (a West Tamar Council community advisory group)

¹³ https://dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Public%20Submissions-Cat%20Management%20Amendment%20Bill_Nov%202019.pdf



- Domestic cats are not registered or subject to controls under local government by-laws in the West Tamar as is the case in almost all Municipalities in Tasmania.
- The Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2019 is widely acknowledged as ineffective and potentially obstructive to effective management of colony and semi domesticated cats. The legislation is poorly conceived and provides no clear incentive for responsible pet ownership.
- Amendments to this legislation under consideration by the Tasmanian Parliament partially addresses failures in the existing Act. The amendments include compulsory desexing and microchipping of pet cats, a system of permits for cat breeding and greater clarity in terms of trapping activities. The amendments fail to provide clarity in terms of penalties for non-compliance and there is no dedicated resourcing for promotion or enforcement of regulation.
- Animal welfare legislation in Tasmania provides adequate guidance to ensure the humane treatment of animals including feral and stray cats.
- The lack of resourcing for effective cat management in Tasmania is a significant impediment to voluntary and enforced compliance required for responsible pet ownership.

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions:

- **Implementation and enforcement of cat management should be addressed in the first instance by the State, by establishing a central system that includes a single microchip and registration database.**
- **This should be operated in partnership with the State's councils, including through provision of appropriate resources, to support introduction of a fair registration fee for cats to support costs, as is currently the case with dogs.**
- **There needs to be provision in the Act to support and expand the current Cat Management Facilities and to establish additional facilities across the State. The Facilities need to be funded and accessible to Councils and community members to access – community members should not have to (and won't) travel large distances to dispose of captured cats.**
- **The current Act, and proposed amendments, do not specify cat containment. Cat owners should be responsible for their pets, as dog owners are expected to be, and not allow them to leave their property. As noted above, cats, including domestic, have large impacts on surrounding fauna, and are potential agricultural and human health threats. Recent studies suggest that up to two thirds feral cats are found within town and village zones indicating there is a reasonable chance for a roaming domestic cat or stray interacting with a feral; compounding the risk of disease spread and the general health of a loved family feline.**

4. Effectiveness of Commonwealth action and cooperation with states and territories on this issue, including progress made under the Threat Abatement Plan, national framework and national declaration relating to feral and domestic cats in Australia

Need of Commonwealth involvement



- Any action the Commonwealth can take to coordinate or foster action on private and public land is highly desirable.

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions:

- **Consistent approaches to control of feral cat populations through specific funding programs is needed.**
- **Standardised codes of practice and coordinated deployment of control measures is desirable.**
- **There is a need for more coordinated federal research and development projects that provide further insight into the effectiveness of alternative control measures for feral cats including the use of biological controls.**

5. Efficacy, cost effectiveness and use of current and emerging methods and tools for controlling feral cats and their impacts, including baiting, the establishment of feral cat-free areas using conservation fencing, gene drive technology

Current Situation

- There is no coordinated or strategic approach to the management of domestic, stray and feral cats in Tasmania. Lack of funding is a key factor for inaction amongst local government, combined with the need for a complex community engagement process involving strong and competing views.¹⁴
- Efforts to reduce the impact of cats in rural and peri-urban areas has fallen to volunteer groups or paid contractors, predominantly working in local areas on private land. Trapping methods vary widely as does the treatment of animals captured in traps.
- Volunteers are exposed to risk through injury from trapped animals and they often incur costs for transport and treatment for euthanising of cats they catch.
- Much of the equipment used to catch cats by volunteers is low tech, and low cost.
- A custom 'smart trap' is currently under development by Upper Meander Catchment Landcare group. The trap is remotely accessed and raised off the ground to avoid capture of native animals. These traps are currently being trialled and further support should be provided if the trial findings prove effective..
- The Felixer Groom Trap, has been trialled in the State on various properties and has so far shown reasonable success. The latest iteration is currently being calibrated in photo-only mode. The outcomes will provide a potential further method of capture; however this will require funding and training to support deployment in the community.
- Successful community-based programs addressing the breadth of stray and feral cat impact, including humane trapping methods and procedures, have made a positive impact on property owners, peri-urban residents, experienced community groups¹⁵ and

¹⁴ Submission comments from West Tamar Landcare and Northern Area Advisory Group (a West Tamar Council community advisory group)

¹⁵ Notes obtained from Upper Meander Catchment Landcare Group; refer to their separate submission to this inquiry.



pilot partner councils¹⁶. A key part of this success has been effective communication with local communities through meetings, workshops, presentations, letters and social media. These community-based approaches offer a significant opportunity to expand the reach of initiatives to have landscape scale impact on feral and stray cat numbers.

