

**Submission from the Cat Protection Society of NSW on
the draft threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats**

Cats are sentient animals who deserve to be treated humanely.

Cats do not belong in all environments but demonising them as a species is to deliberately distract from the human-caused drivers of biodiversity loss overseen by this and previous governments. It achieves nothing more than to direct cruelty towards cats.

Habitat loss and climate change are the greatest threats to biodiversity.

A “war” on cats will not undo land-clearing, mining, and logging in native forests. Creating moral panic using numbers extrapolated from guesstimates based on ballpark figures founded on false assumptions is not constructive. The poison 1080 should be banned and simply delivering the poison in new ways does not make it humane or safe.

The draft plan overreaches into the realm of domestic cats, targeting cats who are loved, lost, homeless, fed and cared for in the community.

The definitions are incorrect as feral cats have absolutely no dependency on humans, directly or indirectly. We refer to the submission from the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation and agree with their contention that the issue of domestic cats (whether owned or not) is discrete and should be considered separately, and expertly, with compassion for people and cats.

Cat Protection operates in, and advocates for, a One Welfare framework that recognises the interdependency of human, animal, and environmental wellbeing.

The focus on a single species is flawed. A multifaceted, humane approach which respects the importance of cats to people (as well as cats’ intrinsic dignity and sentience), as well as the importance of the human role in animal care and ecological management, is needed. Furthermore, strategies need to be hyper-local to be effective; there isn’t a single, one-size-fits-all solution to ecological complexities although the overarching approach should be evidence-based, humane and focused on protection of habitats.

We don’t disagree there is an urgency to protecting our environment, we do disagree with singling out cats. We have attached the presentation we made earlier this year to the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group, “Cruelty won’t solve a wicked problem”.

Also attached is the research by Scotney, R.; Rand, J.; Rohlf, V.; Hayward, A.; Bennett, P. *The Impact of Lethal, Enforcement-Centred Cat Management on Human Wellbeing: Exploring Lived Experiences of Cat Carers Affected by Cat Culling at the Port of Newcastle*, in *Animals* 2023, 13, 271.

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cat protection society

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Cruelty won't solve a
wicked problem

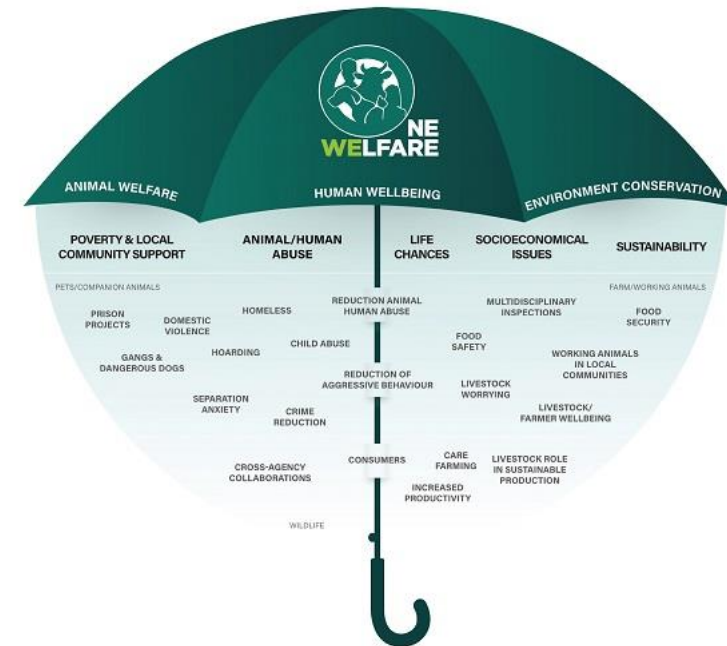
Cat Protection acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

Every cat deserves a loving and responsible home

- Since 1958, Cat Protection has been dedicated to helping cats and the people who love them, with a focus on reducing the population of street cats through affordable (sometimes free) desexing and shelter services
- First shelter to practise early-age desexing (EAD) & actively promoted, including with CPD-points accredited, free, online EAD education program
- Charity dependent on donations and bequests – donations and bequests funded the EAD program, our welfare services (DX by referral and subsidy c2,000 cats pa + c1,000 cats pa for adoption), and feline health & medicine research and social research

