



**Biodiversity
Council**

Biodiversity Council submission in response to the Cat Management in Tasmania Discussion Paper

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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.

The Biodiversity Council acknowledges the First Peoples of the lands and waters of Australia, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and future and expresses gratitude for long and ongoing custodianship of Country.

Our founding partners



Introduction

The Biodiversity Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the [Cat Management in Tasmania Discussion Paper](#) (the Discussion Paper), which will inform the delivery of a new five-year Tasmanian Cat Management Plan to replace the [Tasmanian Cat Management Plan \(2017-2022\)](#).

Our understanding

The Discussion Paper aims to identify key areas for improvement in the existing Tasmanian Cat Management Plan, to inform the development of the new five-year plan.

The regulatory management of cats in Tasmania primarily occurs through a legislative framework that includes both the [Cat Management Act 2009](#) and the [Biosecurity Act 2019](#) (for feral cats).

While all cats are the same species (*Felis catus*), the *Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2009* recognises three management categories of cats: domestic, stray, and feral.

It is currently not an offence for a cat to roam beyond its owner's property in Tasmania. Any cat that enters a cat management facility must be desexed and microchipped before it is reclaimed by its owner or rehomed by the facility. The Act permits the facility to charge the owner of a cat for the reasonable costs associated with microchipping, desexing and care of their cat.

The *Cat Management Act 2009* and the [Cat Management Regulations 2022](#) allow for the establishment of cat management facilities in Tasmania for the handling and holding of cats. The Act recognises a council facility designed for handling and holding cats as a cat management facility, but few councils in Tasmania have the dedicated infrastructure and resources to operate such a facility.

Tasmania's primary cat-management facilities are run by non-government, not-for-profit organisations dedicated to the welfare of cats. At present, there are two facilities in Tasmania, run by Ten Lives and Just Cats.

Our position

Cat owners have a clear responsibility to minimise the impacts of their pets on wildlife, neighbours, livestock and the broader community. Australia has more pet cats than ever before, making responsible ownership increasingly important. Just as dog owners are expected to manage the impacts of their pets, cat owners must take reasonable steps to prevent their cats from killing wildlife, creating nuisance, contributing to stray populations or transmitting disease.

Containment, desexing and identification are practical measures that protect both cats and the community while reducing the cumulative impacts of Australia's large and growing cat population.

All key stakeholders involved in cat management in Tasmania, including governments, councils, veterinarians, shelters, rescue organisations and conservation groups, should consistently communicate that cat ownership carries an expectation of compliance with responsible ownership behaviours. These include sourcing cats from lawful suppliers, desexing, microchipping, registration, and preventing cats from roaming. Many of these behaviours are already legal requirements. The next Cat Management Plan should establish a clear pathway to progressively introduce any remaining elements of responsible ownership, particularly registration and 24-hour containment, as mandatory requirements over time.

The Biodiversity Council recognises the foundational work of the [Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017 - 2022](#), particularly in establishing social norms around responsible cat ownership. There are also areas where Tasmania is demonstrating best-practice, such as requiring desexing by 4 months of age. The Discussion Paper provides a well-balanced and thorough analysis of the issues and challenges with cat management. The Biodiversity Council sees opportunities to improve cat management in Tasmania and we have made many recommendations about specific areas to address. It must not be missed that one of the most important factors in effective cat management is resourcing. As for other jurisdictions, best practice policy and regulation won't achieve their intended outcomes unless they are supported by sufficient resourcing to ensure effective implementation. Many of the additional responsible cat management approaches we are suggesting have already been committed to in other states in Australia. It is critically important that the Tasmanian government adequately resource implementation of the new cat management plan.

Our recommendations are grouped under the following headings that broadly reflect the sections of the Discussion Paper:

1. Refine cat categories (Response to Section 2.2)
2. Establish government-run cat management facilities (Response to Section 2.3)
3. Develop a comprehensive monitoring program
4. Remove 'reducing pressure on cat management facilities' as an objective in the next plan
5. Implement a compulsory registration program (Response to Section 4.2)
6. Improve transparency in cat sale and transfers (Response to Section 4.3)
7. Introduce mandatory cat containment (Response to Section 4.4)
8. Consider local laws banning cats in high value conservation areas
9. Prohibit feeding of stray cats (Response to Section 5)
10. Remove existing cat colonies and prevent new ones (Response to Section 5)
11. Implement a strategic, integrated and well-resourced feral cat control program (Response to Section 6)

1. Refine cat categories (Response to Section 2.2)

Tasmania currently has three management categories of cats: 'domestic', 'stray', and 'feral'. This should be simplified to a two-category system of 'owned' and 'unowned'. This binary system provides a straightforward and logical framework with clear implications for management and enforcement. It would align with the [Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats 2024](#) which would improve coordination across jurisdictions and levels of government.

The use of the intermediate labels of "stray" (or variations such as "semi-owned") downplays the environmental impact of free-roaming cats. Research indicates that so-called "stray" cats still depend heavily on killing native wildlife for food and are not solely dependent on human provision. Therefore, treating these cats as a separate category from feral cats can lead to ineffective management that fails to protect susceptible native species.

Labels like "stray" are based on subjective judgements based on "socialisation" or "lifestyle". This makes regulation more complicated and difficult to enforce.

