

The logo for the Invasive Species Council (ISC) consists of the letters 'ISC' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, set against a solid orange rectangular background.

Invasive Species Council

AUSTRALIA

Director
Exotic Species Regulation Section
Wildlife Branch
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
Canberra
By email WSM.Mail@environment.gov.au

16 August

Dear Director

Submission on *Draft environmental assessment of the suitability of the import of the Savannah Cat (Domestic Cat x Serval hybrid specimens) into Australia*

The Invasive Species Council is a national environmental organisation that campaigns to prevent further introductions of invasive plants, animals and pathogens.

We support the analysis contained in the draft submission and strongly recommend against allowing the import of savannah cats. The risk of them escaping into the wild, establishing in the wild and threatening native species is very high, so 'the proposed amendment to prohibit Savannah Cats would be valuable in the long term for the protection of the Australian environment.'

We consider there is a high risk that savannah cats will:

- ◆escape into the wild - whether deliberate or accidental, these cats will inevitably escape domestic constraints sometime in the future (even if it takes decades);
- ◆establish in the wild - these cats will be more than capable of surviving in the Australian bush and with high fecundity are likely to quickly establish populations; and
- ◆threaten native wildlife - they will add to the predation pressure on Australian native wildlife, probably targeting a greater range of prey than domestic cats given their larger size, and compete with native species for food and shelter.

One of the greatest risks of this proposed import is that as different types of serval-domestic cats are bred and imported, there will be greater potential for hybridisation with domestic cats in the wild. This would expand the gene pool of feral domestic cats, increasing their potential threat to the environment.

While those who seek to import the cats argue that there is a low risk of their escape into the wild - because the cats are valuable, because (some) sellers will require agreement to guidelines for keeping the cats - they neglect temporal and psychological factors that greatly increases that risk.

To state the obvious, once savannah cats are here they are likely to be here for ever. Even if the risk of them becoming a pest is low for the foreseeable future, social conditions and fashions change, and risks escalate over time simply because even a low probability becomes a high probability given enough time. If they are as desirable as pets as the sellers claim, more and more will be introduced and bred, prices will drop and the risk of accidental escapes will increase.

Once savannah cats escape into the wild and start breeding there is little that can be done to retrieve the situation, as feral cats are notoriously difficult to control.

It is important to also acknowledge that some people seek maliciously to harm the environment. One of the worst examples of this is the presumed deliberate introduction of foxes to Tasmania. No laws or penalties can guard against this. The only safeguard is banning them from entry into Australia.

We urge the government to ensure that Australian species are protected from this potential feral pest.

We have also written recently to the Minister urging him to apply the same caution to other variants and hybrids of species allowed import into Australia.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol Booth". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Yours sincerely".

Dr Carol Booth
Policy Officer