

Cat Management in Tasmania

Discussion Paper

Submission by the
Invasive Species Council

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About the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council was formed in 2002 to advocate for stronger laws, policies and programs to keep Australian biodiversity safe from weeds, feral animals, exotic pathogens and other invaders. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation, funded predominantly by donations from supporters and philanthropic organisations.

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Executive summary

The Invasive Species Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on Tasmania's draft Cat Management in Tasmania discussion paper. Tasmania's current cat management system remains fragmented, under-resourced, and overly reliant on voluntary action and local government enforcement. Despite multiple policy cycles and stakeholder feedback, key structural issues, particularly inconsistent regulation, limited infrastructure, and weak provisions for feral cat control, remain unresolved.

The next Tasmanian cat management plan should align with the national threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024 and position Tasmania as a national leader in coordinated cat management, island eradication, and biodiversity protection.

This submission calls for a shift to a coherent, statewide system that is enforceable, properly funded, and aligned with Tasmania's environmental and biosecurity objectives. Central to this is the introduction of mandatory cat containment, investment in cat management infrastructure, reform of trapping and humane destruction rules, and support for landscape-scale feral cat control. Without these reforms, Tasmania will continue to fall short in protecting wildlife, supporting communities, and managing one of its most significant invasive species threats.

Key recommendations

Recommendation 1: Improve statewide leadership and consistency

Recommendation 2: Staged introduction of mandatory cat containment

Recommendation 3. Address the cat management facility bottleneck and expand provisions for trapped cats

Recommendation 4. Prioritise island eradication

Recommendation 5. Embed adaptive and integrated pest management principles into feral cat management

Recommendation 1: Improve statewide leadership and consistency

Cat management is a statewide issue that requires consistent, statewide regulation and funding. The current approach to cat management in Tasmania has relied heavily on local councils and has thus resulted in uneven implementation, confusion for the community, and limited progress. This is a longstanding issue identified across previous policy processes. Continuing to delegate primary responsibility to councils without adequate resourcing or consistent legislative backing will perpetuate inaction.

The national threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024, to which Tasmania has supported, emphasises the need for enabling legislative, and regulatory and planning frameworks that support consistent and coordinated cat management across jurisdictions. While local councils may be the first port of call in cat management, for effective cat management, the state government should establish statewide regulations that standardise how all councils manage feral, stray, and pet cats. It is also crucial that the state government provide resourcing and support to local councils in administering statewide regulations.

Recommendations:

- Establish statewide minimum standards for cat management with dedicated funding for implementation and clarification of roles, with the state government leading policy, coordination, and resourcing. This aligns with Objective 1 of the national threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats.

Recommendation 2: Staged introduction of mandatory cat containment

Given that a single roaming pet cat can kill 110 native animals a year (Legge et al., 2020), mandatory cat containment is an effective strategy for protecting wildlife. Keeping cats inside is also better for the cats themselves, with contained cats living up to 10 years longer than those allowed to roam (Calver et al., 2026).

Containment should be understood not simply as a pet management measure, but as a foundational requirement for broader cat management. The 2024 national Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats recognises that improved management of pet cats is necessary to reduce feral cat impacts. Allowing pet cats to roam fundamentally undermines feral cat management ecologically, operationally, and socially. Although cats are legally required to be micro-chipped, roaming pet cats are practically indistinguishable from stray and feral cats, creating legal, operational, and social constraints on control efforts. Importantly, reducing feral cat populations is already challenging without the continuous replenishment from roaming domestic cats contributing to ongoing recruitment into feral populations.

Achieving effective cat containment will require a multi-pronged approach, including education, community engagement and enforcement. Education programs are crucial to increase the acceptance and uptake of cat containment.

We strongly recommend a staged introduction of 24/7 cat containment, starting with strong and well-funded education and community support programs for voluntary containment, and a clear introduction date that allows local councils, cat management facilities and supportive organisations to assist the community to prepare and make the shift, ahead of an enforceable requirement.

The ACT successfully modelled this approach, with, for example, new suburbs having cat containment mandatory for all new residents. For established suburbs, an extensive consultation, engagement and education program on Canberra-wide mandatory cat containment, carried out with a long lead-in time before the introduction of city-wide containment and enforcement, has resulted in high levels of community acceptance and compliance.