One Welfare framework

- We are guided by a One Health/One Welfare framework, acknowledging the interconnectedness of the health and wellbeing of people, the environment and non-human animals
- We believe every human and non-human animal deserves to be treated humanely and with respect for their sentience and dignity



<https://www.onewelfareworld.org/>

Ethics matter

- Cats have been companions to people for some 10,000 years, historically working animals protecting grain, taken around the world as ships' cats. They are our moral responsibility; we owe them a duty of care
- Ethics matter – to avoid moral distress our work has to be aligned to our principles and values



The human-feline bond

- **Some people will choose homelessness over shelter if they will be separated from their pet** (The Unbreakable Bond: The Mental Health Benefits and Challenges of Pet Ownership for People Experiencing Homelessness; Cleary, M et al, Issues in Mental Health Nursing 2020; also see www.mydogismyhome.org)
- **Some people will stay in situations of domestic violence because they will not leave their pets behind** (Animals and People Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence, Domestic Violence NSW Nov. 2020)
- **Some people will not leave their home in a natural disaster if they can't take their animals** (No Pet or Their Person Left Behind: Increasing the Disaster Resilience of Vulnerable Groups through Animal Attachment, Activities and Networks; Thompson, K et al Animals 2014, 4; also see www.ses.nsw.gov.au/get-ready-animals)

The human-feline bond



- Social policy and the law are beginning to recognise the intrinsic value of this attachment and so we see a trend to crisis co-sheltering; the inclusion of pets in DVOs; initiatives like Get Ready Animals and provision for pets in emergency shelters
- The bond enhances human health and wellbeing; access to those benefits is a social justice issue
- *Pictured is a kitten of a person left homeless by the Black Summer Bushfires. We paid for many kittens' & cats' veterinary treatment and boarding until their people were able to find housing*

The Good Neighbour Project

- Cat Protection funded initiative launched in Bathurst in late 2016
- A range of resources to support responsible cat ownership – *Pets are a vital part of our human ecology but pet ownership requires consideration of both natural and social/built **ecologies** [please note the plural there]. Being a responsible cat owner means ensuring the welfare and wellbeing of your cat as well as protecting the local fauna and neighbourhood amenity. Put simply, it means being a good neighbour.*



A wealth of free resources (that most councils have ignored)

- Brochures and factsheets on everything from happy indoor cats, DIY cat-proof fencing to benefits of EAD
- Guides for running community events & resources on our catcare.org.au site
- Offers to present to communities & at libraries
- Videos, including videos in Auslan, Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese and English & factsheets in many more community languages



A wealth of free resources (that most councils have ignored)



- Advertising on radio, print media, Sydney trains + unpaid media coverage
- Published research & EAD training
- Presentations to CUPS & AIAM as well as workshops, Open Day, Tweed Shire (in conjunction with their Love Cats, Love Wildlife project which we also financially supported), Central Coast Saturday
- Sent to all councils & libraries ... only about 6 councils responded

Moral panic

- It has not suited councils to *do* anything because it is easier to promote moral panic about cats: lots of headlines that make them appear to care about environmental issues, proposed “solutions” that are unworkable, unjust, unnecessary and unethical
- Blaming cats, councils have cast themselves as victims, “othering” the problem and taking the focus of their (in)action
- “Moral panics (Crossman, 2019) arise when individuals and groups believe there is a looming existential threat of surpassing moral concern. Such panics are often bolstered by media coverage that amplifies fear and underwrites the demonization of those who are believed responsible for the threat ... the fear and anxiety generated ... create phantom problems, divert attention from other real and pressing issues, and shortcut our ability to think and act clearly ...” (Lynn and Santiago-Ávila, 2022)

Outdoor Cats: Science, Ethics, and Politics

Willian S Lynn & Francisco J Santiago-Ávila in *Society & Animals* 30 (2022)

