

Replacement Report

REPORTS THROUGH THE GENERAL MANAGER

REPORTS FROM THE DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

16 [CNR-CM] Impact of Cats on Native Fauna - Preliminary Report

SUBMITTED BY: Natural Resource Management

Valid



Civic Leadership



Caring for the Environment

LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK:

1	Civic Leadership
1.1	Ensure actions taken and decisions reached are based on the principles of sustainability
1.1.2	Create a sustainable, social and environmentally aware community through education
4	Caring for the Environment
4.1	Protect the environment and natural beauty of the Tweed
4.1.2	Protect, regulate and maintain natural assets (the coastline, coastal and inland waterways, biodiversity, bushland and scenic landscapes) for current and future generations

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report is in response to the following Council resolution.

That Council bring forth a report on the negative impacts of cats on native fauna, and recommendations for management.

This report to include, but not be limited to:

- *a summary of current research on the interactions between cats (domestic, free-living strays and feral) and native wildlife on the eastern seaboard;*
- *what measures have been successfully employed by other Australian Councils to reduce the impacts of cats on native wildlife;*
- *recommendations as to possible measures Tweed Shire Council can adopt to reduce the impacts of cats on native wildlife; and*
- *suggestions on where these measures will fit into the organisational structure, and the resourcing implications of adopting such measures.*

RECOMMENDATION:

That a workshop be conducted with Councillors to explore the options and possible actions and resource implications of managing cats in Tweed Shire.

Replacement Report

REPORT:

At the Council meeting of 10 April 2014, the following was resolved:

RESOLVED that Council bring forth a report on the negative impacts of cats on native fauna, and recommendations for management.

This report to include, but not be limited to:

- *a summary of current research on the interactions between cats (domestic, free-living strays and feral) and native wildlife on the eastern seaboard;*
- *what measures have been successfully employed by other Australian Councils to reduce the impacts of cats on native wildlife;*
- *recommendations as to possible measures Tweed Shire Council can adopt to reduce the impacts of cats on native wildlife; and*
- *suggestions on where these measures will fit into the organisational structure, and the resourcing implications of adopting such measures.*

This report provides a response to the above resolution.

Summary of current research

The summary on current research on the interactions between cats (domestic, free-living strays and feral) and native wildlife on the eastern seaboard

A literature review has been undertaken on current research on the interactions between cats and native wildlife. A summary of the findings is provided below, with the full literature review included as an attachment to this report.

Alongside being a valued companion animal, domestic cats (*Felis catus*) are highly skilled hunters. With no native equivalent to the domestic cat, Australia's native fauna have not evolved alongside predators of this calibre and do not have the inherent skill-base to survive the presence of cats in the landscape.

For management purposes, cats can be split into three categories - owned, stray and feral. The following definitions are provided:

- **Owned cats** - are cared for and live with humans. This relates both to cats that are confined on an owner's property or those that are allowed to roam outside of an owner's property;
- **Stray cats** - are un-owned but at least partly rely on humans for feeding and/or other husbandry, and
- **Feral cats** - survive without any human contact or assistance.

Impacts of feral cats

The impacts of feral cats on native fauna across Australia are well researched and clearly established. To this end, they have been listed as a Key Threatening Process under both Commonwealth and NSW legislation. A federal Threat Abatement Plan was developed for the control of feral cats in 2008. Predation by cats has been implicated in the extinction of up to seven species of small mammals on the Australian mainland.

Replacement Report

Whilst it is recognised that eradication of feral cats is unlikely to be achieved on the Australian mainland, properly coordinated and resourced control programs can achieve meaningful benefits for Threatened fauna populations.

Impacts of owned cats

The true extent of the impacts of owned cats on native fauna in Australia is not yet fully understood, as effective research techniques have only become available very recently. Most previous studies on predation by owned cats have relied on assessing the numbers and type of prey species returned to the home by the cat.

One such study undertaken in Canberra, found that 75% of owned cats hunt, and a total of 67 different species were preyed on. Estimates based on this study indicate that owned cats in the Canberra urban environment hunt approximately 480,000 animals each year, including 20-27% of the total number of native birds present.

A recent study (2013) employing the use of 'KittyCam' video cameras found that cats bring less than a quarter of their captures back to their place of residence. This suggests that previous studies of cat predation that depended on data collected from 'prey returns', such as the Canberra study outlined above, may have vastly underestimated the total take of hunting from owned cats.

Free-roaming or unconfined owned cats also represent a source of neighbour aggravation and nuisance to Council. Impacts include: excessive noise at night; territory marking; defecating in neighbours gardens, and attacking other pets. Neighbour aggravation also arises where neighbourhood cats encroach into gardens intended to provide habitat for native wildlife. Since February 2011, there have been 345 complaints made to Tweed Shire Council about cats.

The literature review also found:

- Owned cats are present throughout the landscape, and can reach very high populations in urban areas.
- Domestic cats serve as a reservoir for numerous significant wildlife and human diseases, including *Toxoplasmosis*.
- Unlike some predators, a cats desire to hunt is not suppressed by being provided with adequate supplemental food.
- A large proportion of owned cats hunt. Within the group of owned cats that hunt, some hunt more than others. A small number of owned cats will focus specifically on one prey type whilst most cats will prey on whatever they come across.
- Owned cats that have access to natural areas (or access to parks or gardens with good wildlife habitat) with higher numbers of native fauna present will predate more native fauna.
- Many cat owners are unaware of the hunting behaviour of their owned cat, as many cats that are hunters do not bring home any trophies.
- There are significant impacts on native fauna associated with 'non-fatal' hunting attempts by cats. These include: reduced reproduction; competition with native predators for prey, and change in normal foraging behaviours by native fauna in response to the risk of predation.

