



Submission to the Cat Management draft Bill 2024

10.08.2024

I have divided our concerns into 2 sections

Section 1

In documents provided for the assistance of this Submission, I note that DEW SA continues to insist that cats are largely responsible for wildlife decimation, whilst those of us that live in rural areas across Australia, hear the logging, felling and clearing of natural habitat on a daily basis and our cries for legal intervention go unheard by the EPA.

We are at odds with the vilification of cats, for such claims of wildlife reduction – as no **substantiated** figures are given. You provide estimates only which are easily challenged.

All State Ministers of the Environment have recently had a meeting and I note that they have agreed on the Draft Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats (TAP) in principle, and I see this intention reiterated here in the Dog and Cat Reform 2024 Explanatory Guide.

Whilst TAP 2016-2020 was pronounced to be a failure, the outcome was a foregone conclusion, and we and others animal advocates are aware that C.A.T.S. Cats Assistance To Sterilise Inc. provided the scientific forecast to DEW SA on the basis of the Vacuum Effect, and on more than one occasion. CA.T.S. Inc. is an organization whose principles I support.

About C.A.T.S. Cats Assistance To Sterilise Inc: It was incorporated in Nov 1989 and the Desex and Return to Home (DRH) program for owned and unowned cats was formulated to comply with the Natural Resources Amendment Act. It has been the recipient of local government praise and an award for excellence. The goal has been to resolve cat related problems in urban and surrounding areas of Adelaide with a view to reducing any threat to wildlife. To date C.A.T.S. has organized the desexing of 135,000 cats at a low cost, and tens of thousands of these cats which are still alive today are under threat of poisoning, trapping and shooting from The Threat Abatement Plan (TAP). Every one of these cats has been brought in by a member of the community, desexed by a co-operating vet, returned to the home garden and is looked after and fed by a guardian. These desexed cats now mark their territories and keep out infiltrator cats which a vacuum would invite. These territories are no longer being filled up with unwanted kittens ending up in shelters only to be euthanized.

I believe C.A.T.S. program is an Australian first.

I am keen to see that in the Adelaide perimeter areas where C.A.T.S. work has reached, that no negative activities towards cats takes place. This would particularly mean baits and Felixer Traps, possibly also shooting and general trapping.

I would like to see a removal of the Government app program allowing vigil anti behaviour amongst the anti-cat section of the public.

Beyond this I can see many groups throughout Australia making similar efforts to desex cats, all with the public's support and co-operation, none of whom want to see the destruction of these cats, in which they have invested time, money and love.

In South Australia, C.A.T.S. have assisted in conducting work over a very wide area, not just in the suburbs of Adelaide, but north to Gawler and the mid north

and beyond, northeast to the Barossa, east to the Adelaide Hills and beyond, south-east to Murray Bridge and the Riverland and beyond and south to Goolwa and surrounds.

I am specifically looking for a guarantee that these cats in these perimeter areas are not baited, shot, trapped or harmed in any way in view of the public investment in them. I ask that the protection for these desexed cats in the areas listed above be written into the Threat Abatement Plan as a special category of cats and ask that Minister Susan Close undertakes to do this.

As I do not want 35 years of work to be in vain, I ask for an amendment in the Plan as outlined in the paragraphs above without the necessity for Containment or Curfews, and without pressure on Councils to set up bylaws for such containment and curfews.

I am including a link of a study done spanning over 2 years which shows that containing pet cats indoors makes no difference to the diversity and abundance of small and medium sized mammals in the area. The study was done by vet scientists in 4 areas on the edges of Perth between Sept. 2003 and July 2005.

- 2 of the areas had no cat regulations at all,
- 1 was a pet cat free zone,
- 1 had a "2 bells on the cat" rule and a night-time curfew.

The vet scientists were surprised with the results, but other overseas studies show similar results. Nothing was gained by curfews.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-05-18/mice-baiting:ram~-farmers-attemptHo.:prevent-plague-numbers/102359034>

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Figures from Councils using containment as a strategy show negative results.