By adopting the owned/unowned model, management pathways become unambiguous: owned cats are verified through microchipping and registration and must be managed responsibly, while unowned cats are subject to population reduction and control programs. This ensures there is no regulatory "no-man's-land" where no single authority feels responsible for a cat's welfare or impact. It supports the long-term goal of ensuring that all cats are either responsibly cared for by an owner or humanely removed from the landscape to allow for the recovery of native wildlife, and to protect humans and livestock from cat-borne diseases.

Recommendation 1: *Adopt two categories of cats in the next Tasmanian cat management plan: 'owned' and 'unowned'. Remove the 'stray' category from the plan and management frameworks.*

2. Establish government-run cat management facilities (Response to Section 2.3)

Tasmania's current cat management framework relies heavily on cat shelters that are run by community cat welfare organisations - Ten Lives and Just Cats.

Ten Lives and Just Cats play an important role in supporting the community with pet cat care, promoting responsible cat ownership, and rehoming surrendered owned cats and kittens. These shelters do undertake some euthanasia.¹ However, the discussion paper notes that they are opposed to euthanasia for capacity or cost management purposes, as it does not align with their values and notes that euthanasia has adverse mental health impacts on staff and volunteers.

The primary objective of Ten Lives and Just Cats is the welfare of individual cats and their focus is on preventive strategies to reduce the number of cats entering their facilities. This is a laudable aim, but unfortunately it is not an effective approach to reducing harms on biodiversity, agriculture and human health from unowned cats. This requires a strategic approach focussed on reducing population levels. As for other invasive species, lethal control is an important tool. Cat shelters are not the appropriate

¹ [Ten Lives Impact Report](#)

institutions to lead population-level management of stray and feral cats. Expecting welfare-focused organisations to undertake large-scale euthanasia is analogous to asking a vegan organisation to run a meat-processing facility: it creates an inherent conflict between organisational values and management objectives.

Both organisations have limited capacity. It is understood that their facilities operate on an appointment-only basis and maintain waitlists to limit intake to manageable levels. It is well documented that even the supply of healthy kittens exceeds the ability of shelters to rehome.² Due to the very high breeding rate of cats, unless Tasmania achieves near-total early-age desexing of the owned cat population, community run cat shelters will largely exhaust available places rehoming surrendered owned kittens and cats, and cannot be expected to home a significant proportion of unowned cats.

If Tasmania is serious about reducing the impacts of cats, dedicated government-run facilities are needed, staffed by an appropriately trained workforce. These facilities would focus on the evidence-based reduction of stray and feral cat populations, they would not provide an alternative animal rehoming service. Instead, the facilities should rapidly scan and assess cats to determine if they are microchipped and owned or should be sent to an adoption shelter (like Ten Lives or Just Cats) or euthanised. Facilities should have no-public facing function other than to receive animals and to contact owners of roaming animals who can collect them within a defined period (e.g. within 48 hours) following the payment of a substantial fine. The scale of the cat management problem in Tasmania requires this kind of clear, evidence informed and efficient management.

In other jurisdictions we have seen that both private individuals and local government animal management officers are reluctant to trap even when highly problematic cats are having large impacts on wildlife or the urban environment when they have nowhere to take them. It is essential that Tasmania establish suitable government-run facilities and processes to address this problem, including a network of other official collection points and animal management officers that can transfer cats to these facilities, to overcome practical impediments caused by distance.

Recommendation 2: *Establish and resource dedicated government-run cat management facilities focused on the evidence-based reduction of unowned cat populations, and systems to make it easy for animal management officers, local government, NRM, and other land management and agency staff to transfer cats to these facilities.*

3. Develop a comprehensive monitoring program

The [Tasmanian Cat Management Plan Achievements 2017-2022 Report](#) provides an ‘overview of the achievements by stakeholders across Tasmania against the strategic objectives of the Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017– 2022.’

The Discussion Paper reports that the Achievements Report documents meaningful improvements in responsible cat ownership, reduced impacts of feral cats, community awareness, and education that

² Ten Lives and Just Cats rehome about 2,000 cats per year combined, according to public records. In contrast, the unowned cat population in Tasmania is estimated to be at least [150,000](#), highlighting that cat rehoming via shelters does not occur in sufficient numbers to factor into the population level management of unowned cats.

have been achieved over the past eight years. However, the Achievements Report primarily documents administrative and educational outputs rather than measurable conservation or population outcomes.

While the report highlights significant effort, such as the TassieCat campaign reaching over 184,000 people on social media and TV advertisements airing more than 800 times, there is no corresponding data to demonstrate that this resulted in actual changes in community behavior or a reduction in the number of roaming cats. The establishment of new low-cost desexing programs is reported but without any data on actual desexing rates. Similarly, while the Tasmanian Cat Tracker project successfully implemented citizen science, it only tracked 20 cats for a seven-day period, providing a snapshot of movement rather than a statewide metric for containment.

A significant gap in the current evaluation is the lack of statewide data for the Plan's own performance indicators. For example, Action 4.1.1, intended to measure declines in cat-related complaints and shelter intakes, is listed as "Ongoing," with the necessary databases still "in development" by Biosecurity Tasmania. Without this baseline and subsequent trend data, it is impossible to verify if the Plan has achieved its primary goal of encouraging responsible ownership or reducing the pressure on cat management facilities.

