

**Barrie Price**

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Mr Ted O'Brien MP

Chairperson

The House of Representatives

Standing Committee on the Environment & Energy

**Terms of reference - Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia.**

Dear Mr O'Brien,

I am making this submission as an ordinary Australian with no formal training in environmental issues but as a person that has lived in Sydney all his life and observed the changes to the native fauna over 60 years.

**BACKGROUND**

For 60 years I have been lucky enough to live in a few Sydney suburbs and with our homes adjoining bush reserves. During that time I have seen a big decline in vulnerable species of small birds and animals, in no small part, caused by foxes, cats and dogs.

Currently, I am part of a volunteer program with our local Sutherland Council to humanely trap foxes that are coming onto our large garden. I joined the program because we had noticed the remains of dead birds, possums and very sadly a sugar glider. We trapped one fox which was dealt with by the Council staff but a large number of cats, which I have released. I understand that the **NSW** Companion Animals Act prohibits cats being dealt with in a suitable manner as other feral animals.

None of our neighbours have cats and these trapped cats appear to be strays or feral cats!

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- A. **The prevalence of feral and domestic cats in Australia** – anecdotally, from trap numbers cats are common in Sydney bushland settings. The cat population could be measured by the amount of cat food available and products that are presented for sale in the areas supermarkets.
- B. **The impact of cats on native wildlife and habitats** – I have witnessed the loss of native birds and animals due to cats in the bushland surrounding Sydney suburbs over 60 years.
- C. **The effectiveness of current legislation** – other feral predators can be dealt with humanely while cats appear to have some immunity because of the **NSW** Companion Animals Act. According the **NSW** Companion Animals Act, as long as cats are microchipped, registered

and wearing a collar there are no restrictions on where they can roam, except in prohibited places such as protected wildlife areas and where food is prepared or consumed.

This exemption is not afforded to dogs, who do not cause as much damage to native wildlife in bushland surrounding Sydney. Dogs are strictly controlled by local government regulations and enforcement.

Cats should not be allowed to roam free outside the property of the owner.

I believe that Local Government legislation should be made stronger to deal with the range allowed to cats. The local council in the Yarra Ranges of Victoria enacted regulations in the 1980's to compel cat owners to lock up their cats at night to save the complete destruction of the native wildlife and this has developed into a "Cat Curfew". This should be adopted by all local councils.

I submit that the Federal Government should pressure the States to change their legislation to enable stricter control of cats in line with that of dogs and encourage local government to take a more aggressive approach to the problem.

- D. **The effectiveness of Commonwealth action and cooperation with the states on this issue –** it could be better as the problem is not decreasing.
- E. **The efficacy, cost effectiveness and use of current and emerging methods and tools of controlling feral cats –** the source of the increase in numbers and range of feral cats is the domestic cat population! Tighter controls need to be enforced on ownership, breeding and the disposal of unwanted litters. The cost of enforcement can be obligated to cat owners and not borne by the three levels of government programs. If cats are controlled at the source, large budget conservation fencing and other large budget government funded programs could be scaled back in the future. The problem will only increase if the source of the problem is not addressed.
- F. **The efficacy of import controls for high risk domestic cat varieties -** Australian border controls are strong when it comes to other animals and insects, the same approach should be applied to the import of cat varieties. A person importing a cat variety should bear the burden to prove that this cat is not a danger and that its importation will somehow lessen the danger to native wildlife. There must be a benefit to allowing such an import.
- G. **Public awareness and education in relation to feral and domestic cats -** there is a distinct lack of information provided by State and Local Government around the impact of cats on the destruction of native wildlife. If a person goes looking for information, it is online but it needs landowners and rate payers to be canvassed continually in conjunction with rate notices to be alert to the problem. In 40 years as a ratepayer in Sydney, I have not been made aware of the problem by local councils.
- H. **The interaction between domestic cat ownership and the feral cat problem -** I would suspect that most cat owners are responsible and alive to the issues that lack of animal control has on the environment but we must legislate for the minority who get lazy or simply do not care. Cats should not be allowed to roam on other than the owner's property and

there should be enforceable legislation enacted at a local government level. Local councils should be adopt programs that assist owners with unwanted litters which could be funded by a more stringent registration policy. The "user pay" notion is used constantly but all levels of government and this should be adopted here with cat registration funding programs.

I thank you for taking the time to read the submission and I wish the Committee well in making positive change in this area.

Yours faithfully,

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Barrie Price

08/07/2020