

Pet owner responsibilities for preservation of native wildlife in NSW

Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group

A submission to the review of Companion Animals Laws conducted by the Office of Local Government NSW, May 2025



*A pet 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 Review of Companion Animals Laws 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 dog and cat owners.

Drawing on our observations over many years, we urge the government to adopt evidence-based measures that address the serious threats posed by domestic cats and dogs to native wildlife in the Blue Mountains, and all over NSW. There are two problematic behaviours by pet owners that we focus on in this submission:

- Cat owners who allow their cats to roam; and
- Dog owners who take their dogs into national parks, or who walk their dogs off leash in other natural areas

The ecological impact of cats and dogs

Many pet owners fail to understand that both dogs and cats pose significant threats to our native wildlife.

The threats from cats are perhaps the most obvious, and are well documented. A House of Representatives inquiry 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.

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.

The threats to native wildlife from dogs are less well documented, and less well understood by pet owners. A very recent article, published by the CSIRO, has found:

“As the commonest large carnivore in the world, the environmental impacts of owned dogs are extensive and multifarious: they are implicated in direct killing and disturbance of multiple species, particularly shore birds, but also their mere presence, even when leashed, can disturb birds and mammals, causing them to leave areas where dogs are exercised. Furthermore, scent traces and urine and faeces left by dogs can continue to have this effect even when dogs are not present. Faeces and urine can transfer zoonoses to wildlife and, when accumulated, can pollute waterways and impact plant growth. Owned dogs that enter waterways contribute to toxic pollution through wash-off of chemical ectoparasite treatment applications.”² (*Zoonoses are infectious diseases that can spread from animals to humans.*)

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. In the Blue Mountains National Park, cats and dogs pose a significant threat to several threatened and endangered species. These include the Spotted-tailed Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*), Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*), Eastern Pygmy Possum (*Cercartetus nanus*), and Blue Mountains Water Skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*). While it is not a threatened species, one of the special features of our catchment area is the abundant presence of the Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) an iconic species which features in the logo of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. A CSIRO study noted that there is evidence that cats prey on lyrebird nests – which are on the ground – and have contributed to the depletion of lyrebird populations in some areas³.

Recommendations

1. Updating of Companion Animals Act

- We support amendment of the Companion Animals Act to spell out the guiding principles of responsible pet ownership, including provision of adequate food, water, shelter, desexing, veterinary care, training, and socialisation etc. It is suggested that these guiding principles should include a general responsibility for the protection of native wildlife, and a specific responsibility to keep domestic animals out of national parks and wildlife protection areas.
- The Companion Animals Act should, as far as possible, provide more consistency in the requirements for owners of dogs (in Part 3 of the Act) and cats (in Part 4). A relevant example of inconsistency is that Section 16 (“offences where a dog attacks a person or animal”) has no equivalent for cats.
- The Companion Animals Act should be amended to mandate containment of pet cats, consistent with the requirement already in place for dogs. This would significantly reduce roaming and predation while improving cat safety.
- It will not be practical for cat containment to be introduced overnight. The law should provide for it to be phased in over several years. The experience of other jurisdictions with the successful progressive implementation of cat containment policies, such as the ACT, provides an excellent guide.

² Bateman and Gilson, “Bad Dog? The environmental effects of owned dogs”, 2025, *Pacific Conservation Biology* 31, PC24071. <https://doi.org/10.1071/PC24071>

³ 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

- We do not support the proposition (by some councils and LGNSW) that it should be up to each council to decide whether or when cat containment should be introduced into their areas. As is the case with dogs, containment should be prescribed by the legislation, and should come into force across the whole state at the same time. This will facilitate the effectiveness of statewide information and education campaigns about the changes.

2. Increased Education and Advocacy

- It is clear that law reform alone will not bring about change in attitudes or behaviour of pet owners. The government will need to commit to expand public education campaigns to raise awareness of the principles of responsible pet ownership, including the need to reduce the impact of domestic cats and dogs on native wildlife,
- 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 pet owners. It is therefore desirable that vets be provided with resources to help them provide this guidance effectively.
- In relation to cats, 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.
- In relation to dogs, there is a need for programs to educate pet owners about the reasons why dogs should not be taken into national parks, and kept on leashes in other natural areas. While there are already clear laws and sanctions in relation to these behaviours, our experience is that these laws are very frequently disregarded, often because dog owners do not fully understand the effects of their dogs’ presence on native wildlife.

A balanced approach

We recognize the importance of balancing the welfare of companion animals with the protection of native wildlife. The Leura Falls Creek Catchment Group strongly supports the adoption of laws, policies, programs and practices to address the threat posed by cats and dogs 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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