Reducing pressure on cat management facilities should not be an objective of the next plan, as it is not supportive of a strategy aimed at reducing unowned cats and their impacts on wildlife, humans and agriculture. For example, pressure could be kept low on cat management facilities simply by leaving unowned cats in the landscape. An effective strategy to reduce unowned cat populations would be expected to increase pressure on cat management facilities while cat numbers are brought down.

Even where results are focused on more ecologically relevant outcomes, such as numbers of cats removed on North Bruny and Stanly Islands, there is no data to verify the short and long-term effect those removals had on cat densities or on wildlife populations. The Achievements Report presents no data that provides a clear picture of the Plan's overall impact on Tasmania's biodiversity or the recovery of cat-susceptible species at a state level. It is essential that monitoring include robust methods for estimating unowned cat densities, such as camera trapping and spotlighting, as shelter records cannot reveal this. Likewise, robust monitoring of populations that cats impact is also required.

Recommendation 3: *The next Tasmanian Cat Management Plan must transition from a focus on activities to a focus on results by establishing SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) targets. These targets should be quantified and linked to specific outcomes, for example, a percentage increase in 24/7 containment and desexing rates, or a measurable reduction in the density of unowned cats in priority biodiversity areas.*

To achieve this, the Tasmanian Government should:

- 1. Improve baseline data:** *Ensure for shelter intakes, public complaints, and desexing rates are complete and ready to be added to at the commencement of the new Plan.*
- 2. Implement standardised monitoring:** *Adopt monitoring standards, such as those used in the NSW [Keeping cats safe at home](#) project, which collected social and ecological baseline data from thousands of residents to track behavior change over time. Additionally collect datasets that can*

be used to estimate unowned cat and native wildlife populations or trends, such as camera trapping and spotlighting.

3. **Align with the National [Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats 2024](#)**: Ensure state targets align with the Threat Abatement Plan's objectives for protecting cat-susceptible species and suppressing feral cat densities in priority habitats.

4. Implement a compulsory registration program (Response to Section 4.2)

Microchipping and compulsory registration serve distinct but complementary roles in cat management.

Microchipping provides permanent identification and is essential for reuniting lost cats with their owners. However, on its own, it provides limited support for population management, encouragement of desexing, compliance monitoring and enforcement.

Registration serves as a regulatory and funding mechanism that complements microchipping. It provides councils with better information about cat ownership and breeding activities within their jurisdictions and avenues to communicate with cat owners about their responsibilities and resources available to support them. The use of differential fees - i.e. charging substantially more for 'entire' cats than desexed cats - incentivises desexing and establishes it as the social norm. Differential fee structures are already applied by local governments across Australia that require cat registration. While fees vary somewhat, the City of Melbourne's fees are fairly indicative of national trends, with registration of desexed cats set at \$44 per year, while entire cats are \$133 per year.

Tasmania's current requirement for all cats to be desexed by four months of age unless they are registered to a licensed breeder is best practice and should be continued. In reality, some entire cats still occur in the community, outside of the registered breeder system, with kittens either sold or given away, often through unregulated social media apps or word of mouth.

Registration system

Desexing and microchipping are already requirements of the sale/transfer of cats. It should be an offence to keep an unregistered cat to deter this practice and support the benefits of the registration system.

A registration requirement is unlikely to be a significant challenge for the majority of the community, and low-income groups, such as pension/healthcare card holders, should be given discounted registration fees. Many clinics already offer discounted desexing to these groups. Local Governments could consider waiving registration costs during an introduction period to lower barriers to getting animals into the system.

The registration system should include the animal's microchip details. This will help track individual cats over time, including those that are abandoned. Annual registration renewals provide an opportunity to update details including animal deaths and ownership transfers.

To be effective, these requirements must be supported by well-designed compliance regimes including well-designed communication, monitoring and enforcement. Active communication to cat owners could include notices to every resident; posters at vet clinics, pet stores, animal shelters, libraries and council offices, and coordinated messages through traditional and social media. There must be fines for non-compliance. Cat owners should not view registration as optional. If fines are not issued to owners of unregistered cats, then even people who may have been quite willing to sign up may not bother; people hate complying with a rule that neighbours are ignoring without consequence.

Recommendation 4: *Introduce mandatory cat registration across Tasmania, linked to each cat's microchip details.*

Recommendation 5: *Invest in active communication, monitoring and enforcement, including public awareness campaigns, compliance checks, infringement notices and ongoing reporting of compliance outcomes to the community.*

Fees

The fees collected from registration or fines from non-compliance should contribute to the administrative costs of running the registration system and to support animal management by local governments, including staff to monitor and enforce microchipping, registration and desexing requirements.

In a differential fee system, the additional fees collected for entire cats can be used to support discounted desexing programs for lower-income groups. In this way, where desexing rates are lower, the registration system will both provide a cost incentive to desex and generate revenue to support discounted desexing.

A discounted registration fee should be offered to low-income groups such as pensioners and students, but only for desexed cats. A 50 or 100% discount on registration could be offered to all pet owners in the year the cat is desexed to offset the cost of desexing. This discount can only be applied once in the cat's life.

The cost of desexing cats in Tasmania, could be as low as [\\$65 for males and \\$95 for females](#), but fees of [\\$120 \(males\) and \(\\$150 females\)](#) for pension/concession card holders are typical and up to \$400 for a female cat at a private vet clinic.

