

Cat and Dog statutory review
Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
PO Box 8349
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

CAT ACT Review Response

From Albany and Surrounds Feral Cat Working Group

About the OHCG

The Oyster Harbour Catchment Group (OHCG) was established in 1992 as a community catchment group and became an incorporated body in 1994. OHCG's purpose is to co-ordinate and facilitate natural resource management to all stakeholders in the Oyster Harbour Catchment including land managers, the urban and peri-urban community, local government and government agencies. We are the key natural resource management group of the Oyster Harbour Catchment and form one of the three community natural resource management groups for the Albany Hinterland sub region of the overall South Coast NRM region.

Albany and Surrounds Feral Cat Working Group

The OHCG recognised the devastating damage that feral, stray and pet cats inflict on native wildlife. For this reason, in 2019 we held a feral cat workshop in Albany and from that meeting we have formed a Feral Cat Working Group for Albany and surrounds (ASFCWG). The ASFCWG takes a collaborative and consultative approach and seeks to apply current research knowledge to the management of cats.

This group has a wide range of representatives participating in the planning stage: Dept of Biodiversity Conservations and Attractions, Dept of Primary Industries and Regional Development, local Landcare Catchment Groups, native animal carer groups, WA Feral Cat Working Group, Western Australian Biodiversity Science Institute, Natural Resource Management groups, Shires, Albany Animal Welfare, Gondwana Link, Birdlife Australia, Bush Heritage, University of WA, feral animal contractors, local 'Friends' groups and concerned citizens.

The group has studied the Pause for Paws Review of the Cat Act 2011 and though the Purposes of the Act are admirable the review is incomplete in providing supportive data to make an informed decision on the adequacy of the Act. The Purposes of the Act that are delivered via the regulations are not elaborated so it's difficult to offer comment on their adequacy and provide possible solutions. To offer comments to this document, reading and understanding of the Cat Act 2011 is required, however this was not attached to the consultation paper for ease of reference. Without this knowledge it is very hard for concerned citizens to make informed responses. Furthermore, the online survey asks for the participants opinion rather than giving any statistics for or against the efficacy of the Act.

- A comprehensive review of the Act should have been provided
- There are no statistics to inform the reader as to the efficacy of the current Act

Comments on the review of the Cat Act 2011

The following points highlight specific sections of the Cat Act 2011 which the ASFCWG believes require strengthening, incorporation and /or further consideration. We have also posed several questions requiring clarification.

Local Government

The Regulations and Guidelines for carrying out the Cat Act have been created by the State but require Local Government to uphold them.

- All Regulations should be strengthened as legislation
- State Government should legally support Local Government with this legislation rather than allowing local laws to be optional for each Shire across the State e.g. collars and tags in public and numbers of animals per property
- There is no funding or revenue information provided for evaluation of costs

Registration

Information provided indicates cats wander, create a nuisance and multiple cat ownership is not restricted even when pets are registered.

- A simple solution is to create cat Curfews – as a bare minimum
- and/or always restrict cats to premises at all times
- State legislation should restrict the number of cats allowed per household

Questions:

- Why are there 3 options of registration if one of them (lifetime registration) indicates a local government revenue decline?
- Is the review suggesting this intended revenue gain is supposed to help fund local government to enforce the State Regulations?
- Has the State taken into consideration the increased financial burden on local government with the changes to the Cat Act?

Microchips

The Cat Act states - Cats are to be microchipped by six months of age.

- Cats should be microchipped at three months of age as is the case with dogs

Sterilisation

The Cat Act states -Cats are to be sterilised by the time they are six months of age.

- Breeding is possible at four months of age therefore sterilisation should be done before cats reach four months of age
- General Public and vet clinics need to have the ability to report the breaking of this law- i.e. When neighbours/general public view a cat that is continuously having kittens, often these kittens also become a burden on society.