The Kingborough Council has also successfully introduced mandatory cat containment to Bruny Island as part of a broader cat management strategy. According to Kingborough Council, 74% of known households with a pet cat fully comply with the by-law. To achieve this result, Kingborough Council worked closely with the community. Strategies they implemented included: programs in local schools, an education campaign, stalls at community events, engagement with the local cat rescue, working with the local men's shed to provide enclosures, wildlife monitoring, engaging the community to report cat sightings, as well as compliance activities like issuing cautionary infringement notices.

Moving to mandatory cat containment is timely and reflects changes in community sentiment. [Research by the Biodiversity Council](#) found that two-thirds of Australians now support cat containment, recognising the need to shift expectations regarding responsible cat ownership for the benefit of wildlife and communities. The next Cat Management Plan should reflect this shift.

Recommendations:

- Legislate statewide mandatory cat containment implemented in a staged rollout that includes the following:
 - A long lead-in time to allow for strong community education and support before shifting to compliance and enforcement.
 - Areas to target for cat containment initially should be areas of high biodiversity value, particularly near new housing developments, as the concept could be more actively promoted.
 - Including council reserves as cat-prohibited areas, alongside the already designated state-managed reserves, such as national parks and crown land reserves.
 - Implement an education campaign in conjunction with local councils, vets, and community groups to raise awareness about the law.
 - Ensure messages targeting cat owners focus on the safety of their cat, with conservation as a secondary message. Social research has repeatedly shown that cat owners are more receptive to messages that focus on their pet's safety.
 - As resources allow, develop an incentive program for cat owners. E.g. the Shire of Capel, WA offers cat owners a \$200 rebate to install a new catio (see here: <https://www.capel.wa.gov.au/news/catio-rebate/>).
 - Support a clear mechanism for community members to report roaming cats and a follow-through support strategy, e.g. follow-up phone calls with reported cat owners.
 - Design and implement a monitoring program that can assist local governments in the enforcement of cat containment. For example, advances in AI recognition systems could allow for monitoring and compliance of known roaming cats.

- As part of the education program, continue to encourage the uptake of cat desexing, registration and microchipping.

Recommendation 3. Address the cat management facility bottleneck and expand provisions for trapped cats

The current cat management facility system is oversubscribed, geographically limited, and structurally unsustainable. While we welcome the government's support for another cat management facility in Burnie, access to facilities for those in regional and remote areas is still very limited. Appointment-only intake further limits responsiveness. These limitations severely compromise both animal welfare outcomes and the success of community-led trapping efforts.

The current legal requirement that trapped cats be taken to a cat management facility creates significant barriers to effective action. Limited facility capacity, geographic constraints, and the scale of feral cat populations make this requirement impractical to comply with. In practice, this results in reduced participation in control efforts, release of trapped cats, or illegal euthanasia that may not comply with welfare requirements. This creates a system that is not scalable and is unable to support effective and humane cat management at the landscape level.

Recommendations:

- Invest in a statewide cat management facility network that might include regional hubs and mobile or contracted services. Providing further support for other organisations already engaged in dealing with trapped cats (e.g. local councils and veterinary services) would also help to address the bottleneck created by the limited number of cat management facilities.
- Provide legal pathways and support for land owners who are not primary producers or on prohibited land to humanely destroy cats as part of organised cat control programs. These provisions should be coupled with well-implemented cat containment mandates to avoid the risk of pet cats being killed.

Recommendation 4. Prioritise island eradication

The feral cat threat abatement plan identifies cat-free islands and island eradications as a critical national strategy for protecting highly susceptible species and preventing extinctions. Tasmania has a unique opportunity to lead nationally in feral cat eradication through a coordinated island program.

Offshore islands offer a cost-effective opportunity to achieve permanent eradication, delivering rapid and measurable biodiversity gains. The next cat management plan should establish a dedicated, well-funded island eradication program as a core pillar of its strategy, moving beyond ongoing suppression toward demonstrable ecological recovery.

Beyond the islands identified in the discussion paper, there are other programs underway to eradicate feral cats from Indigenous-managed Bass Strait islands, including Lungtalanana, Babel, and Chappell islands, offering an opportunity for further ecological wins, in addition to substantial benefits to ongoing Aboriginal cultural heritage.

It is important to note that should the use of Felixers be expanded, provision will need to be made to increase the number of personnel authorised to service the traps with the 1080 bait, as it is understood that currently there is only one staff member in Biosecurity Tasmania authorised to supply the machines with bait and that this has proven to be a constraining factor in the deployment and efficiency of the Felixers.

Recommendations:

- Establish and fund a dedicated feral cat island eradication program that uses a range of tools, including coordinated trapping and baiting and emerging technologies such as Felixer grooming traps (where appropriate). Key islands to focus on initially should also include indigenous-managed Bass Straight islands, thereby leveraging the progress to date.

