

Comment from the Cat Protection Society of NSW Inc to the RSPCA's 2017 Discussion paper "Identifying best practice cat management in Australia"

The foreword to the RSPCA paper states its aim is to foster discussion on "more effective **domestic cat** management in Australia" (emphasis added).

The first recommendation in the RSPCA's paper is that **feral cats** should be declared a pest species (emphasis added).

The paper notes (1.2) that 'while domestic or feral cats differ in relation to their dependence on and socialisation with humans, they are the same species.'

Indeed. So if cats are labelled as pests, then cats will be considered pests, not pets.

In July 2017 the ABC reported that a South Australian man who killed his neighbour's cat with a bow and arrow was found guilty of ill-treating an animal causing death. The offender argued he was entitled to kill the cat because he thought it was a feral cat (abc.net.au 14 July 2017).

The RSPCA paper notes (2.2.2) that 'Declaring an animal a pest species ... provides legal protection for landholders undertaking trapping and poisoning, although this also means there may be less incentive to choose the most humane methods ...' Bows and arrows, perhaps?

Names matter. There is little to be gained and much harm that will be caused by labelling cats a "pest". Negative labelling of an animal deliberately devalues the animal and creates a culture that is permissive of violence and cruelty towards that animal.

Legislated labelling matters even more. The paper acknowledges that "Many feral cat management techniques, including trapping and poisoning, cause suffering to the affected cats and thus constitute an act of cruelty. However, operators who use these methods are generally **exempt from prosecution, as pest animal management legislation overrides animal welfare legislation.**"(Emphasis added).

It is truly difficult to comprehend why an animal welfare organisation – established to prevent cruelty to animals – is arguing that cats should be afforded *less* protection from cruelty.

Cat Protection utterly rejects the RSPCA's position on this. There are legal and social reasons that labelling cats "pests" puts cats at risk, as described above. It will result in more dead cats, and more cats at risk of cruelty and harm, and little else.

Cat Protection also rejects the RSPCA's quest for national legislation to govern companion animals.

Finding 5 notes that 'cat management is legislated at both state/territory and local government level' but states the reason for this is 'unclear' and argues inconsistencies should be addressed. This argument presupposes 'consistencies' between all states, territories and local government areas – consistencies among all social, built and natural environments – which is simply not the case.

The paper suggests national law should govern matters that are more appropriately and can be, or are, adequately dealt with at a state and local level. The appendix suggests the paper was prepared without consulting any NSW or Victorian organisations, even though these states account for more than half the pet and human populations of Australia.

Cat Protection supports the sharing of information and experiences, however, this paper is not a 'discussion paper' as it has been labelled because it makes strong findings and explicit recommendations.

Fundamentally, this paper seeks to promote an agenda that conflates feral and domestic cats (calling it 'integration') which – revealed by its top recommendation that feral cats be declared a pest species – is to define cats as pests, not pets.

As a compassionate feline welfare charity, we reject this absolutely.

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