Yarra ranges Council Data – 3rd Year after mandating 24/7 cat containment

Measure	2012/13	2016/17	Difference	% Change
Resident Population	149,026	152,246	+3220	^2.16%
Cat Nuisance Complaints	237	576	+339	^143%
Cats Impounded	440	738	+298	^67.7%
Cats Euthanized	232	273	+41	^17.67%

Casey Council Data 20 years after mandating 24/7 cat containment

Measure	1998	2019/20	Difference	% Change
Resident Population	156,128	364,600	+208,472	^134%
Cats Impounded	264	1047	+783	^296%

We have continuously encouraged Government at all levels not to enforce cat bylaws as mouse and rat plagues follow containment and curfew bylaws and I have seen evidence of this locally as I have interstate after the 2016-2020 TAP. It is the same central cause- removal of cats- whether by cull or by curfew. In a story about aerial mice bait dropped in NSW, ABC news (18.3.2023) spoke about farmers under threat from rodent plagues. Steve Henry from CSIRO reported that mice numbers were concerning in some cropping areas and patchy in others. At Trenten Hills Farm the owner was 70% through sowing his crop when

he had to go back and bait for rodents. There was a related story from farmers in Coleambally being desperate to harvest "waves

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-05-18/mice-baiting:ram~-farmers-attemptHo.:prevent-plague-numbers/102359034>

Following the rodent plagues, the Vacuum Effect ensures that new cats pour into the unprotected spaces resulting from the removal of the resident cats and, with an increased food supply of rats and mice, breed even more cats: This does not help native wildlife.

SUMMARY Section 1

I ask that the Draft Threat Abatement Plan be scrapped, failing this that exclusion zone in Adelaide perimeters be detailed into the Draft Threat Abatement Plan, these boundaries being to north to Gawler and the mid north and beyond, north-east to the Barossa, east to the Adelaide Hills and beyond, south-east to Murray Bridge and the Riverland and beyond, and south to Goolwa and surrounds.

I ask that equal consideration be given to other city perimeters where groups are carrying out similar desexing programs.

I ask that containment and curfews not be sought as a solution.

Section 2

I further note that DEW SA feels that owners seek laws to ensure that their pet is returned to them should their pet get lost.

I urge you to realize that laws cannot be formulated for cats in the same manner as dogs. They have opposing behaviour patterns when it comes to ownership. Dogs have specifically been bred for domesticity – **not so with cats**. If you are not aware of the history, DNA testing shows dogs have been bred down from grey wolves – that is every variety of dog that is a pet today. Not so with cats.

Cats have always been as they are now with the same characteristics and do not seek an immediate bond with their owners or accept that they have owners. They may accept a backyard territory and mark it as their own or they may not which is one reason why it is never a good idea to pay a breeder a lot of money for a cat - they want to make their own decisions, and they have certainly this right of natural behaviour. It is not the exchange of money that creates the understanding of ownership or the bond, it is the cats willingness to comply.

We suggest that what an “owner” is actually looking for is **a guarantee rather than a law** – a guarantee and a security of knowing that if their cat ends up in a shelter that it is not euthanized and can be found again. This is easy to achieve in the case of a cat and does not need to be overcomplicated. All that is needed is that we simply leave them alone to find their way home if they wish to do so. Cats are excellent navigators. There should be no reason to bring a cat to a shelter unless it is in need of medical attention in which case a vet could be best. Where a cat is sited, that is its home range or territory and cats know their territory as they mark it. There may be compassionate reasons such as hunger that inspire community members to render assistance. This is also the position of the RSPCA and AWL. For this no laws are needed.

Laws come with the problem that they are divisive and create a perceived impression that owned cats are greater in value than unowned cats, when in reality, no difference in value exists. All animals are sentient and in the case of a cat we think we have shown that they are also community servants in their rodent catching habits.

I note that DEW is seeking new partnerships in delivering good cat management. I encourage you to reach out to C.A.T.S. Inc. who work around the clock for wildlife protection and a happy healthy human-cat coexistence.

Summary Section 2

- Remove pressure from councils to create divisive cat bylaws which lead to the suffering and persecution of unowned cats
- Help the community to understand that an unowned cat is not necessarily lost and unless in need of medical attention or food, should not be taken to a shelter.

INCENTIVISE AND STERILISE DON'T LEGALISE