



**Southern Downs**  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

**Please address all  
communications to:**

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t **1300 MY SDRC**  
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Our Ref: MW:CM

30 July 2020

Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy  
Parliament of Australia  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

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

Please accept this submission from Southern Downs Regional Council to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy's inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia.

Council's responses to the relevant terms of reference are presented below:

a) ***Prevalence of feral and domestic cats in Australia***

The Southern Downs Region spans an area of 7,120 km<sup>2</sup> and supports a population of approximately 36,000 people. The region impounds an average of 700 cats per year with 330 cats being deemed feral and euthanised by local vets. The remaining cats (an average of 350 cats) are either returned to their owners or rehomed by animal welfare groups. Feral cat trapping programs are periodically undertaken at hot spots such as the major waste facilities at Warwick and Stanthorpe and other locations identified via complaints from members of the public. These programs have captured 49 feral cats during the previous 12 months. The data indicates the cat problem is growing in the region and it is estimated that cats cost Southern Downs Regional Council (SDRC) approximately \$85,000/year.

c) ***The effectiveness of current legislative and regulatory approaches***

In Queensland, the feral cat (a domestic cat living in a wild state) has been declared a restricted invasive animal under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. The State Government provides educational resources on feral cat ecology and control but devolves responsibility for further policy and regulation of cats to local government. Policy and regulation of cats from local government is highly variable with responses ranging from no management of cats through to requiring individuals wishing



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to own a cat being required to microchip, register and de-sex the animal. In the Southern Downs Region, Council provides a range of services to residents including advice and education on responsible cat ownership, restricting the number of cats a resident can own via local laws, pest management officers to provide advice on feral cat control, animal control officers undertaking patrols of major population centres to collect straying animals, cat trapping programs at waste facilities and other problem areas, and provision of cat traps and drop boxes for residents wishing to control cats on/or entering their premises.

In the Southern Downs Region, these approaches do not appear to have led to any reduction in the number of cats in the region. Limited information on feral cat policy, control and research from Federal and State Governments seems to filter down to the local government level. Council recommends:

- Improving communication from government agencies regarding the legislative and regulatory requirements around cat management;
- Providing clear guidelines and resources centred on the development and implementation of local government policy on managing feral and domestic cats;
- Public awareness campaigns to better inform the general public of their legislative and regulatory obligations around the keeping of cats.

In recognition of the increasing cat problem in the Southern Downs Region, Council is considering implementing further cat management strategies. These strategies may include compulsory micro-chipping, registration and de-sexing (unless you are a registered breeder) for domestic cat ownership.

- 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.***

Limited information regarding emerging methods and tools for feral cat control has filtered down to the local government level. A potential solution is for the Federal government to co-ordinate and promote a nationwide “knowledge base” that shares details on cat management programs (including indicative costs) from across the country. Organisations running cat management programs could register their project and upload information and results. This would give pest managers the opportunity to examine a variety of management options in a single location. In addition, subsidies specifically related to feral cat control projects could be made available to local governments. This would help remove the barrier of cost for local governments, particularly those with smaller budgets, to implement appropriate cat control and management programs.

SDRC has received funding through round 2 of the Federal Government’s Communities Combatting Pest and Weed Impacts During Drought Program for a project aimed at reducing the impacts of feral cats in the region. The project will combine policy, monitoring,



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management and awareness raising to get a better understanding of cat movements and options to regulate ownership.

g) ***Public awareness and education in relation to the feral and domestic cat problem***

Communication and education are critically important areas where all levels of government should be delivering a coordinated and consistent set of messages. Federal and State government agencies could supply a coordinated set of education and public awareness materials for use by local government for dissemination through their communities.

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

The large number of cats impounded in the Southern Downs Region (approx. 700 per year) indicates a relatively low level of understanding/adherence to the principles of responsible cat ownership. As previously mentioned, greater support to local government in the form of tools and materials for policy development, community education and awareness would be highly beneficial.

The timing of the inquiry as it pertains to Council's meeting schedule is such that this submission has not yet been endorsed by Council. Council will consider the submission at its 27 August 2020 Ordinary Meeting and should the submission be amended in any way, Council will advise the Standing Committee.

Yours faithfully

Craig Magnussen  
**Acting Director Sustainable Development**