

**Submission
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COMPANION ANIMAL BREEDING PRACTICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Submission from the Cat Protection Society of NSW Inc to the NSW Parliament Joint Select Committee on Companion Animal Breeding Practices in NSW

The Cat Protection Society of NSW Inc (“Cat Protection”) welcomes the NSW Parliament’s concern for companion animal welfare and wellbeing.

We acknowledge that intensive breeding for profit is a greater problem for dogs than cats. This reflects the increased popularity of dogs as pets, particularly ‘designer’ breeds as opposed to traditional pedigrees, and people’s willingness to pay high prices for such puppies. This provides a stronger motive to breed such dogs for profit.

The welfare issues for cat breeding are more significantly centred on unowned and semi-owned cats. Recognising this, Cat Protection supports programs that promote early-age desexing; and research and trials of possible solutions such as ‘trap, neuter, return’ (TNR). For example, Cat Protection supported the Member for Sydney’s *Animal Welfare (Population Control Programs) Bill 2014*.

To illustrate the different situations of dogs and cats, a quick survey of *Trading Post* classifieds on 10 June 2015 revealed almost 2,600 dogs listed versus some 850 cats (and many of these were shelter cats). With so many homeless and semi-owned undesexed cats, pounds and shelters have a constant supply of kittens that (very sadly) more than meets demand.

In Cat Protection’s experience, the vast majority of registered cat breeders care strongly about feline welfare. They frequently rehome their kittens already desexed, provide follow-up support to the new owners, love their own cats and provide them with all necessary vet care and attention. For example, breeders registered with NSW Cat Fanciers Association are required to put limits on how many litters a queen can have in any period of time, and to not breed cats with a known history of physical or genetic defects that could affect the cat or their kittens’ quality of life (NSW CFA Code of Ethics).

It is the ‘backyard’ breeders - selling non-pedigree ‘pure bred’ cats without papers - that are of concern. Kittens being sold in markets, some pet shops and on the internet - where the seller has a degree of anonymity - are most likely to be at risk. We have seen such cats admitted to our shelter: unmicrochipped so-called ‘Burmese’; ‘Persians’ with extreme brachycephalia¹; ‘Ragdolls’ with serious behavioural problems to name just some. None of these cats had papers; none was from a registered breeder. All had been purchased at considerable cost.

¹ Many breeds such as Persians, Himalayans and British Short Hair are brachycephalic – short-nosed. However, severe brachycephalia leads to significant health problems including corneal damage, epiphora (tears cannot drain), dental disease because of abnormalities of the skull and breathing difficulties.

For both cats and dogs, improvements to welfare, health and wellbeing need to be driven by both 'supply and demand'. Consumer education is essential. Even if the strongest regulations were in place, it would not be possible to monitor compliance at all times, in all places. Therefore, complementing regulation, we should have consumer education that helps people understand how to make ethical choices when acquiring a pet. If more people knew what their 'purchasing' decisions meant for animal welfare, it would change the profile of demand, and go some way to eroding support for bad breeding practices.

At the same time, there is a reasonable (and strong) social expectation that governments will implement rules and laws that ensure humane practice in the treatment of animals. The 'supply' side of the equation needs to be regulated.

Cat Protection was a member of the Companion Animals Taskforce which was established to inquire into a broad range of matters affecting cat and dog welfare. Cat Protection supported the recommendations made by the Taskforce in its final report to the NSW Government.

We note that ***Recommendation 1: A breeder licensing system should be established and the Companion Animals Register should be updated to capture breeder licence information for each animal record*** was supported in principle by the NSW Government.

We also note that ***Recommendation 2: The Animal Welfare Code of Practice – Breeding Dogs and Cats should be revised to ensure that the existing guidelines it contains become enforceable standards*** was also supported in principle and that Recommendation 3, which required sellers of cats and dogs to display a microchip or licence number in all advertisements/point of sale, was fully supported. We reiterate our support for the Taskforce's recommendations, which came about following extensive expert review and consultation.

The Victorian Government has been reviewing the Code of Practice for Breeding and Rearing of Dogs and Cats for Sale. Consideration of their approach would be beneficial to inform any planned changes to regulations in NSW.

While the majority of registered breeders are responsible and ethical, when people who keep numbers of undesexed animals (whether cats or dogs) find themselves in a personal crisis or with mental health problems, the consequences for the animals are much more significant than if they were desexed pets.

For example, we have had experience in assisting with the removal of previously loved and cared for breeding cats whose owners have experienced some form of serious mental health illness. Some of these cats were so badly neglected and allowed to breed at will, to the point where one cat's uterus was external to her body when Cat Protection attended. Other cats had deep scars from wounds, they were all malnourished, carried significant parasite burden and were in extreme poor health. Such outcomes are more likely to be seen in hoarding situations and are undoubtedly rare among registered cat breeders.

Nonetheless, we contend that were these breeders subject to some form of annual inspection the situations would not have reached that point and much suffering would have been prevented.

As neighbours of breeders are used to the existence of many cats or dogs, that the situation has become a problem is not necessarily identified (particularly if the person is socially isolated) until there are clear external signals (for example, extreme malodour). A licensing system that involved assessments by authorised trained inspectors would provide some assurance that breeding establishments met required standards and guidelines.

We appreciate that there are many ethical and good registered breeders of cats and dogs whose motivation is continuation of a healthy, happy and well-adjusted pedigree. However, there are people who exploit animals for a profit motive and engage in poor practices which results in much animal suffering.

Cat Protection strongly supports the implementation of a system that protects cats and dogs from breeding practices which harm their health, wellbeing and welfare, and which contribute to an 'oversupply' of pets.

While there are thousands of homeless cats and dogs in shelters and pounds, it is a tragedy that there are people seeking to profit from the production of more animals. They are bred without regard for their health, wellbeing or welfare, and without regard to the fact that many of them will end up in pounds and shelters once they manifest the health and behavioural problems that arise from poor breeding practices and inconsiderate rehoming practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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