If adjusted correctly, the system should result in a scenario where it is cheaper for low-income owners to desex a cat than to register an entire cat. While for other pet owners, the cost of desexing is recouped within 2-3 years.

Recommendation 6: *Implement a differential registration fee structure, with substantially lower fees for desexed cats, to encourage desexing and discourage unregistered breeding.*

Recommendation 7: *Provide discounted registration fees and desexing support for low-income households, including pension/concession card holders, to ensure affordability is not a barrier to compliance.*

Recommendation 8: Use registration fees and penalties to fund animal management and responsible cat ownership programs, including administration, compliance activities and subsidised desexing programs.

Phased approach

A phased approach to introduction is recommended. A model approach is outlined below.

Phase 1: Three to six months prior to commencement date

- All data infrastructure ready and tested
- Pet owners can register cats free of charge during this period to incentivise early compliance and get cats recorded in the system
- An extensive communication campaign, which outlines the new requirements, when they commence, why they are needed, how collected fees will be spent, and the penalties for non-compliance, that fees are waived until commencement. This campaign should include a notice to every resident, notices at vets, animal shelters, pet stores, libraries and council offices; interviews on TV and radio; and a social media campaign.

Phase 2: First three months after commencement date

- Registrations are free, and advisory warnings rather than fines are issued to owners of unregistered cats.
- Active communication as above, with the addition that the requirement has started, and fees and fines will go up from 'X' date.
- Active monitoring by local government officers, checking the registration compliance of cats and issuing warning notices. Report active compliance and the issuing of fines to the community.

For example, assuming a fee structure of \$40 for a desexed cat and a \$300 fine for non-compliance. An ideal message is, "We would like to thank the community for the high levels of compliance with the new cat registration requirement which is now in effect. ### cats have now been registered in Tasmania. Tasmania has more pet cats than ever before, and this registration system provides essential information to local governments to help them manage cats in our communities. The penalty for owning an unregistered cat is \$300, but fines are being waived in this transition period. Registration is also still free until that date, so please register ASAP if you have not already. Council Officers are actively checking compliance and have handed out XXX warnings.

Phase 3: Three to six months after commencement date

- Registrations fees and fines are in effect, but have a 50% discount.

- Continued active communication as above, including the increase in the number of registered cats, the cost of fines and that the 50% discount on fines and registration fees is ending soon. State numbers of fines issued.
- Tailored communication to regions and community groups with registration rates below the expected.

Phase 4: Six months after commencement

- Registration fees and fines are at full amount.
- Pension/concession card holders receive discounts on desexed cat registration fees.
- Active monitoring by local government officers, checking the registration compliance of cats and issuing infringement notices with fines where cats are not registered.
- Continue to communicate to the community that fines are being issued and share other messages as needed.

Recommendation 9: *Adopt a phased implementation approach, including an initial period of free registration, extensive community education, warning notices before fines, and gradual introduction of fees and penalties.*

5. Improve transparency in cat sale and transfers (Response to Section 4.3)

Tasmania already has legal requirements governing the sale and transfer of cats, including requirements relating to desexing, microchipping, vaccination, parasite treatment and minimum age. However, enforcement is hampered by poor traceability, limited transparency and the anonymity provided by online sales platforms.

The Biodiversity Council supports new requirements to improve transparency and compliance. All advertisements and notices offering cats or kittens for sale, adoption or free rehoming should be required to include:

- breeder or source identification number
- an animal's microchip number
- a standard statement outlining all the legal conditions that apply to the sale or transfer of cats in Tasmania
- confirmation that the sale is compliant with all conditions outlined in 'C'.

Sellers should be required to provide documentary evidence of compliance at the point of transfer, and online platforms should be required to verify breeder or source identification numbers and remove non-compliant advertisements.

A centralised cat transfer and breeder register, similar to Victoria's [Pet Exchange Register](#), should be established. All cat sales, adoptions and ownership transfers should be recorded within this system to provide end-to-end traceability, improve compliance and enforcement, and reduce illegal breeding and

sales. Details in the register should also be available to local government officers who are tasked with monitoring and enforcing compliance.

Recommendation 10: *Require all advertisements and notices for the sale, adoption or rehoming of cats and kittens to include a breeder or source identification number, microchip number, and a statement of the legal requirements for cat transfer in Tasmania, including a requirement to provide documentation confirming compliance on transfer, together with a declaration of compliance with each requirement.*

Recommendation 11: *Require sellers and transferors to provide documentary evidence at the point of transfer demonstrating compliance with all legal requirements, including desexing, microchipping, vaccination, parasite treatment and central registration obligations.*

Recommendation 12: *Establish a centralised breeder and cat transfer register, similar to Victoria's Pet Exchange Register, and require all cat sales, adoptions and ownership transfers to be recorded within the system to improve traceability, compliance and enforcement.*

6. Introduce mandatory cat containment (Response to Section 4.4)

Mandatory 24-hour containment is the most effective measure available to reduce the impacts of owned cats on wildlife, human health, livestock, community amenity and cat welfare. It simultaneously addresses multiple problems that cannot be effectively addressed through night curfews or voluntary measures:

- *Biodiversity protection* - Roaming pet cats kill large numbers of native animals. Even well-fed cats hunt instinctively, and research shows pet cats collectively kill hundreds of millions of animals annually in Australia. Many native animals, especially birds and reptiles, are active during the day, and pet cats hunt throughout the day as well as at night. 24-hour containment is the only reliable way to prevent pet cats from hunting wildlife.
- *Reducing stray and feral cat populations* - Roaming owned cats contribute to stray populations through unintended breeding, abandonment and loss. Containment reduces opportunities for cats to become unowned and helps limit recruitment into stray populations.
- *Human and livestock health* - Cats are hosts for diseases such as toxoplasmosis, which can affect humans, livestock and wildlife. Containment reduces opportunities for disease transmission through hunting, scavenging and environmental contamination.
- *Cat welfare* - Contained cats are less likely to be hit by vehicles, attacked by dogs, injured in fights, become lost, be intentionally harmed, or contract infectious diseases. Contained cats typically live longer and healthier lives.
- *Community amenity* - Roaming cats can create nuisance through trespass, fighting, spraying, defecating in gardens and disturbing neighbours. Containment largely eliminates these impacts.
- *Fairness and accountability* - Containment places responsibility for managing cat impacts with cat owners, rather than requiring neighbours, councils, farmers and conservation managers to bear the costs. Society already accepts that dog owners must contain and control their pets. Applying similar expectations to cats reflects modern standards of responsible pet ownership.

A 24-hour requirement is simpler to communicate, easier to enforce and delivers substantially greater benefits for wildlife, cat welfare and community outcomes than partial containment measures. No alternative exists that will provide the same benefit as well-enforced mandatory 24-hour containment.

Challenges

Some households will face practical challenges if cat containment measures are introduced. Some properties may lack flyscreens or other features essential to prevent cats roaming. In rental properties, modifications to make a property cat-escape-proof may be challenging. In some cases, owners lack knowledge or confidence about how to successfully contain and care for cats indoors.

Overcoming these issues may be most challenging for low-income households, elderly people, people with disabilities, and those living in rental accommodation.

Education, incentives and targeted support programs can be used to address these challenges. This could include grants or subsidies for containment infrastructure, practical advice on cat containment and enrichment, assistance programs for pensioners, elderly people and people with disability, and working with landlords and housing providers to facilitate cat-friendly containment solutions in rental properties. These programs should be active well in advance of the introduction of containment requirements; they are about helping prepare for the requirement. Difficulty in containing a cat is not a valid excuse for roaming after containment is mandatory.

Practical barriers for some current cat owners should not be used as a reason to avoid stronger cat containment measures. Society generally accepts that pet ownership comes with responsibilities. We do not regard dog ownership as an unrestricted right that allows owners to let dogs roam if containment is inconvenient. Prospective dog owners are expected to consider whether they have the capacity to safely house and contain a dog before acquiring one. Importantly, free-roaming pet dogs were far more common several decades ago, but community expectations changed in response to their impacts on people, livestock and wildlife. A similar shift in expectations is now needed for cat ownership, recognising the substantial impacts that roaming cats have on wildlife, human health and agriculture. We need people to start factoring their ability to contain a cat into their decision to acquire one, as we see for dogs.

Recommendation 13: *Implement a long-term public education campaign that promotes cat containment as a normal responsibility of pet ownership, similar to community expectations regarding dog containment and control, and provides practical guidance to transition to containment.*

Recommendation 14: *Establish grants, subsidies, and practical support programs to assist disadvantaged households with containment infrastructure, which may include pensioners/concession card holders, elderly people, people with disabilities, and renters.*

Phased approach

Experience from other jurisdictions with regard to cats and from the introduction of other types of regulations demonstrates that containment requirements will be most successful when they are preceded by sustained efforts to build community understanding, increase responsible ownership, establish support programs, and create a strong expectation that containment will become the norm.

Attempting to introduce mandatory containment without first building social licence, compliance systems and enforcement capacity risks undermining both public support and long-term effectiveness.

The most effective pathway to establish mandatory 24-hour cat containment is a phased approach that first establishes high rates of responsible ownership, builds community support, and provides practical assistance to cat owners before introducing legal requirements. This approach maximises compliance, improves outcomes for cats and wildlife, and avoids many of the implementation challenges experienced in other jurisdictions.

Once containment becomes mandatory, many of the same principles outlined in the staged introduction of registration fees also apply: extensive communication of the requirement and why it is being introduced, active monitoring of compliance, issuing of warnings, infringement notices, and visibility that the requirement is being enforced and applied to everyone. However, as containment is a more significant change for some members of the community, a longer proactive lead-in phase can be of benefit.

A model approach is outlined below.

Phase 1: Establish responsible ownership and build social licence (Years 1–2)

The first phase should focus on creating a culture of responsible cat ownership and making cat containment an increasingly accepted social norm. Considerable groundwork for this was already achieved in the 2027-2022 plan. Further strengthening community support across Tasmania before introducing legal requirements is likely to result in higher compliance and better long-term outcomes.

Key features:

- Mandatory desexing and microchipping, registration requirements.
- Make it illegal to feed unowned cats. Encourage people who may have been feeding an unowned cat to transition it to being an owned cat.
- Statewide communication campaigns promoting the benefits of containment for wildlife, cat welfare, human health and neighbour relations.
- Practical guidance on affordable containment options.
- Grants, subsidies and advice for containment infrastructure, for low-income households, pension/concession card holders, and people with disability.
- Strong promotion of containment, as being something important for all cat owners to do.
- Clear and consistent communication of the future date when mandatory containment will commence.
- Collection of baseline data on ownership, compliance and containment rates.