- “The furore over felines is rooted in faulty evidence and poor reasoning ... the idea that cats equally threaten animals across urban, rural, and wild landscapes fails to account for the concentration of cats around human settlements, questions of seasonal variations, differences between individual cats’ predaciousness, or whether cat predation adds to or substitutes for other causes of wildlife mortality ...”
- “The impact of cats and other carnivores on wildlife is highly dependent on ecological context. Claims that cats are a universal threat to biodiversity everywhere is an over-generalization of localized case studies.”
- Cat Protection has consistently argued that strategies to minimise any negative impact of cats must be hyper-local
- Local governments are well-placed to deliver “local” management but they continue to defer the matter to the state government. Why?

Geocentrism as a model

Outdoor Cats: Science, Ethics, and Politics

Willian S Lynn & Francisco J Santiago-Ávila in *Society & Animals* 30 (2022)

- Managing contested space and relationships between cats, people and wildlife is a “wicked” problem that can’t be solved with cruelty – we need to develop an ethical, moral framework
- “Biocentrism” locates moral value in individual beings (including cats)
- “Ecocentrism” in ecological wholes
- “Anthropocentrism” in people

Geocentrism as a model

Outdoor Cats: Science, Ethics, and Politics

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- Killing cats is seen as morally unproblematic in purely ecocentric terms; they are not of moral concern
- But cats *are* of moral concern. They are sentient beings and capable of forming genuine, lasting relationships with people (& other animals)
- “Geocentrism” recognises the individuals are based in a whole: a whole community, a whole ecosystem

Geocentrism as a model

Outdoor Cats: Science, Ethics, and Politics

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It is unhelpful to give any animals binary distinctions of 'good' or 'bad'. It is, moreover, dangerous to do so, as it invites disrespect of the animals labelled as 'bad' and establishes a culture where that animal's sentience does not matter... all violence begins with disrespect.

... We are regularly confronted by some people's deep-seated hatred for cats. Their jokes about cruelty and their threats of violence are frequently self-justified by the claim that "cats are killers" and that "they deserve it". When we have taken in battered and broken tiny feline victims of human violence, we don't know what the person who committed that violence said, but we do know they had no respect for cats.

We cannot overstate the importance of language and imagery in promoting ethical and humane behaviour – or conversely, its power to create a culture that is permissive of cruelty and inhumanity. We object most strongly to the labelling cats as pests.

Submission from Cat Protection Society to the Natural Resources Commission Pest Animal Review draft report 2016

- “To move beyond this polarity the debate needs a different value paradigm that is better able to appreciate the moral values at play.
- “Geocentrism ... recognises the intrinsic value in people, animals, and nature ... Individuals are not seen as entirely separate from larger collectives; instead, each are regarded as co-constituting in complex and non-reductive ways ...
- **“Geocentrism allows us to care about cats and wildlife simultaneously ...”**

Habitats are specific & situations unique

- The International Consensus Principles for Ethical Wildlife Control published in the journal Conservation Biology call for interventions to be based on the specifics of a situation rather than negative labels
(Dubois S, Fenwick N, Baker L, Baker S, Beausoleil NJ, Carter SP, Cartwright B, Costa F, Draper C, Griffin J, Grogan A, Howald G, et al February 2017 Conservation Biology Volume 31, Issue 4)
- Also, that the justifications for controls are based on real and not perceived harms – in other words, can we stop the moral panic and start protecting the environment by taking a careful, ethical, humane, One Welfare, specific and hyper-local approach to the impact of cats?

Instead of an unwinnable, unjust and cruel “war on cats” what about many battles to protect habitats?

- Right now 600 old trees are set to be destroyed at the Royal Golf Course at Rose Bay – just to make ‘improvements’ to the course for an elite few, at the expense of homes for a wonderful array of birdlife, the threatened Grey-headed Flying Fox, ringtail possums – trees that support carbon capture and provide shade and a tree canopy
- This isn’t a ‘wicked’ problem, it’s a very simple issue of a very real harm planned to satisfy the golfing ambitions of a handful of privileged people
- **Moral panic = distraction = 600 mature trees massacred in plain sight**