Recommendation 5. Embed adaptive and integrated pest management principles into feral cat management

The next Tasmanian cat management plan should adopt an evidence-based and adaptive management framework consistent with the national threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024. Cat management programs should include clear monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes that allow management approaches to be refined over time in response to new evidence, changing conditions, and lessons learned from implementation. Embedding adaptive management as a key principle within the next cat management plan will help to ensure programs remain effective, efficient, and responsive to changing conditions and new evidence.

Tasmania is well placed to contribute to evidence-based cat management through monitoring and evaluation, particularly of current island eradications, and emerging control technologies, such as Felixers.

Feral cat management occurs within a broader ecological context and should be integrated with wider management programs. For example, rabbit and rodent populations can sustain elevated cat populations of cats in some areas (e.g. Lurgi et al., 2018). This means not only can coordinated management of cats and other pest species yield higher benefits, but it can also prevent unintended outcomes, such as rabbit or rat population booms when cat numbers are reduced. Additionally, there is some evidence that Tasmanian devils can exert downward pressure on cat populations. Leveraging devil conservation efforts may optimise the overall benefits of feral cat management. Habitat condition and fire regimes can also influence the impact of cats and the effectiveness of control programs (Doherty et al., 2023), further highlighting the benefits of integration across programs to improve outcomes. For example, there may be optimal times to manage cats post-bushfires.

Recommendations

- Establish consistent monitoring and reporting frameworks for cat management programs and integrate these frameworks into management programs
- Integrate cat management with broader invasive species and conservation programs
- Prioritise research and innovation into emerging management technologies that enable landscape-scale cat population reductions. This may include improvements in cat monitoring systems and enabling Felixer technology use in areas with devil populations

Responses to questions

Domestic cats

1. What do you consider are the advantages and/or disadvantages of compulsory registration of cats compared to microchipping?

Microchipping provides a highly effective, permanent method of identifying cats and linking them to owners. It avoids duplication, is widely adopted, and is embedded in existing compliance systems. However, given that there are multiple microchipping providers, there is no central repository for this data, which will be key for any future cat containment mandates

The primary advantage of registration is a centralised, accessible database and a revenue stream for cat management. Such a database would be required for the implementation of cat containment. Microchipping alone is not enough to ensure responsible ownership of cats. However, it is important to note that in practice, registration schemes can be administratively complex and costly to implement, costs that often get placed on local governments.

Streamlining microchipping and registration into one process, rather than two separate processes, might improve the benefits of both strategies.

2. Do you think cat owners should be required to register their cat, like dog registration? Yes or No.

Yes, but only if it is going to be part of the implementation of a staged cat containment program and streamlined to leverage existing microchipping data where possible. Furthermore, the administration and enforcement of such a scheme must be clearly defined, avoiding cost shifting to local councils without ongoing funding to effectively and consistently implement the scheme.

3. If yes, should there be a fee/levy charged for registration of a cat? Yes or No. If you answered "No," skip to Question 5.

Yes

4. If yes, what should the fee be used for? (For example: registering cats, research into cat welfare, the costs of managing cats)

Registration fees should first cover the costs associated with registration. In the event there is extra revenue, funds could go back into cat management, such as key island cat eradications.

5. What could help ensure that people who breed and sell cats are doing so lawfully?

6. Do you think a seller should be required to state that the cat meets the legal requirements of sale in advertisements?

Yes. Advertisements should be required to clearly state that the cat is microchipped and desexed and that the seller is a registered breeder.

7. What role, if any, should cat owners play in reducing impacts on wildlife, neighbours, and the broader community?

Cat owners have a duty of care to keep cats contained to their property and ensure their cats are desexed and microchipped. Responsible ownership should be understood as a baseline obligation, not a voluntary action.

8. What practical challenges would households face if stronger cat management measures were considered in the future?

Stronger cat management may present challenges to households, which may include the cost of building containment infrastructure, rental housing restrictions, physical limitations (e.g. elderly or disabled residents), and cultural barriers (e.g., recently arrived people). However, the benefits to the environment, community, and health of the pet cats themselves outweigh the costs. The costs could be reduced when paired with support, subsidies, and practical guidance.

9. Are there alternative approaches that could achieve responsible cat ownership outcomes without requiring containment?

There are no equally effective alternatives to cat containment for preventing negative impacts to wildlife and community health.