- There are currently no formal fenced feral cat areas in the state that we are aware of. This is an effective measure to protect highly threatened remnant cat free areas. However, the cost to implement and maintain is high to address even for small areas so, this method cannot solve the issue at a state-wide of landscape levels.
- We note that cats are potentially vulnerable to biological control approaches such as feline parvovirus (feline enteritis) wherein a highly contagious disease could be introduced to the feral population. We are aware that such a disease can be treated in domestic cats and as such provides a means to reduce the destructive populations in the wild in a cost-effective manner while providing a system to protect pets.
- We note that in Tasmania there is a potential link between a healthy population of Tasmanian Devils and control of feral cats. Anecdotal information suggests that Devils prey on kittens and young cats. If there are ways to further support the recovery of Devil populations in Tasmania, this may help as a further control measure against cats. There was also a noted disproportionate decrease in native meso predators such as the Eastern Quoll when Devils were not present and feral cats increased.
- There has been no significant consideration given to the introduction of cat flu to reduce feral cat populations. Our understanding is that domestic cats can be vaccinated against the disease, so investigation into cat flu as a potential option for biological control should be investigated.
- Gene drive technology hasn't been explored by our member groups to date but they would be open to exploring it further

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions

- **Landcare Tasmania member groups often work adjacent to, or with, Parks and Wildlife Tasmania reserves enabling an opportunity for implementation assistance if a policy for conservation fencing threatened areas became a state-wide strategy.**
- **New trapping methods and approaches are encouraged, and well-funded coordinated trapping and elimination programs are strongly encouraged as a recommendation from this inquiry.**
- **Investigation and research into potential methods of biological control of feral cats is urgently needed, including of any potential concomitant impacts on native fauna and on methods to provide protection for domestic cats.**
- **With targeted grants made available, Landcare Tasmania can facilitate gene drive field research and trials within the state in partnership with relevant on ground groups.**

6. Efficacy of import controls for high risk domestic cat varieties to prevent the impacts of feral and domestic cats, including on native wildlife and habitats

¹⁶ Refer to Attachment A - Sulphur Creek / Preservation Bay Landcare + Central Coast Council Cat Control Project Summary



Current situation

- There appears to be no sound reason to allow the importation of domestic cats to Australia and specifically to Tasmania.

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions

- **A review of the importation of cat varieties is required to understand the level of need against the level of risk they pose to the nation's, and particularly Tasmania's, vulnerable wildlife. Importation of recognised high risk species should be not be allowed.**

7. Public awareness and education in relation to the feral and domestic cat problem

Landcare Tasmania and Member Group Observations

- Cat control will not succeed without community participation. Education is required to reduce dumping of cats and kittens and the feeding of semi-wild cats. Compliance with micro-chipping and de-sexing is critical. Encouragement to keep cats contained and for responsible cat ownership must be continually reinforced.¹⁷ The recent Central Coast Council awareness campaign resulted in overwhelming public support for the pilot trapping program and requests for extension of its scope.
- A potentially unregulated source of stray and feral cats comes from farms. In particular cats which are kept semi-domesticated around sheds, dairies and barns for rodent control. Such cats are generally allowed to breed and are not subject to normal treatment as pets by farmers. These cats provide a valuable service that discourages their close management, desexing or containment. Feral cat populations intermix with these farm cats and wild populations are augmented.
- Specialist community engagement around the management of farmyard cats is required which includes practical approaches to alternative management of rodents and other pests, the impact of farmyard cats on wildlife, and livestock as vectors of Toxoplasmosis and Sarcocystosis.
- In Tasmania the state government has enabled the creation of a valuable community resource known as Tassiecat (<https://www.tassiecat.com/>). Such programs are desirable in promoting responsible cat ownership and ideally need ongoing support and wider distribution

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions

- **'Tassie-Cat' regional Cat Management Co-ordinators have been helpful resources for domestic cat management. Expansion of their scope to include education around feral**

¹⁷ Excerpt from Attachment A - Sulphur Creek / Preservation Bay Landcare + Central Coast Council Cat Control Project Summary



cats would be assist in a broader reach in understanding and support for the general public.

