Biodiversity Council

Submission to the import of Bengal Cat for household pet purposes

10 October 2025

About The Biodiversity Council

The Biodiversity Council brings together leading experts including Indigenous knowledge holders to promote evidence-based solutions to Australia's biodiversity crisis. The Council was founded by 11 universities with the support of Australian philanthropists.

Introduction

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on an application to include Bengal cat, a hybrid animal of a domestic cat (*Felis catus*) and an Asian leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*), for non-commercial household pet purposes in the Live Import List under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The application is to include the hybrid in the Live Import List, not just an individual animal. If listed, anyone can import the animal, subject to conditions.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is particularly seeking comment on the following:

- Can this hybrid animal survive in the Australian environment and breed with other species that may be present in Australia?
- What diseases can this hybrid animal carry or transmit and what diseases are they known to be susceptible to?
- What are the likely potential impacts to the environment if this hybrid was to establish a feral population in Australia?

The proposal to allow the import of Bengal cats into Australia poses significant ecological and biosecurity risks. Despite a requirement that imported Bengals be at least five generations removed from their wild ancestor (*Asian leopard cat*), these animals may still retain traits that increase their likelihood of establishing in the wild and threatening native wildlife.

The Biodiversity Council recommends that the Australian Government **rejects the application to include Bengal cats on the live import list.**

Our key concerns are outlined below.

Key concerns

1. **Risk of them becoming part of Australia's feral cat population**

Permitting additional imports of Bengal cats is likely to increase the risks of them becoming part of Australia's feral cat population. Additional imports are likely to reduce current constraints to ownership or increase the incentive to keep them by:

- increasing their availability and reducing the purchase price
- introducing novel forms that increase their appeal to some people
- reducing concerns about inbreeding and hereditary diseases.

The more people that own a Bengal cat, the more likely they are to escape and establish in the wild. This is consistent with a well accepted principle in invasion biology that the higher the number of introductions the greater is the risk of establishment.

Moreover, Bengal cats may be more likely to be abandoned by their owners because of unappealing behaviours, such as inappropriate toileting, destructiveness, fighting and roaming. Wildlife shelters in the United States report they are being surrendered at high rates.

2. High invasive potential

Feral cats are one of the most damaging invasive species introduced to Australia, having been the primary cause of over 20 species extinctions, and causing severe population declines in many more species. Bengal cats have several attributes that make them more formidable predators than domestic or feral cats. In particular, Bengal cats are larger and more muscular than typical feral cats, potentially enabling predation on larger prey. They are also known for their climbing, jumping, and swimming abilities. These attributes can facilitate escapes and allow Bengal cats to more readily access fenced reserves (established as critical conservation sites for cat-susceptible native animals) and islands, and enhance their ability to hunt or kill wildlife, including arboreal and aquatic species.

Bengal Cats may tolerate a wider range of habitats due to their ancestry. Asian leopard cats inhabit an exceedingly wide range of habitats and vegetation types – mountainous areas (up to 4,500 metres), riparian habitats, agricultural wetlands, tropical rainforests, temperate broadleaf forests, coniferous forests, shrub forests, grasslands, plantations, agricultural landscapes and human settlements. The introduction of these genetically-influenced traits into the feral cat population could increase the ability of feral cats to live and hunt, or become more abundant, in a broader range of habitats.

When Bengal cats escape and establish in the wild, or breed with feral cats, they will add genes to the feral cat population, increasing the impact that feral cats have on wildlife.