Phase 2: Introduce statewide mandatory 24-hour containment

Introduce 24-hour containment as a legal requirement for all owned cats.

Grandfathering existing cats creates enforcement difficulties, delays wildlife benefits, increases community confusion and undermines compliance. A long lead-in period followed by a single commencement date applying to all owned cats provides a simpler, fairer and more effective pathway to achieving high rates of containment.

A single statewide commencement date, without grandfathering or exemptions, provides clarity and avoids the complexity and enforcement challenges.

24-hour containment requirements may be introduced in areas with vulnerable wildlife populations earlier.

It is essential that the requirements be effectively and explicitly communicated prior to introduction, and that substantial proactive monitoring, trapping of roaming cats and enforcement of fines occur from the date of enforcement, with clear and ongoing communication to the public that people can and are being fined. As per the recommended staged approach for the introduction of registration fees, warnings only could be offered for three months, followed by fines with a 50% discount for an additional three months.

Active policing and visible enforcement of the requirement, right from the start is essential to achieving high rates of compliance, even among those who could easily comply. Failure to do this signals that the requirement is not a real requirement. Failure to issue fines and enforce requirements on noncompliant individuals fosters ill will toward local government among compliant residents.

An intense period of enforcement at the start of mandatory containment would quickly achieve very high compliance rates, further reinforcing the social norm of cat containment.

It is critical Tasmania learns from the mistakes of other jurisdictions where a lack of resourcing for active monitoring and enforcement has critically undermined the success of cat management strategies. It is not sufficient for fines to be given only when neighbours trap roaming cats and take them to the council facilities, animal management officers should be actively doing this.

Recommendation 14: *Adopt a phased approach to mandatory 24-hour cat containment, beginning with measures that build responsible ownership, community support and compliance, including mandatory desexing, microchipping, registration, and measures to discourage feeding of unowned cats. Then moving to mandatory 24-hour containment for all owned cats, with a clear commencement date for all cats, and earlier implementation where vulnerable wildlife requires additional protection.*

Recommendation 15: *Ensure strong monitoring, enforcement and compliance, including proactive compliance checks, trapping of roaming cats, warning periods followed by fines, and visible enforcement to establish containment as a community norm.*

7. Consider local laws banning cats in high value conservation areas

While containment is effective, as compliance is seldom 100%, new housing developments near high-value conservation areas can be declared cat-free suburbs, where cat ownership is prohibited.

For example, Halls Gap, Victoria is nestled within Grampians National Park. The Northern Grampians Shire Council introduced a local law in 1993 that bans residents from keeping pet cats in order to help protect the Grampians' native wildlife. The local law was considered contentious when it was first introduced, but was accepted and over time led to broad community awareness and created a strong culture of not keeping cats, that is socially enforced.

This approach is easiest in new housing development areas, where people understand the requirements before buying or moving in, and should be considered in the planning of all new housing developments near biodiverse natural areas.

Recommendation 16: *Ensure strong monitoring, enforcement and compliance, including proactive compliance checks, trapping of roaming cats, warning periods followed by fines, and visible enforcement to establish containment as a community norm.*

8. Prohibit feeding of stray cats (Response to Section 5)

As stated under 1. *Refine cat categories*, the inclusion of a 'stray' category is unhelpful to management processes. All cats should all be either:

- owned and managed responsibly, or
- unowned and subject to population reduction programs.

The feeding of unowned cats should be prohibited for the following reasons.

Feeding increases unowned cat populations, ultimately increasing cat suffering

Unowned cats experience poor welfare, as they lack adequate shelter and are susceptible to disease and injury without veterinary care. Feeding may improve the condition of an individual unowned cat in the short term, but it increases their breeding rate, often substantially,³ leading to more and larger litters of kittens in the unowned cat population, which are then subject to poor welfare. In this way, feeding unowned cats may feel like a kind thing to do, but ultimately perpetuates more suffering by cats.

Feeding does not stop wildlife predation, and increases wildlife suffering

Research consistently shows that cats continue to hunt even when fed. Feeding may reduce hunger, but it does not eliminate predatory behaviour. By increasing cat numbers, feeding

³ A volunteer at a Victorian animal shelter reported that unowned cats in their area of Melbourne typically produced litters of about 3 kittens. However, during Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdowns, more people began feeding unowned cats, and litters of eight kittens became common, substantially increasing reproductive rates and accelerating population growth.

unowned cats increases the suffering of wildlife and can lead to native species being wiped out from an area.

Cats carry diseases that impact people, pets, and livestock.

Unowned cats carry a variety of diseases that are harmful to humans, livestock and native animals. This includes the cat-borne parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which can cause miscarriages, stillbirth, birth defects, illness, death in immune-compromised individuals and has been strongly linked to schizophrenia. A CSIRO study found that 84% stray and unowned cats in Tasmania carry the disease.⁴ Tasmania's cool, moist conditions allow the prolonged persistence of *Toxoplasma gondii* oocysts spread by cats in playgrounds, school yards, gardens, soil, on plants and in water. Cat-borne diseases are estimated to cost the Australian community \$6 billion per year.⁵ They also cause miscarriages and stillbirths in livestock, especially sheep.⁶ The impact on agricultural producers' livelihoods can be significant.