- **Successful public awareness campaigns partnered with pilot trapping programs, such as the recent Central Coast Council approach, should be used as exemplars for Federal and State Government policies. The Council created a dedicated informative cat impact page on the Council website, provided overviews and alerts in the Council Newsletter and letterboxed hundreds of residents near the trapping area. The project summary, including key messages broadcast, are described in Attachment A.**
- **There is increasing community awareness of the environmental effects of cats. Maintaining and expanding local and Statewide information campaigns, and providing assistance in moving towards responsible cat ownership, would keep this momentum going.**
- **Greater involvement between cat management coordinators and state-wide community organisations such as Landcare Tasmania is critical for public participation and awareness raising. Community-based cat control programs are a cost-effective way to reduce cat numbers and impacts, and are able to be responsive to changes in local circumstances.**

8. Interaction between domestic cat ownership and the feral cat problem, and best practice approaches to the keeping of domestic cats

Landcare Tasmania and Member Group Observations

- Without effective containment within properties, domestic cats are much more likely to come into contact with diseased feral or stray cats. The contact magnifies risk of contracting wild-borne diseases and spreading amongst human owners or encountered wildlife. Tassie Cats have begun this process of public awareness and resources for cat containment
- Community awareness of the obligations and responsibility of cat ownership, as well as the potential impacts of irresponsible cat ownership, needs to be strongly reinforced through registration and cat tracking systems. Microchipping provides an effective means of identifying cats that have escaped from a domestic environment.
- Community awareness that both desexing and microchipping is both humane and beneficial to pets is a desirable approach.

Recommendations/Suggested Solutions

- **Provision of simple information on responsible pet ownership, including containment systems and strategies, tracking of pets, preventing unwanted breeding and pampering of pets should be included in expanded community awareness programs.**
- **Compulsory desexing of pet cats at the point of sale will reduce the potential for strays to breed in the wild.**
- **Penalties to traced owners of stray cats need to reflect the true cost of administration of stray cat controls.**



Attachments

- A. A Sulphur Creek / Preservation Bay Landcare + Central Coast Council Cat Control Project Summary
- B. West Tamar Landcare and Northern Advisory Group (West Tamar Council community advisory group) submission comments (entirety)
- C. Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary former Head Keeper, Jason Graham comments



Attachment A

Summary

Pilot Cat Control Project 2020

**Sulphur Creek/ Preservation Bay Coastcare Group
together with the Central Coast Council (sponsor), NW Tas**

The Sulphur Creek Preservation Bay Coastcare Group and the Central Coast Council partnered to conduct a Federal Government funded Cat Control Program.

Council Reluctance

There was an initial unwillingness by Council to take on the additional responsibility of animal control because ordinarily this is a task undertaken by State Government.

Councils' are not equipped with resources or skilled staff, including ethical and humane procedural knowledge. Once-off funding may set a precedent and shift the onus onto Council. Meanwhile, inaction on cat control is adding to extinction and the general public are highly aware of the issue.

Pilot Project

Council agreed to undertake a pilot project taking a strong role in raising awareness - fully informing the public about the aims, methods and outcomes of the Cat Control Program.

Partnerships

Working cooperatively with Tassie Cats and their Region Cat Management Coordinator and local RSPCA proved to be vital in bringing all parties into line and in agreement with aims, objectives and methodologies. Council and Coastcare received essential support throughout the planning stage, strengthening the project and adding credibility during and after the trapping phase.

Aiming for Public Acceptance

Cat control will not succeed without public participation. Education is required to reduce dumping of cats and kittens and the feeding of semi-wild cats. Compliance with micro-chipping and de-sexing is critical. Encouragement to keep cats contained must be continually reinforced.

Awareness Raising

Dedicated Cat page on the Council Website. Council Newsletter. Letterboxing of residents near the trapping area. 4 key Facebook messages:

1. *Protecting our beautiful coast zone*
A treasured playground for our community, equally as important shorebirds, little penguin rookeries and other wildlife.
2. *Keeping your cat safe from harm and harming*
Encouragement to contain cats ref to Tassie Cats Website info about keeping pets safe at home and advice regarding the microchipping and desexing of cats.



