



THE KEEPING OF CATS AND APPROPRIATE CAT MANAGEMENT MEASURES WITHIN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

A Report Prepared for
Leda Developments Pty Ltd

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1 INTRODUCTION

JWA Pty Ltd has been engaged by Leda Developments Pty Ltd (Leda) to advise on the implications for native wildlife of the keeping of cats and on appropriate cat management measures within residential areas. **SECTION 2** provides a review of relevant literature. **SECTION 3** provides the legislative context for the management of cats in NSW. Cat management measures, derived from the literature review and legislation, are provided in **SECTION 4**.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Cats, as companion animals, have social benefits, promoting a sense of care and responsibility and increasing human well-being. However, a number concerns arise when cats are allowed to roam beyond the cat owner's property or when a cat becomes stray or feral. These concerns can be grouped into three primary issues: impact on native wildlife from cat predation; the potential for nuisance behaviour; and the relatively poor health and welfare of stray and feral cats (Eyles and Mulvaney n.d.). However, the significance of domestic cat predation on native wildlife is widely debated as there are difficulties in distinguishing this impact from other threats such as disturbance from human activities, habitat loss and predation by stray and feral cats (Nattras 1992; Fougere 2000; Eyles and Mulvaney n.d.).

Loss *et al.* (2013) completed a systematic review and quantitative estimate of wildlife mortality caused by free-ranging domestic cats in the United States. It was estimated that 1.4-3.7 billion birds and 6.9-20.7 billion mammals are killed annually. Loss *et al.* (2013) found that it was un-owned cats, as opposed to owned pets, that accounted for the majority of this mortality. However, owned cats were still found to cause substantial wildlife mortality.

Free-ranging cats on islands have caused or contributed to 33 (14%) of the modern bird, mammal and reptile extinctions recorded by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List (Medina *et al.* 2011). Tidemann (1994) likens the effect of domestic cats moving beyond suburban edges into remnant habitat patches, to predation within an island environment. While the cat is mobile, many of the native fauna species in remnant habitat patches are relatively immobile and isolated, largely due to habitat removal. Domestic cat predation can be the tipping point that leads to local extinctions in these situations (Preisser *et al.* 2005).

In Australia, cats that live close to remnants of native bushland are known to kill a wide range of native wildlife, with species that feed or nest on or near the ground most at risk (DEH 2007). Cats have been found to eat more than 186 species of native birds, 64 species of mammals, 87 species of reptiles and 10 species of frogs (DEHP 2011). However, it has also been argued that pet cats prey more heavily on introduced species than native wildlife (Nattras 1992; Fougere 2000).

The benefits of cat containment have been demonstrated in a number of suburbs adjacent to remnant bushland and nature reserves, particularly within Canberra (Eyles

and Mulvaney n.d.). Benefits include minimised nuisance from roaming cats and reduced predation of native wildlife. Contained cats also have a longer life expectancy and improved health as they are less likely to sustain injuries and contract feline diseases (Eyles and Mulvaney n.d.).

3 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 NSW *Threatened Species Conservation (TSC) Act 1995*

In 2000 the Scientific Committee, established by the *TSC Act 1995*, made the Final Determination to list Predation by the Feral Cat (*Felis catus*) as a KEY THREATENING PROCESS on Schedule 3 of the Act. Listing of Key Threatening Processes is provided for by Part 2 of the Act.

The Scientific Committee has found that:

1. The Cat *Felis catus* (Linnaeus, 1758) is a common but elusive predator that occurs throughout Australia and on many offshore islands. It was introduced to Australia with the First Fleet in 1788, but may have arrived prior to this on Indonesian trading vessels or European ships of exploration. Cats occur in virtually all terrestrial habitats in Australia, and the main determinants of local population size appear to be the availability of food and shelters.
2. Cats may be categorised as domestic, stray or feral. Domestic cats are pet or house cats living with people; their ecological requirements are intentionally provided by humans. Stray cats rely only partly on humans for provision of their ecological requirements, and include animals in urban fringe situations, dumped animals, and cats kept on farms for rodent control. Feral cats are free-living; they have minimal or no reliance on humans for their ecological requirements, and survive and reproduce in self-perpetuating populations. Individual cats can shift between categories in their lifetimes. This determination concerns only Feral Cats.
3. The Feral Cat is carnivorous and capable of killing vertebrates up to 2-3kg. Preference is shown for mammals weighing less than 220g. and birds less than 200g. but reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates are also eaten. Carrion and other scavenged material is taken if live prey is not available.
4. Predation by Feral Cats has been implicated in the extinction and decline of many species of mammals and birds on islands around Australia and in other parts of the world, and in the early extinction of up to seven species of small mammals on the Australian mainland.
5. In New South Wales, predation by Feral Cats has been linked to the disappearance by 1857, of 13 species of mammals and 4 species of birds from the Western Division. Current impacts on native species are most likely in modified, fragmented environments and where alternative prey such as Rabbits or House Mice fluctuates in abundance.
6. Based on a rank-scoring system that predicts the susceptibility of native vertebrate species to predation from Feral Cats (Dickman 1996), several Endangered and Vulnerable species in New South Wales are currently threatened, including the Hastings River Mouse *Pseudomys oralis*, Sandy Inland Mouse *Pseudomys hermannsburgensis*, Pilliga Mouse