Feeding undermines management programs

Where governments, councils or land managers are attempting to reduce unowned cat populations, ongoing feeding boosts cat numbers and can undermine trapping and removal programs.

Many people feed unowned cats as they think it is a kindness and that they are helping. One of the solutions to overcome this challenge is education that effectively communicates that feeding unowned cats either short or long-term increases the long-term harm for cats, wildlife and disease spread. People need to understand that they can turn unowned cats into owned cats if they officially adopt them and comply with all responsible pet ownership requirements. This is far kinder than a middle ground of semi-ownership which results in unacceptable outcomes for the welfare of cats and their impacts on the broader community.

While the discussion paper notes the difficulty of enforcing a prohibition on feeding unowned cats, that is not a reason to forgo the prohibition. Making it an offence subject to a fine further reinforces the inappropriateness of the behaviour. Even without 100% compliance, a well-communicated prohibition backed by fines will reduce the number of people feeding unowned cats, thereby slowing the growth of the unowned cat population. It will also reduce the social acceptability of feeding unowned cats. The collection of fines can be used to support unowned cat population management, including trapping and removal. Individuals and business owners should also be educated to prevent the unintentional feeding of cats and other vermin by leaving rubbish and other food sources unsecured.

Recommendation 17: Prohibit the feeding of unowned ('stray') cats and introduce. Support this with the introduction of financial penalties with the proceeds used to support unowned cat population management.

⁴ [https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/CATS%20and%20WILDLIFE%20Booklet%20\(A5%2012%20pp\)_2015.pdf](https://nre.tas.gov.au/Documents/CATS%20and%20WILDLIFE%20Booklet%20(A5%2012%20pp)_2015.pdf)

⁵ Legge S, Taggart PL, Dickman CR, Read JL, Woinarski JCZ. (2020) Cat-dependent diseases cost Australia AU\$6 billion per year through impacts on human health and livestock production. *Wildlife Research* 47, 731–746.

<https://doi.org/10.1071/WR2008well-communicatedwell-communicated,9>

⁶ Ibid.

Recommendation 18: Effectively communicate the prohibition and why feeding unowned cats, without adopting and caring for them properly leads to the increased suffering of both unowned cats and wildlife and increased spread of significant diseases. Encourage people to be vigilant in removing or securing unintentional food sources for cats, like rubbish.

9. Remove existing cat colonies and prevent new ones (Response to Section 5)

Cat colonies are defined as three or more adult unowned cats that live in close proximity and engage in frequent social behaviour.⁷

Cat colonies magnify the problem of unowned cats. They continue to kill wildlife, even when supplementary food is provided. They act as reservoirs for diseases including toxoplasmosis. They make population reduction difficult as they provide a focal point for people to dump and abandon cats and breed new kittens, and they create ongoing welfare issues through injury, disease and poor nutrition.

Any attempts to provide supplementary food or shelter for the colony will exacerbate the problem by increasing breeding rates and survival. The Biodiversity Council recommends preventing new colonies from forming by education and active enforcement of the prohibition on feeding unowned cats and abandoning cats.

Ultimately, all existing colonies should be trapped and removed, with cats either rehomed if suitable, subject to the availability of homes, or euthanised. Cat colonies near wildlife habitats should be prioritised for removal first.

Trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs are not an effective or responsible management option and should not be considered. TNR fails to eliminate populations or even reduce them because cats are highly mobile and breed rapidly. Based on modelling of cat populations in the United States,⁸ TNR is only able to reduce a population in a scenario where no new cats can arrive in an area (for example, a single population on a small island) and there is certainty that a very high (75%+) proportion of the population can be kept desexed. Neither of these conditions can be met in Tasmania.

In addition, any cat that is desexed and returned would continue to harass, injure and kill native wildlife, spread disease and be a nuisance to the community. Cats in colonies have poor welfare and can attract vigilante behaviour, such as people poisoning animals. It would never be considered acceptable to manage unwanted dogs by desexing them and turning them out onto the street. Cats should not be treated any differently; there is never a place to release a cat to the wild in Australia, regardless of whether they are desexed. The cost of desexing a cat is also much higher than the cost of euthanasia.

Due to the high breeding rate of cats, it is important that management efforts are intensive - this results in the overall lowest management costs, best outcome for wildlife, and biggest benefit for disease

⁷ Vitale, K. R. (2022) The Social Lives of Free-Ranging Cats *Animals (Basel)* **12**(1), 126.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8749887/>

⁸ Schmidt PM, Swannack TM, Lopez RR, Slater MR. (2009) Evaluation of euthanasia and trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs in managing free-roaming cat populations. *Wildlife Research* 36, 117–125.
<https://doi.org/10.1071/WR08018>

reduction. It is also the best overall outcome in terms of cat welfare, because far fewer cats will be euthanised in a scenario in which all cats in a colony are trapped and removed at the same time, compared with approaches in which a smaller proportion are removed regularly, and which may not even keep pace with population growth.