Replacement Report

- Owned cats are hunting in areas of bushland and throughout the urban landscape, and are actively hunting both during the day and night.
- A monitoring study undertaken in Tweed Shire recorded an owned cat roaming 1.5km from its place of residence in an urban area, into an important bushland area. This cat was also recorded preying on native fauna.
- A significant number of the studies on owned cats recommend the development and implementation of policy and other management measures to reduce the impact of cats on native fauna.

Many natural areas in Tweed Shire are fragmented, representing 'island habitats'. Native fauna, particularly threatened fauna are subject to increased risk from cats in these areas. Island habitats and fragmented bushland often occur adjacent to new and existing residential areas that allow cat ownership. The native fauna isolated in these areas, particularly populations of Threatened fauna, are at risk of localised extinction from cat predation.

Measures successfully employed by other Australian Councils to reduce the impacts of cats on native wildlife

A range of cat related by-laws and policies are currently applied by various Local Councils across Australia. These include, but are not restricted to:

- dusk until dawn cat curfews (eg. Wodonga City Council and City of Kingston);
- 24 hour cat curfews where cats must be confined to owners property at all times unless on a leash (eg. Gold Coast City Council and Logan City Council);
- council policies restricting the number of cats permitted per household (eg. City of Mitcham and Gold Coast City Council);
- mandatory de-sexing (registered breeders excluded) (eg. Shire of Busselton and Logan City Council);
- cat prohibited or 'no go' zones (eg. Parramatta Council and Blue Mountains City Council), and
- 'Last Cat' Policy. This has been implemented on island communities, such as Bruny Island and Lord Howe Island.

The use of planning and development controls to manage cat predation

In many areas environmental planning laws are used to impose controls and prohibitions on the ownership of domestic cats, using planning agreements and/or conditions attached to development consents.

Examples of other Local Government Areas that have controls to prohibit cats from being permitted within a specific development are Casey City Council, Wodonga City Council, and the township of Eynesbury in Victoria.

Examples of development controls currently in existence in Tweed Shire Council are:

- registering an instrument on title to prohibit cats in a residential estate, for example at Koala Beach and Black Rocks Estates;
- the requirement to confine cats to the owners property at all times (unless under the control of a leash or other suitable method), for example in some sections in Pottsville Waters;

Replacement Report

- cat curfew (dawn to dusk) covenants on titles, for example at Sea-breeze Estate and some sections in Casuarina Estate.

Due to the multiple, different types of development controls for new estates these controls have been difficult to enforce.

Trapping program

A large number of Councils have programs through which they loan cage traps to residents to catch cats that are roaming on private property. Examples are provided below:

- Alexandrina Council runs a trapping program to protect the welfare of owned and domestic cats whilst reducing the numbers of feral and un-owned cats.
- Tweed Shire Council loans cage traps to community members for trapping of cats on private property. Since June 2012, 67 cats have been trapped. All trapped cats are sent to Council's pound for assessment.
- Gold Coast City Council lends soft jawed traps to rural areas and cage traps to urban areas for the control of roaming owned, stray and feral cats.
- Roxby Downs operates a cage trapping program to the community for a refundable fee.

Management Plans

Most Local Government Areas have Animal Management Plans, which include management for cats. Some examples are included below:

- Tamworth Regional Council has introduced a Strategic Companion Animal Management Plan 2012 - 2015. Since the commencement of this plan Council has reported a decline in community nuisance complaints concerning cats, has implemented programs to support responsible pet ownership and has enforced cat regulation measures.
- Alexandrina Council is implementing a five year Animal Management Plan. This plan includes an education program on the importance of keeping cats indoors over night to minimise predation on native wildlife and provides assistance to residents with the removal of feral or un-owned cats.

Possible future actions for Tweed Shire Council:

Effective cat management in Tweed Shire requires acknowledgment that there are distinctly different types of management required for the three types of cats we have in the Shire, being owned cats; stray cats; and feral cats.

Owned cats

There is a need to establish clear protocols for the management of the impacts of free-roaming pet cats in Tweed Shire. The NSW *Companion Animals Act* 1998 is largely focused on the control of domestic dogs, and has limited provisions for the control of cats, thus providing little in the way of protection for native wildlife.

The protection of wildlife is a challenging task for land managers in areas where suburbs are adjacent to natural areas. The effectiveness of existing development control measures to manage the impacts of cats is limited due the difficulties in enforcement including complexity of different regulations and resource constraints.

Replacement Report

Feral and stray cats

It is known that both feral and stray cats are present in Tweed Shire. The management of the impacts of these animals is limited by existing resource levels.

OPTIONS:

1. That a workshop be conducted with Councillors to explore the options and possible actions and resource implications of managing cats in Tweed Shire.
2. That a workshop not be conducted with Councillors and this report be received and noted.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the literature review summarised above, has found that owned, stray and feral cats are having an impact on native fauna in Australia. This body of work provides a convincing argument that cats are having a negative impact on native fauna in the Tweed, across all land use types.

There are a number of measures being applied by Local Councils across Australia to mitigate the impact of cats on native fauna. Foremost among these are measures that are being applied to the management of owned cats.

COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:

a. Policy:

Companion Animals Management Plan v1.0

b. Budget/Long Term Financial Plan:

This report is for information only. Regulation and control of the impact of owned, stray and feral cats on native fauna would have significant ongoing budget implications.

c. Legal:

Not Applicable.

d. Communication/Engagement:

Inform - We will keep you informed.

UNDER SEPARATE COVER/FURTHER INFORMATION:

Attachment 1.

A summary of current research on the interactions between cats (domestic, free living strays and feral) and native wildlife on the Eastern sea board (ECM 3692765)