Pseudomys pilligaensis, Bolam's Mouse *Pseudomys bolami*, Forrest's Mouse *Leggadina forresti*, Mountain Pygmy-possum *Burramys parvus*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*, Grey Grasswren *Amytornis barbatus*, Striated Grasswren *Amytornis striatus* and the lizard *Aprasia aurita*. Larger species such as Southern Brown Bandicoots *Isodon obesulus* and Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies *Petrogale penicillata* may also be at risk locally or when other prey is scarce.

7. Many other native species are potentially at risk of becoming threatened as a result of Cat predation. Small mammals such as rodents, dasyurids, burramyids and ground-nesting birds are at particular risk.

In view of 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 above, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that Predation by the Feral Cat adversely affects more than two threatened species and could cause species that are not threatened to become threatened, and is therefore eligible for listing as a Key Threatening Process under the Threatened Species Conservation Act.

3.2 NSW Companion Animals (CA) Act 1998

Under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, all cats born in NSW after July 1999, and any cat that has changed owners since that time, must be micro-chipped and registered for life. Section 29 of the *CA Act 1998* provides that a cat must be identified by a form of identification that enables a local authority to ascertain the name of the cat and the address or telephone number of the owner of the cat. The owner of the cat is guilty of an offence if this section is not complied with.

In accordance with Section 30(1) of the *CA Act 1998*, cats are prohibited from a public place or part of a public place that is set apart by the local authority for the protection of wildlife and in which the local authority ordered that cats are prohibited for the purposes of the protection of wildlife and in which, or near the boundaries of which, there are conspicuously exhibited by the local authority at reasonable intervals notices to the effect that cats are prohibited in or on that public place.

A cat can be declared a nuisance under the *CA Act 1998* if it:

- repeatedly damages anything outside the owner's property; or
- repeatedly interferes with the peace, comfort or convenience of a person, for example by being continuously noisy.

See below for how nuisance cats are dealt with in the Tweed Shire.

3.3 Tweed Shire Council

In the Tweed Shire, if a pet cat causes a nuisance to neighbours by persistently making noise, fouling their yard or attacking animals, the owner of the cat can be issued with a Nuisance Cat Order and issued with an infringement notice. In these circumstances, Council Officers may issue an Order to the owner to prevent the nuisance behaviour. Such Orders are in force for six (6) months, and cannot be appealed or reviewed (in accordance with *CA Act 1998*). Owners must comply with an Order or face a penalty.

4 CAT MANAGEMENT MEASURES

A number of measures can be implemented to manage the impact of cats on native wildlife:

- Use of planning and development controls. A recent example of this involves the construction of a domestic cat and dog proof fence along the edge of an urban estate to protect fauna in an adjoining nature reserve (Ballina Shire Council 2010);
- Enforcing cat curfews and/or declaration of cat management and prohibited areas:
 - cats are to be prevented from roaming by keeping indoors or in a specially designed “cat yard”;
 - consideration should be given to 24 hour cat containment as is applied to new Canberra suburbs adjoining nature reserves (Eyles and Mulvaney n.d.); and
 - cat containment should be strictly and continuously monitored/enforced by a suitably qualified person(s).
- Mandatory registration of domestic cats and identification by way of micro-chip and using a collar and tag with owner’s contact details (in accordance with the *Companion Animals Act 1998*). A collar with several bells may help to reduce the cat’s ability to hunt. Registration also provides a dedicated revenue source for cat management;
- Mandatory desexing of pet cats:
 - minimises wandering and anti-social behaviour;
 - prevents unwanted litters of kittens that contribute to the stray and feral cat populations;
- Managing stray cats in partnership with animal welfare organisations:
 - Government supervised community trapping programs have been successfully established in a number of municipalities in Victoria and elsewhere, whereby the local council offers a ‘cat trap hire program’ for residents. When a cat is trapped, the resident contacts the council and an Animal Management Officer (AMO) collects and transports the animal to a holding/pound facility; and
- Education/Information packages/signage for residents encouraging responsible cat ownership and underpinning regulatory compliance. Information packages would aim to provide awareness regarding:
 - The risks cats pose to native wildlife;
 - The impacts of dumping unwanted cats or kittens;
 - Cat curfews or containment regulations and compliance;
 - Methods of cat containment;