Furthermore, it is also important to remove unowned cats in urban environments, due to their individual impacts and to prevent the formation of new cat colonies. Tasmania must learn from the experience of other jurisdictions and ensure adequate resourcing is allocated to the task. In Queensland and the ACT the lack of resourcing to address unowned cat populations is leading to their ongoing growth, harmful impacts, and undermining responsible cat ownership. Unless resourcing is sufficient to remove high proportions of the unowned population each year it will not prevent cat population growth and will lead to programs being far more costly over the long-term. An initial high intensity program followed by regular removal of new unowned cats is the most cost effective approach and leads to the smallest number of cats needing to be euthanized over the long-term.

Recommendation 19: *Prevent new colonies from forming by prohibiting the feeding of stray/unowned cats.*

Recommendation 20: *Map existing cat colonies to prioritise removal, beginning with those near natural habitat.*

Recommendation 21: *Remove all cats in a colony as rapidly as possible through trapping. Scan cats for microchips and contact and fine the owners of any abandoned previously owned cats. If any unmicrochipped cats are suitable for rehoming, and shelters advise they have the capacity to rehome them, send them to the shelter for processing (microchipping, worming, vaccination and desexing). Euthanise remaining animals.*

Recommendation 22: *There is no place for trap-neuter-return programs in Tasmania. They are currently illegal, as abandoning an animal to the wild is illegal. It is important to maintain this prohibition.*

10. Implement a strategic, integrated and well-resourced feral cat control program (Response to Section 6)

Like the management of all fast-breeding invasive species, feral cat control is usually most effective when undertaken across large areas and coordinated among neighbouring landholders, governments, conservation groups and First Nations land managers, rather than as isolated property-scale efforts. As feral cat numbers are boosted by rabbits, there is also value in integrating cat and rabbit control strategies.

Rural landowners can be supported by regional invasive species management officers who help facilitate feral cat control across multiple properties at the same time, and who can provide advice on best-practice approaches. The National Threat Abatement Plan provides clear direction, but it would be more effective if it is communicated to rural landowners by local officers.

There are also scenarios where intensive cat control at a relatively small site that supports cat-susceptible species of high conservation value, will be feasible. These sites need to be identified and prioritised for such management attention.

Rural landowners must also comply with responsible cat ownership requirements, most notably ensuring that all cats are desexed by four months, so that they do not contribute to the feral cat population.

Cat management approaches should differ between urban, peri-urban and rural areas because the likelihood of encountering owned cats varies significantly. Management intensity should be guided by the risk posed to biodiversity, agriculture and human health, while ensuring owned cats are protected from unintended impacts.

In urban and peri-urban areas, all captured cats should first be trapped, scanned for a microchip, and assessed for ownership before further management action is taken.

In rural areas, landowners are not permitted to euthanise cats if the location at which the cat is found is less than 1 km from a residence. This 1 km 'dwelling buffer' provides too much habitat for feral cats to live and breed in and may result in high impacts on important conservation values and agricultural impacts. Moreover, if cat containment is effectively implemented, then cats should not be roaming.

Reducing the buffer distance from 1 km to 500m will reduce the management burden on landowners and animal management facilities by allowing more cats to be humanely culled on site. Within the 500m of dwelling buffer landowners can take the more resource intensive step of trapping cats, and delivering them to animal management officers or cat management facilities. Outside of the 'dwelling buffer' additional control methods such as Felixer™ grooming traps, shooting and baiting (where off-target impacts have been assessed and will not be significant) should be available.

Bounty programs should not be considered, as there is extensive evidence that they achieve little, are a waste of public funds that are better directed to professional coordinated programs, are plagued with corruption and can make invasive animal problems worse.⁹

Recommendation 23: *Support coordinated, evidence-based landscape-scale feral cat management across neighbouring properties and land tenures, including integrating rabbit and feral cat management.*

Recommendation 24: *Identify sites of high conservation value that are at risk because of cat predation, and prioritise these for intensive cat control.*

⁹ Natural Resources Commission. (2016). *State-wide review of pest animal management: Final report* (Document No. D16/3146). NSW Government. <https://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/Pest%20animal%20review%20-%20Final%20report.pdf>

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<https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Economic-evaluation-of-the-role-of-bounties.pdf>

Fairbridge, D., & Marks, C. (2005). *Evaluation of the 2002/03 Victorian fox bounty trial*. Vertebrate Pest Research Unit, Primary Industries Research Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, Victoria.

<https://pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/VicFoxBountyEvaluation0203.pdf>

Ditchkoff, S.S., Holtfreter, R.W. and Williams, B.L. (2017), Effectiveness of a bounty program for reducing wild pig densities. *Wildl. Soc. Bull.*, 41: 548-555. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wsb.787>

Recommendation 25: *Provide landholders with access to best-practice control tools, training and guidance based on current evidence and the National Threat Abatement Plan and fund regional invasive species officers to provide technical advice, coordination and support.*

Recommendation 26: *Require all cats captured in urban and peri-urban areas and within 500m of a dwelling in rural areas to be trapped and scanned for a microchip before further management action is taken.*

Recommendation 27: *In rural areas, reduce the 'dwelling buffer' distance from 1 km to 500 m. Within the 500 m 'dwelling buffer' require all cats to be trapped and scanned for a microchip before further management action is taken. Permit additional feral cat control methods in rural areas, including Felixer™ grooming traps, shooting and baiting, where they are conducted in accordance with legislation and at least 500 metres from occupied dwellings.*

Recommendation 28: *Do not implement a bounty scheme for feral cats.*