Collars and Tags

The Cat Act states cats are to wear tags and the owner of a registered cat must ensure that when the cat is outside its home premises the cat must wear the tag.

- Cats should be required to wear collar and tag when outside their home, no exceptions

Combining the Dog and Cat Acts

Many requirements apply equally to cats and dogs and negative impacts of cats and dogs on the environment could potentially be dealt with more effectively if both were managed under one Act.

Questions:

- How? You give no evidence of this being efficient

Dangerous Animal Act

The Dog Act states a dog is to be declared dangerous by Local Government if it has caused injury or damage by an attack on, or chasing, a person, ANIMAL or vehicle.

- If statistics show that cats kill more than a million birds every day, why can't they be listed as dangerous¹
- While recognising the many benefits of pet ownership we should acknowledge and legislate also to reduce the detrimental impacts cats have on native animals²
- Feral cats in Australia's natural environments kill 466 million reptiles a year³.
- Pet (which number nearly 4 million) and feral cats together kill over 1.5 billion native reptiles, birds and mammals making Australia's mammal extinction rate the highest in the world⁶.
- In total, the book's authors said cats would kill more than 3 million mammals, 2 million reptiles and 1 million birds every day⁶.

Final Comments

- Many government and non-government organisations promote 'responsible cat ownership'^{4,5,6,7}. They see education as an additional way to increase responsible ownership. But education is not happening. There needs to be a more concerted effort to inform pet owners about the damage their pets are doing to the native animals. They need to know these statistics of death and extinction taking place every day and how much of an impact this has on our native fauna. Responsible cat ownership via containing cats would not only protect native animals it will also protect cats from the risk of contracting diseases, viruses and parasites, (which can be deadly) as well as from the physical dangers such as road trauma. Containment of pet cats will improve protection for native
- Whilst we understand that lack of resources is very common in many areas of government, the loss of native animals to pet, stray and feral cats is so significant that cat control issues need to be addressed. The unsatisfactory part of the Cat Act and its regulations is it is far easier for people to do the wrong thing and risk getting caught, with little incentive to follow the Cat Act 2011 and complete all the requirements.

Keeping cats contained is both better for the environment and the health of cats.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Albany and Surrounds Feral Cat Working Group by,

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Albany and Surrounds Feral Cat Working Group (ASFCWG) coordinator

August 3rd, 2019

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References

- ¹ and ² John Woinarski <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-04/cats-killing-one-million-birds-in-australia-every-day-estimates/9013960> and <https://theconversation.com/for-whom-the-bell-tolls-cats-kill-more-than-a-million-australian-birds-every-day-85084>
- ³ Woinarski, J. C. Z., Murphy, B. P., Palmer, R., Legge, S. M., Dickman, C. R., Doherty, T. S., ... & Stokeld, D. (2018). *Wildlife research*, 45(3), 247-266.
- ⁴ Department of the Environment, 2015. Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats. *Commonwealth of Australia, 2015*, pp.1-50. <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/78f3dea5-c278-4273-8923-fa0de27aacfb/files/tap-predation-feral-cats-2015.pdf>
- ⁵ Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Western Australia, 2019, "Pause for paws Feedback on dog and cat laws in WA" <https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/resources/publications/Publications/Pause%20for%20paws%20-%20Feedback%20on%20dog%20and%20cat%20laws%20in%20WA/Pause%20for%20Paws%20-%20Feedback%20on%20dog%20and%20cat%20laws%20in%20WA.pdf>
- ⁶ Woinarski, John CZ, Sarah M. Legge, and Chris R. Dickman. *Cats in Australia: Companion and Killer*. CSIRO Publishing, 2019. <https://www.cdu.edu.au/newsroom/cats-companion-and-killer>
- ⁷ Selby, L.A., Rhoades, J.D., Hewett, J.E. and Irvin, J.A., 1979. A survey of attitudes toward responsible pet ownership. *Public Health Reports*, 94(4), p.380