- The benefits for the health and life span of cats when they are appropriately contained, as there are some perceptions that containment may be harmful for cats;
- What to do if you lose a cat (e.g. regularly check the Tweed Shire Council Dog and Cat Impounding Facility and advise them of missing cat; door knocking in local neighbourhood; contact local Veterinary clinics for lost/injured animals);
- What to do if you find a stray cat (e.g. check for identification/registration tag; ask around neighbourhood to determine if anyone has lost a cat; contact the local Veterinary clinics to determine if a lost cat has been reported; take the cat to the pound or contact the Regulatory Services Unit (Rangers) at Tweed Shire Council; take stray cats to a shelter for re-homing rather than feeding them); and
- Ensuring pet cats have adequate supply of fresh food and water. Well-fed cats are less likely to hunt native wildlife for food.

5 CONCLUSION

JWA Pty Ltd has been engaged by Leda Developments Pty Ltd (Leda) to advise on the implications for native wildlife of the keeping of cats and on appropriate cat management measures within residential areas.

Keeping domestic cats as pets has been demonstrated to have a number of positive social benefits. However, the negative impacts of cats on native wildlife are well documented. It is vital that these impacts are managed in residential developments to ensure the persistence of local fauna populations and to minimise impacts to threatened species known to occur within the locality.

It is considered that the keeping of cats within residential developments can be achieved with minimal impact to native wildlife by the implementation of appropriate community education (outlining the precautionary approach underlying cat controls), applying cat management regulations (refer **SECTION 4**) and implementing active control of stray cats where necessary.

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Responsible Dog and Cat Ownership

Information sheet



Responsibility of pet owners

In today's urban environment, there is general recognition of the right of dog and cat owners to have, and enjoy, the companionship of their pet. However, there must also be the recognition of the rights of others to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without unreasonable interference from another person's pet. Unfortunately, in some cases it may not necessarily be the pet that causes the problem, but the lack of owner responsibility.

Tweed Shire Council's aim is to permit pet owners to maximise the enjoyment of companion animals while also providing for environmental protection and a harmonious coexistence of pets, pet owners and the wider community. Ensuring the well-being of companion animals is also important.





Four ways you can better care for your cat and protect wildlife

1 Desex your cat

Desexed pet cats are less likely to wander, fight or spray-mark their territory. They generally also make better pets. Desexing also prevents unwanted litters of kittens that might contribute to the stray and feral cat populations and to the ongoing demise of native wildlife.

2 Identify your cat as a pet, not a stray

Microchipped pets can be easily identified by Council and can be returned safely to their owners if they get lost or wander onto neighbouring properties. A collar, bell and tag on your cat will also show it is a well cared for pet.

3 Never dump unwanted kittens or cat

Contact an animal welfare organisation for assistance. Dumped cats are likely to become stray and rely more on wildlife as a food source. Unwanted cats and kittens should be sold or given to a responsible person, taken to an animal welfare or re-homing facility, such as Friends of the Pound or the RSPCA. Contact your local vet or animal welfare shelter for assistance.



4 Keep your cat from roaming

Pet cats prevented from roaming are protected from the risk of injury from vehicles, cat fights, dogs, snakes and ticks. Statistics show that pet cats prevented from roaming on average live longer than those allowed to range freely, and it can save you costly vet bills. Cats kept indoors or in a specially designed 'cat enclosure' won't prey on wildlife. Cat yards provide access to your house and to an enclosed outdoor area. Well-designed cat enclosures enrich a cat's environment to ensure they get enough exercise and don't get bored.

Wildlife and your cats

How you can protect both



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