## 9.3 Post Exhibition Report - Cat Containment Policy (Author: Ormella/Corey)

**File Reference:** 3.4.98-08

**Recommendation**

**That Council adopts the Draft Cat Containment Policy.**


## Summary

At its meeting of 14 August 2024, Council resolved to place the Draft Cat Containment Policy on Public Exhibition for a period of 42 days. The policy was exhibited from 21 August 2024 to 9 October 2024 (**Resolution No 378/24**).

Notable findings from the public exhibition included:

- 869 visits to the Your Voice - Draft Cat Containment Policy exhibition page
- 185 visitors that either answered one of the three questions or provided a detailed comment regarding the policy.

The report below presents a summary of the community consultation for the amended policy. Given the widespread community support for the amended policy, this report seeks Council's adoption of the policy.


## Background

Cats play a significant, but complex role in our society and culture and while pet cats bring health and comfort benefits to their owners, they have a natural instinct to hunt. Undomesticated (feral) cats hunt for their survival.

Cat containment has significant benefits for natural wildlife, it also benefits the cat. Evidence from the Threatened Species Council states that cats that are contained to their own properties can live 10 years longer than those free to roam.

Additionally, Council has significant populations of stray cats living in urban areas including parts of Queanbeyan and Braidwood. These populations are supported by humans direct feeding or from scavenging in rubbish. These populations continue to grow each year causing problems for native wildlife, fighting and transmitting disease. Ensuring that pet cats are contained to their own properties gives Council more options to conduct targeted eradication of these urban populations.

## Report

The community consultation consisted of a survey with four questions. The first question asked in the survey was "are you a cat owner?".

47.5% of respondents owned cats and 52.5% did not. This provides a good range of responses to the further questions.

The second question asked if respondents support the amended cat containment policy. 75% of respondents support the amended policy.

The third question asked if respondents were supportive of the proposed implementation timeframes. 61% of respondents were supportive of these timeframes.

The fourth question was an option to provide a free text comment. There were various comments received and these have been categorised to allow them to be addressed in the report.

- Comments in Support of the Policy
- Comments Against the Policy
- Comments Related to Implementation Timeframes
- Comments Related to methods of Cat Containment
- Comments Related to Farm Cats and Rural Areas
- Comments Related to the Companion Animals Act, 1998
- Comments related to Feral Cats

These submission themes are addressed below:

Comments in Support of the Policy:
The overwhelming majority of comments received were in support of the amended policy. These comments were received from people who own cats and people who don't own cats. The main reasons cited for support of the policy were protection of wildlife, neighbourhood amenity and animal welfare.

Comments Against the Policy:
Very few comments were received against the policy. These comments disputed the widely available evidence that roaming cats are a threat to native wildlife and suggest that Council concentrate on other matters.

Comments Related to Implementation Timeframes:
Various comments related to the implementation timeframes in the amended policy were received. These included comments that the policy was not being implemented soon enough and comments that it was being implemented too soon.

Various comments requested a grandfathering clause on existing pets. This is not considered appropriate to bring about the required behavioural change in pet owners soon enough. The impacts on the natural environment and neighbourhood amenity are well known and action is needed now. It is considered that the staged implementation timeframes allow for current cat owners to make the required changes to contain their pets to their own properties while also meaning that the benefits of the policy will be realised in a shorter timeframe.

Comments Regarding Methods of Cat Containment:
Various comments regarding methods of cat containment were received. These included comments implying that the policy would require cats to be kept indoors. This is not the case. The policy requires that cats be contained to the property where they live. There are various methods of cat containment that still allow cats to enjoy the outdoors. These include fencing modifications, cat enclosures or 'catios', crates, leashes and other structures that allow for cats to be contained.

Some submissions suggested that cat containment is cruel to cats. Research does not support this. Contained cats live happy and fulfilled lives and may in fact live longer and be healthier than those allowed to roam as they are not exposed to risks such as traffic accidents, diseases and dog attacks.

Comments Related to Farm Cats and Rural Areas:
Several comments relating to farm cats and how the policy would be applied in rural areas were received. The amended policy would apply to all land in the QPRC area including land zoned RU1.

Council recognises that farm cats play an important role in pest reduction and management in some rural areas. It is noted that in most instances farm cats will be roaming between the main dwelling house and outbuildings on the property including sheds and barns. Farmers should ensure that their farm cats do not regularly roam off the property and do not form hunting packs that may have negative impacts on native wildlife. Populations of farm cats should also be controlled through appropriate management and desexing of females where required.

Comments Related to the NSW Companion Animals Act, 1998:
Several comments relating to the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 were received. These comments related to Section 5 of the policy which replicates sections of the Act. This Act is NSW state legislation and cannot be amended by Council. It would continue to be applicable regardless of the policy and has simply been replicated for information purposes.

Comments Related to Feral Cats:
Council acknowledges that feral cats are a problem in some parts of the Council area. Council will use its regular communications channels such as newsletters, website and social media channels to promote the use of the App- Feral Cat Scan: https://www.feralscan.org.au/feralcatscan/

Residents can report sightings and activity relating to feral cats on this app. The data is then used by relevant agencies to target control actions.

**Risk/Policy/Legislation Considerations**

There are several risk, policy and legislation considerations to be taken into account when adopting this policy.

Roaming cats pose a significant risk to wildlife and the natural environment. The QPRC community regularly raise the importance of the natural environment. The lack of implementation of cat containment requirements is a risk to our natural environment.

The Companion Animals Act, 1998 does not prohibit roaming cats in the same way as it does for dogs. For this reason, the Cat Containment Policy functions as a Local Orders Policy under the Local Government Act 1993. It sets out the circumstances in which Council will consider the keeping of cats to be inappropriate. In this regard, cats that are roaming off their own properties will be being kept inappropriately, allowing Council to issue orders requiring the cat to be contained to its own property.

**Financial, Budget and Resource Implications**

Council's communications on the phased implementation of the Policy are key for its success. Residents and the community would give effect to the policy through proactive cat containment.

Council's Ranger Services and Animal Management Staff would have the role of implementing the policy based on the service levels in the adopted Service Plans. Separate budget requests would be made for eradication work for the feral cat populations.

Council's Animal Management Facility is dated and almost always at capacity. Current works to the facility in response to the Canine Parvovirus Incident in 2024 are focused on the areas that house dogs. There are no proposed upgrade works to the areas used to house cats. Where there is a need for additional resources for the management of cats, this would be part of the budget process.

There may be an additional revenue stream through undertaking enforcement activities, but this will be minimal.

## Links to QPRC/Regional Strategic Plans

The policy aligns with Strategic Objective 3.3 of the Community Strategic Plan:

3.3 Our land, vegetation and waterways are managed in an integrated and sustainable manner.

## Conclusion

The Draft Cat Containment policy seeks to expand the current cat containment areas to cover the entire local government area. This policy is expected to have significant benefits to the natural environment and wildlife, as well as providing benefits to cats themselves. The policy contributes significantly to Council's efforts to sustain and enhance the natural environment.

The community consultation for the amended policy has shown widespread community support. The adoption of the Draft Cat Containment Policy will allow for the development of an education and communications package targeting cat owners.

## Attachments

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| Attachment 1 | Draft QPRC Cat Containment Policy *(Under Separate Cover)* |
| Attachment 2 | Draft Cat Containment Policy - Full Submissions in Categories *(Under Separate Cover)* |