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13 July 2020

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

Re: Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia

Dear Committee Secretariat,

Australian Wildlife Society is dedicated to the conservation of Australian wildlife (flora and fauna) in all its forms through national environmental education and advocacy. We are writing to make a submission to the inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia. By now, we are all aware of the devastating impacts that feral and free-roaming cats impose on Australia's native wildlife, with the consequence being major wildlife species decline on a national-scale.

Predation of native wildlife by cats is listed in New South Wales as a key threatening process under the *New South Wales Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Cats have a significant impact on the environment through predation of birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. Predation by cats on native wildlife is a major contributor to the extinction of some twenty-two Australian mammals. A further 142 threatened species are impacted as a result of feral cat predation in Australia. Furthermore, cats can pose a significant health risk to native wildlife through the spread of diseases such as toxoplasmosis and sarcosporidiosis.

Heavier restrictions are required, particularly in relation to the following key topics:

1. The *Companion Animals Act 1998* No 87 section 11B, states that an annual permit is required for cats that are not de-sexed. Feral and domestic cats cause harm to Australia's native wildlife regardless if they are de-sexed or not. Therefore, an annual permit should be a compulsory requirement, whether a cat is de-sexed or not. Furthermore, due to the growing number of uncontrolled feral and domestic cats in Australia, it should be compulsory for all cats to be de-sexed. De-sexing all cats, regardless of status, will help to reduce the number of unwanted cats born each year.
2. The *Companion Animals Act 1998* currently permits domestic cats to roam freely. This results in many cats injuring and killing native wildlife, even when fed daily. This means it is very difficult to manage cat predation effectively, particularly at night when most roaming behaviour occurs. We believe that all cats should be kept indoors or permitted outside in a secure cat run, to prevent cats injuring and killing native wildlife.



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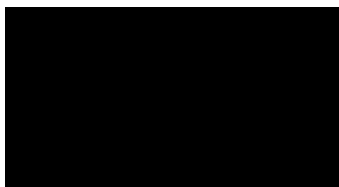


3. Responsible pet ownership. Responsible pet owners' de-sex, microchip and register their cat/s and ensure that their contact details are up to date. De-sexing cats helps to reduce straying, fighting and aggression and antisocial behaviour, such as spraying to mark territory. Furthermore, higher fines should be imposed on those who do not de-sex, microchip and register their cat.
4. We would like to see harsher and more transparent laws implemented regarding the Trap Neuter Release approach, which involves catching, de-sexing and returning unowned (wild and uncontrolled) cats to the wild by some cat societies. Free-roaming cats are regarded as one of the biggest threats to biodiversity and therefore the Trap Neuter Release approach should be considered an unacceptable practice. Although official regulation warns against it, certain community organisations continue to implement the Trap Neuter Release approach. Trap Neuter Release schemes are illegal in Victoria under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* and should be considered illegal throughout the rest of the country. Furthermore, *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (NSW) states that "a person shall not abandon an animal." This provision, which applies to all animals, potentially makes the release of cats, as part of Trap Neuter Release, an offense under animal cruelty regulation. Releasing an unowned cat back into the wild is abandonment. Furthermore, a lack of preventative and ongoing veterinary care could also lead to offences under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.
5. There is an urgent need for local government agencies to be more pro-active in enforcing the existing rules and regulations on feral and domestic cats which roam at night. There appears to be a distinct 'lack of will' to enforce the current regulations because of other commitments and the difficulty of handling such complaints from the public.

The Society encourages the Government to resolve any legal uncertainties and to facilitate evaluation and consideration of the key topics raised in its collection of existing measures.

Australian Wildlife Society would appreciate your strong support for this action and your urgent reply.

Yours sincerely



Patrick W Medway AM
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

