

Protecting our native wildlife from cats

Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group, November 2024

A submission to the inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales, being conducted by the Animal Welfare Committee, NSW Legislative Council



*A domestic cat, with collar, observed hunting within the boundaries of the Blue Mountains National Park
Banksia Streamlet, Katoomba, June 2024*

Introduction

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the inquiry into the management of cat populations in NSW.

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group is an environmental conservation planning and advocacy body consisting of local residents and Bushcare volunteers who take an interest in the natural areas of Leura Falls Creek catchment. The catchment traverses populated areas, natural areas managed by Blue Mountains City Council, and the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage Area. Bushcare groups currently active within the catchment are:

- Banksia Park Bushcare Group
- Leura Park/Cascades Bushcare Group
- Vale Street Bushcare Group
- Govett Street Bushcare Group
- Gordon Falls Bushcare Group
- Everglades Bushcare Group
- Everglades Landcare Group
- Sublime Point Bushcare Group
- Prince Henry Cliff Walk Bushcare Group
- Gun Gun Bushcare Group

The Catchment Group works closely with Blue Mountains City Council, and with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Our membership includes cat owners.

Drawing on our observations over many years, we urge the Inquiry to adopt evidence-based measures that address the serious threat posed by domestic, stray, and feral cats to native wildlife in the Blue Mountains, and all over NSW.

The ecological impact of cats

The committee will no doubt receive expert scientific submissions and evidence on this issue. The House of Representatives inquiry into these issues in 2020 heard evidence that feral and stray cats kill 1.1 billion invertebrates, 90 million frogs, 600 million reptiles, 320 million birds and 960 million mammals each year, and pet cats kill a total of 390 million animals per year¹. Whatever the exact numbers, the impact is clearly massive, and needs to be better addressed at all levels of government.

In the Blue Mountains National Park, cat predation is a significant threat to several threatened and endangered species. These include:

- **Blue Mountains Water Skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*)**, a critically endangered reptile endemic to the region, found only in a few isolated wetlands. Cats threaten this species directly through predation.

¹ [Tackling the feral cat pandemic: a plan to save Australian wildlife: Report of the inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia](#), House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, Canberra 2020, p10-11. These estimates came from the National Environmental Science Program Threatened Species Recovery Hub.

- **Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*)**, a vulnerable marsupial that faces competition and predation from feral cats.
- **Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*)**, which relies on dense undergrowth for protection, often destroyed by cat activity.
- **Eastern Pygmy Possum (*Cercartetus nanus*)**, a small arboreal mammal particularly vulnerable to predation by roaming and feral cats.

Many species of birds found in the Blue Mountains are subject to predation by cats. One of the features of our catchment area is the presence of the **Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*)** an iconic species which features in the logo of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. It might be thought that because of their large size and their powerful feet and claws, lyrebirds would not be threatened by cats. However a CSIRO study noted that there is evidence that cats (and foxes) prey on lyrebird nests – which are on the ground – and have contributed to the depletion of lyrebird populations in some areas².

The Leura Falls Creek catchment, situated along the urban interface of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, serves as a critical transition zone between human settlements and pristine wilderness. Roaming domestic cats do not confine themselves to populated areas; as evidenced by the photograph on the front page of this submission, they inevitably roam into bushland including the National Park. Roaming domestic cats exacerbate the predation pressures on local wildlife already facing habitat loss and fragmentation. Without intervention, these declines may become irreversible, further threatening the biodiversity for which the World Heritage Area is renowned.

Recommendations

We advocate for the following measures:

1. Increased Education and Advocacy

- Expand public education campaigns to raise awareness about the impact of roaming cats on native wildlife, the proposed legal changes (below), and the benefits of responsible pet ownership, such as desexing, vaccination and microchipping.
- Veterinarians have a key role to play in supporting behaviour change in the community – according to the RSPCA they are the most trusted source of guidance for cat owners. It is therefore desirable that vets be provided with resources to help them provide this guidance effectively.
- The RSPCA’s pilot program “Keeping Cats Safe at Home” appears to be an excellent initiative which should be considered for expansion to other areas of the state, subject to satisfactory evaluation.
- Local government and community organisations (e.g. neighbourhood centres, Invasive Species Council, Cat Protection Society) will also have roles to play in helping to change community attitudes and behaviours in relation to cats.

2. Mandatory cat containment laws

- The Companion Animals Act should be amended to mandate containment of pet cats, similar to the requirement already in place for dogs. This would significantly reduce roaming and predation while improving cat safety.

² Legge, Woinarski, Dickman, Murphy, Woolley and Calver, “We need to worry about Bella and Charlie: the impacts of pet cats on Australian wildlife”, 2020, *Wildlife Research* 47(8) 523-539

- Local government should be given the powers – and resources – to bring about compliance with the amended laws, and to support communities and individual cat owners to understand and carry out their responsibilities.
3. **Comprehensive feral cat control programs**
- Increase funding and resources for feral cat control initiatives by local government, National Parks and Wildlife Service and landowners.
4. **Progressive reduction in stray cat numbers**
- Distinct from the category of feral cats is the class of domestic cats which have no owner but which hang around human settlements scavenging for food, and are sometimes fed or cared for by one or more people in the community – stray cats.
 - A sensitive and nuanced approach is required where there are people who care for these cats, who are sometimes (but not always) socially isolated or economically disadvantaged.
 - A “harm reduction” approach may be taken in some parts of the State to ensure that stray cats are desexed, microchipped and vaccinated in some circumstances, even though they have no registered owner. The RSPCA has done some good work in some of these areas, but the problem remains that wildlife is still at risk as long as any cats remain uncontained. The aim must be to reduce the numbers of stray cats over time, eventually reaching zero.
 - Because of the location of Blue Mountains communities directly interfacing with the World Heritage Area, we do not support such a harm reduction approach being taken here. Cats in the Blue Mountains should either be registered and contained in their homes, or be taken off the streets and dealt with by the local government pound systems.

A balanced approach

We recognize the importance of balancing the welfare of domestic cats with the protection of native wildlife. Evidence from jurisdictions with similar policies, such as the ACT’s cat containment laws, demonstrates that such measures can be implemented effectively without causing undue hardship to pet owners.

The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group strongly supports the adoption of laws, policies, programs and practices to address the threat posed by cats to NSW’s biodiversity. Our native wildlife and ecosystems depend on decisive and collaborative action.

Thank you for considering this submission. We welcome the opportunity to provide further information or participate in future discussions.

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