

## **Submission to NSW Government inquiry - Management of cat populations. November 2024**

The Willoughby Environmental Protection Association Inc. (WEPA) is a non-party community group with an interest in preserving natural heritage, protecting local bushland and wildlife and mitigating the impacts of pollution in our locality. Our members are involved in environmental matters at local, state and national levels, with a particular focus on protecting biodiversity nationally. WEPA members believe that greater regulation of pet cats is an urgent and important issue, given the real and active threat that roaming cats are to our native wildlife.

Many of our members volunteer with bushcare groups or reside in areas adjacent to bushland reserves in the Willoughby LGA. As such, they notice the behaviour and impact of unrestrained pets in the reserves and backyards of our area, which are home to a wide variety of native species, including some vulnerable and threatened species such as the powerful owl and little penguin. There are regular late night sightings of cats, with one member recently reporting a domestic cat carrying a native bird kill along a Middle Cove street, adjacent to Harold Reid Reserve. Another member has noticed a significant decline in native gecko and blue tongue lizards, both of which are easy prey for roaming cats. The continued existence of these and other natives, such as sugar gliders, diamond python and superb lyre birds, relies on thoughtful, effective environmental policies from government decision makers.

Feral and/or domestic cats have been seen on infrared motion detector cameras which have been set up to observe nocturnal native animals in the bushland areas which are maintained by bushcare groups and Willoughby Council.

We can see the extent of this problem in the number of 'lost cat' call-outs on local community social pages, which are almost a daily feature. Often these cats don't return home for days. As natural predators, during the hours or days spent roaming they are killing native reptiles, birds and mammals. Research has found that around 70% of cat owners allow their pets to roam. Based on the comments attached to these posts there is negligible awareness of the impacts that cats are having on our native wildlife.

There is evidence indicating that each roaming cat kills around 110 native animals each year and combined they are responsible for an annual death toll of approximately 96 million natives in NSW.

NSW is sadly lagging on regulations that could help reduce this death toll and our appalling native species extinction rates. Better regulation around cat containment would also improve the welfare of pet cats who will be better protected from car strikes, attack and disease.

Reform is urgently needed and must start with clear rules around pet cat containment, including –

- Amendments to the NSW Companion Animals Act to enable local Government to enforce anti-roaming laws.
- Requirement that local councils develop companion animal management plans to protect wildlife, supported by the development of a state-wide online resource for responsible pet ownership.
- Mandatory state-wide desexing by 4 months of age.
- Funding to support compliance, education, desexing, identification and registration programs.

These sensible amendments will bring NSW into line with almost every other state.

WEPA is also calling on the NSW Government to regulate for pet cat-free areas in any new suburb developments that are adjacent to bushland reserves, waterways or forested areas.

We can't change the predatory nature of cats, but NSW decision-makers can act to protect our vulnerable wildlife. We urgently need policies to ensure that our cat owners are educated in relation to this issue and have an obligation to act responsibly.