10. If additional cat management approaches were ever introduced, what monitoring or compliance methods would be workable and fair?

Achieving effective cat containment will require a multi-pronged approach, including education, community engagement and enforcement. Education programs are crucial to increase the acceptance and uptake of cat containment.

We strongly recommend a staged introduction of cat containment, starting with strong and well-funded education and community support programs for voluntary containment, and a clear introduction date that allows local councils, cat management facilities and supportive organisations to assist the community to prepare and make the shift, ahead of an enforceable requirement.

To support enforcement, a monitoring program that can identify individual pet cats and their owners to issue warnings or infringement notices will be needed. Advances in AI recognition systems could allow for monitoring and compliance of known roaming cats

11. Under what circumstances, if any, would stronger cat management measures be considered reasonable?

Stronger measures are reasonable when there is clear evidence of harm to wildlife, agriculture, or community amenity, the measures are introduced as a coordinated and statewide approach, and there is adequate financial support, community education, and transition periods.

Stray cats

12. Do you think feeding of stray cats should be prohibited? Yes or No

13. What do you consider are the main challenges or barriers to a prohibition on feeding stray cats?

14. What are some solutions to these challenges or barriers?

15. How do you think colony cats should be managed?

Feral cats

16. How can rural landowners/managers be supported to better manage feral cats in areas with important conservation values and agricultural assets?

Effective feral cat management in rural and conservation landscapes requires a shift from fragmented, individual effort toward a coordinated, supported, and legally enabled system. It is important to keep in mind that individual landholder efforts are insufficient where populations are widespread and mobile. Any reforms to improve landowners' ability to manage cats should be coupled with coordinated, cross-tenure programs, particularly in areas of high conservation value.

That being said, it is recognised that rural landholders are often willing to act, but are currently constrained by regulatory, logistical, and resourcing barriers that limit what is practical and lawful. Provisions for people to trap and euthanise cats closer to residences, as part of a coordinated cat control program, could increase participation and improve effective control. It is important to note that this should be coupled with compulsory cat containment to reduce the risks of killing pet cats.

17. Should the distance from the nearest residence for humane euthanasia of cats on private property be reduced to less than 1 km?

Yes but only when coupled with effectively administered mandatory cat containment to reduce the risk to pet cats.

There are many peri-urban and rural residential areas on which humane euthanasia of cats is currently not allowed, despite being a major source of cats in the landscape. The requirement of taking cats to a management facility means that control programs don't proceed, cats will be caught and released, or cats will be illegally euthanised without adhering to welfare standards. A provision for people to trap and euthanise cats closer to residences, as part of a coordinated cat control program, would increase participation and improve effective control. When coupled with compulsory cat containment, the risks to pet cats would be significantly reduced.

19. What types of education, incentives, or support programs would encourage responsible cat ownership?

Achieving effective cat containment will require a multi-pronged approach, including education, community engagement and enforcement. Education programs are crucial to increase the acceptance and uptake of cat containment. A staged introduction of cat containment would likely increase uptake, starting with strong and well-funded education and community support programs for voluntary containment and cat registration. A clear introduction date will allow local councils, cat management facilities and supportive organisations to assist the community to prepare and make the shift, ahead of an enforceable requirement.

Social research has repeatedly shown that cat owners are more receptive to messages that focus on their pet's safety. Thus, ensuring messages targeting cat owners focus on the safety of their cat, with conservation as a secondary message, may be more successful than focusing on conservation alone.

Incentive programs for cat owners to build infrastructure for cat containment can help increase uptake and ease the financial burden of compliance. For example, the shire of Capel in WA offers cat owners a \$200 rebate to install a new catio: <https://www.capel.wa.gov.au/news/catio-rebate/>. Such initiatives can be targeted, for example, in lower socio-economic areas with a high number of roaming cats or in areas near high conservation values.

20. Should cat management approaches differ between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas? If so, how?

Yes, but within a consistent statewide framework. Focus for each region should largely be:

- Urban: focus on containment and compliance
- Peri-urban: stronger controls to prevent incursions into high-value conservation areas and flexible enforcement tools to enable rapid response.
- Rural: expanded control options as part of coordinated feral cat control and support for landholders

21. Other matters

Cat management in Tasmania requires a system-level reform, not incremental change. Key priorities include staged rollout of mandatory cat containment, reforming the cat management infrastructure and cat trapping rules and embedding control efforts in a landscape-scale feral cat program, with a focus on island eradications. Without these changes, the system will remain ineffective and unable to address the environmental, agricultural, and community impacts of cats.

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