3. *Protecting Shorebirds and other treasured creatures on our coasts*
Little penguins and shorebirds nesting on the sand are vulnerable to predation
4. *Cat trapping project working closely with Tassie Cats and RSPCA*
Promoting cooperative partnerships with RSPCA and Tassie Cats to ensure humane treatment of animals

Trapping Results July 2020

- 25 traps set out over six nights
- 17 cats were caught within the 5.7km coastal strip
- 4 of the cats caught were cared for by the RSPCA
- 13 feral cats were humanely euthanised
- The Project received overwhelming support, many people asking for the trapping areas to be extended
- Even the contracted trapper, who was initially frustrated with bureaucracy and what he thought to be an excessively cautious approach by the Central Coast Council, came to understand the reasoning behind the consultative and thoughtful process that won majority support.

Follow-up Community Communications

- Results of the trapping project fully reported – Council Facebook, Newsletter and Website
- (additional) 5th key message about the seriousness of toxoplasmosis
- Future Council Newsletter - interview article in with a responsible cat owner who has built a cat enclosure
- Extension of the Cat Control Project being strongly considered by the Central Coast Council for 2021.



Attachment B

Submission comments from West Tamar Landcare and Northern Area Advisory Group (a West Tamar Council community advisory group)

For inclusion in a formal submission prepared by Landcare Tasmania

Specific comments on the Terms of reference;

a. The prevalence of feral and domestic cats in Australia;

- Residents of West Tamar region have reported consistently high populations of feral cats in bushland areas, this has coincided with:
 - reductions in the populations of Tasmanian Devils due to DFTD
 - significant loss of small weight range marsupials (e.g. Eastern Barred Bandicoot)
 - observation of larger marsupial death or illness due to toxoplasmosis
 - impacts on lambing success in local flocks due to toxoplasmosis
- Camera trapping across the region through Tasmanian Land Conservancy's Wildtracker program has revealed widespread evidence of feral and stray cats in rural and peri-urban areas.
- Further monitoring is required to establish accurate population densities and trends. It is suspected that as Tasmanian Devil populations decline, predator pressure on feral cats has also declined.

b. the impact of feral and domestic cats including on native wildlife and habitats;

- Feral and stray cats are widely presumed to be a driver for local extinctions. In the West Tamar we believe cats have been a key factor in decline in prevalence of small weight range marsupials, other mammals and resident and migratory birds.
- Key species threatened by cats include the endangered Eastern Barred bandicoot, a species impacted by predation and transmission of toxoplasmosis – which is fatal for this species.
- Bird and mammal observation after coordinated trapping programs undertaken by volunteers in Tasmania indicates that small bird populations can recover quickly after cat populations are reduced, but marsupials in particular are exceedingly slow to recover due to the combined effects of predation and toxoplasmosis.
- Toxoplasmosis is also a disease that affects the human population and transmission of this disease through cats. This disease is linked to birth defects, mental dysfunction and chronic illness in humans.
- Cats are known to be more prevalent on the edges of farmland and continuing loss of native vegetation habitat, which provides refuge for small mammals, gives the cats a predatory advantage.

c. the effectiveness of current legislative and regulatory approaches;

- Domestic cats are not registered or subject to controls under local government by-laws in the West Tamar as is the case in almost all Municipalities in Tasmania.



- The Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2019 is widely acknowledged as ineffective and potentially obstructive to effective management of colony and semi domesticated cats. The legislation is poorly conceived and provides no clear incentive for responsible pet ownership.
 - The legislation was designed to put the responsibility for cat management on to local government (cat management areas etc.) but according to our local mayor there was no consultation with local government, there is no funding provided and local government has therefore declined to be involved seriously undermining the efficacy of the Act.
 - Amendments to this legislation under consideration by the Tasmanian Parliament partially addresses failures in the existing Act. The amendments include compulsory desexing and microchipping of pet cats, a system of permits for cat breeding and greater clarity in terms of trapping activities. The amendments fail to provide clarity in terms of penalties for non-compliance and there is no dedicated resourcing for promotion or enforcement of regulation.
 - Animal welfare legislation in Tasmania provides adequate guidance to ensure the humane treatment of animals including feral and stray cats.
 - The lack of resourcing for effective cat management in Tasmania is a significant impediment to voluntary and enforced compliance with responsible pet ownership.
- d. **the effectiveness of Commonwealth action and cooperation with states and territories on this issue, including progress made under the Threat Abatement Plan, national framework and national declaration relating to feral and domestic cats in Australia;**
- Any action the Commonwealth can take to coordinate or foster action on private and public land is highly desirable. Consistent approaches to control of feral cat populations through specific funding programs, standardised codes of practice and coordinated deployment of control measures is desirable.
- e. **the efficacy (in terms of reducing the impact of cats), cost effectiveness and use of current and emerging methods and tools for controlling feral cats, including baiting, the establishment of feral cat-free areas using conservation fencing, gene drive technology;**
- There is no coordinated or strategic approach to the management of domestic, stray and feral cats in Tasmania. Lack of funding is a key factor for inaction amongst local government, combined with the need for a complex community engagement process involving strong and competing views.
 - Efforts to reduce the impact of cats in rural and peri-urban areas has fallen to volunteer groups or paid contractors, predominantly working in local areas on private land. Trapping methods vary widely as does the treatment of animals captured in traps.
 - Volunteers are exposed to risk through injury from trapped animals and they often incur costs for transport and treatment or euthanising of cats they catch.
 - Much of the equipment used to catch cats by volunteers is low tech, and low cost.
 - New trapping methods and approaches are encouraged, and well-funded coordinated trapping and elimination programs are strongly encouraged as a recommendation from this inquiry.
 - We note that cats are potentially vulnerable to biological control approaches such as feline parvovirus (feline enteritis) wherein a highly contagious disease could be introduced to the feral population. We are aware that such a disease can be treated in domestic cats and as



