

16 July 2020

INQUIRY INTO THE PROBLEM OF FERAL AND DOMESTIC CATS IN AUSTRALIA

As the coordinator of a Friends group which works at a local conservation reserve of 700 hectares managed by the West Australian Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, our group is well aware and dismayed at the biological cost of feral, stray and domestic cats on our precious, unique and fragile environment.

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

The reserve sits in an urban setting so the problem of predation includes strays and domestic cats. Birds, bats, frogs, quenda (bandicoots) and phascogales who live in the reserve are at risk of predation from cats. Most of the quenda are restricted to areas where the animals can seek refuge from cats and foxes rather than roaming throughout the Reserve. Phascogales live in trees and are extremely susceptible to cat predation.

Scientific evidence highlights the fact that our bushland needs digging animals to thrive. In the face of climate change, rather than continuing with processes that have been shown to reduce biodiversity such as industrial scale prescribed burning, what is required is a more natural means of increasing plant recruitment, soil turnover and overall ecological health through the introduction and expansion of the digging animals that include quenda and woylies for example. However until we have the means to control cats we cannot introduce further animals into our Reserve.

c. the effectiveness of current legislative and regulatory approaches;

There are currently two housing developments being established on the Reserve's southern boundary. We requested that the City of Rockingham (the local council in which the Reserve is situated) enacts a Cat Local Law which would make it possible to declare the Reserve a prohibited area and thus deter local residents from allowing their cats to roam. Fines would also be issued if domestic cats were trapped in the Reserve. Unfortunately to date this has not been pursued.

As well, without local cat laws the opportunities that can be pursued to control feral cats is limited e.g. use of the Felixer device, because of the impact it could have on domestic and stray cats.

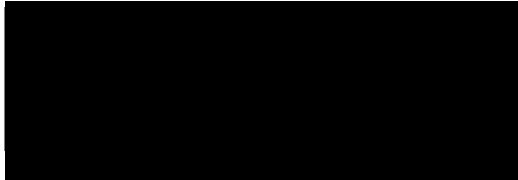
e. the efficacy (in terms of reducing the impact of cats), cost effectiveness and use of current and emerging methods and tools for controlling feral cats, including baiting, the establishment of feral cat-free areas using conservation fencing, gene drive technology;

We would welcome more effective means of cat control but until we can overcome the reticence of our State Government and Local Councils to enact laws that have the same force as is currently applied to dog owners then it is unlikely that urban conservation reserves will see improvements in the reduction of cat numbers. It appears that if an animal has the ability to hurt humans i.e. dogs for example then control is a necessity; however if it's only going to hurt other native species then unfortunately that species must fend for itself!

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

We are disappointed in the lack of awareness or interest by the general public (particularly cat owners) in the plight of our native animals due to cat predation. Many cat owners wilfully ignore and even discount the significant and terminal damage that cats do to many of our native species resulting in extinction in some cases. More public awareness is definitely needed. I, personally, distribute Birds Australia flyers to the people around me who I know own cats. The recommendation is for cats to be confined at least at night but generally to become indoor cats. Most of the neighbours ignore this advice and I know from camera traps that cats continue to use our property as a thoroughfare.

No matter how much effort we make as a group to keep our Reserve weed free it is to no avail if there are no native animals (apart from the kangaroo) to utilise its resources. Our human health relies on the health of the natural world (plants, microorganisms, insects, spiders, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians). Symbiotic relations abound between our native plants and animals. Cats (and foxes and rabbits) destroy these relationships. We need more tools in the arsenal to increase biodiversity conservation through the control of cats and thus enable our native animals to thrive.



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