such provides a means to reduce the destructive populations in the wild in a cost effective manner while providing a system to protect pets.

- We note that in Tasmania there is a potential link between a healthy population of Tasmanian Devils and control of feral cats. Anecdotal information suggests that Devils prey on kittens and young cats. If there are ways to further support the recovery of Devil populations in Tasmania, this may help as a further control measure against cats.

f. the efficacy of import controls for high risk domestic cat varieties to prevent the impacts of feral and domestic cats, including on native wildlife and habitats;

- There appears to be no sound reason to allow the importation of domestic cats to Australia and specifically to Tasmania.

g. public awareness and education in relation to the feral and domestic cat problem;

- We note that a potentially unregulated source of stray and feral cats comes from farms. In particular cats which are kept semi-domesticated around sheds, dairies and barns for rodent control. Such cats are generally allowed to breed and are not subject to normal treatment as pets by farmers.

The fact that these cats provide a valuable service mitigates against their close management, desexing or containment. Feral cat populations intermix with these farm cats and wild populations are augmented.

Specialist community engagement around the management of farmyard cats is required which includes practical approaches to alternative management of rodents and other pests, the impact of farmyard cats on wildlife and as vectors of Toxoplasmosis

- In Tasmania the state government has enabled the creation of a valuable community resource known as Tassiecat (<https://www.tassiecat.com/>) Such programs are desirable in promoting responsible cat ownership and ideally need ongoing support and wider distribution.
- There is an increasing awareness of the environmental effects of cats and maintaining Statewide information campaigns, and providing assistance in moving towards responsible cat ownership, would keep this momentum going.

h. the interaction between domestic cat ownership and the feral cat problem, and best practice approaches to the keeping of domestic cats in this regard.

- Community awareness of the obligations and responsibility of cat ownership need to be strongly reinforced through registration and cat tracking systems. Microchipping provides an effective means of identifying cats that have escaped from a domestic environment.
- Penalties to traced owners of stray cats need to reflect the true cost of administration of stray cat controls.
- Compulsory desexing of pet cats at the point of sale will reduce the potential for strays to breed in the wild.
- Community awareness that both desexing and microchipping is both humane and beneficial to pets is a desirable approach.
- Provision of simple information on responsible pet ownership, including containment systems and strategies, tracking of pets, preventing unwanted breeding and pampering of pets could be included in a community awareness program.





Attachment C

Submission comments from Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary former Head Keeper, Jason Graham
July 24th 2020.

....”regarding the submission re: feral/domestic cats. The part that often is missed out/not emphasised enough is the amount of small mammals that are killed just from cat scratches. In my past work as Head Keeper of Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary, I’d see native animals (mainly Southern brown and Eastern barred bandicoots, but occasionally potoroos, bettongs, native rodents etc) several times a week coming in with scratches, that need immediate treatment before the infection spreads. These are the lucky few that are found by people, or at least people who notice the wounds and think to call. The vast majority escape with their wounds into the bush, just to die slowly from infection. Most members of the public find an animal brought in by their cat, think it’s not injured and release it. Most of the time there is some kind of scratch or puncture and the well-meaning member of the public is releasing an animal to die.

For this reason, I believe the estimates of numbers of native animals killed by cats is vastly underestimated. There is also the massive problem of toxoplasmosis, but I’m sure that has already been covered in the submission.”