

Revised Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) for predation by feral cats 2023-2033

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Invasive Species Council

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Endorsed by:



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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, introduced animals, exotic pathogens and other invaders. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation, funded predominantly by donations from supporters and philanthropic organisations.

Endorsements

This submission was prepared by the Invasive Species Council and has been endorsed by the following organisations:

- Birds South Australia
- Birds Queensland
- Protect the Bush Alliance

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Introduction

The Invasive Species Council (ISC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the release of the updated Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) for predation by feral cats.

The updated TAP for predation by feral cats presents a significant opportunity to curb the impacts of feral and roaming pet cats on wildlife, but only if it is adequately funded and fully implemented.

The revised threat abatement plan is detailed, comprehensive and underpinned by extensive research and expertise. It complements the important targets and actions within the Australian Government's Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032 to ensure "feral cats and foxes are managed across all important habitats for susceptible priority species using best practice methods" and "are managed in all priority places where they are a key threat to condition, using best practice methods for the location".

The updated TAP contains significant commendable improvements on the 2015 TAP, including: engagement and consultation with Indigenous ranger groups and organisations in the development of the plan, the identification of strategic and prioritised actions, a strong focus on protecting native species that are most susceptible to predation by feral cats, the inclusion of guidance for regulators involved in development proposals and attempting to improve the holistic management of threats in the landscape by identifying linkages between feral cat management with fire management, grazing, interactions with other predators (foxes, dingoes), invasive species (rabbits, introduced rodents and mice) and land uses (grazing, development).

While the plan is strong, no specific new funding has been identified to ensure the plan can achieve its goals. Without new and targeted funding, we do not have confidence that this new TAP will be any more successful than the previous three cat TAPs in protecting native wildlife from the impact of feral and roaming pet cats.

The impact of feral cats in Australia has been devastating. Feral cats have contributed to the extinction of at least 20 native mammals, and predation by feral cats is listed as an identified threat to over 200 nationally listed threatened native species.

As a major driver of mammalian extinctions in Australia, ensuring the TAP for predation by feral cats is adequately resourced and implemented is a necessary step if the Australian Government is to achieve its ambitious target of 'no new extinctions' that sits within the Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-32. The previous three iterations of Threat Abatement Plans for predation by feral cats received no specific funding for implementation which has led to fragmented action on cats in localised areas, and predation by feral cats has remained a major threat to many native species.

The core priority for the Australian Government should be to ensure the TAP is fully funded. No threat abatement plan has been fully funded before, and this would signal a significant improvement to the threat abatement system.

In this submission we have detailed a number of recommendations to improve the TAP, that focus on: allocating appropriate funding, development of tools and resources to support decision making, better supporting Indigenous-led cat management, building social licence for increased feral cat control through improving the humaneness of control tools, and significantly revising considerations for managing cats in urban areas.

In this submission, we draw information from the revised TAP, we also note relevant outstanding recommendations from the 2020 parliamentary inquiry on cats in Australia, and draw on ISC's recent work on both pet and feral cats.

Shortfalls of the 2015 threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats

Of the Key Threatening Processes listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, predation by feral cats has received considerable national attention. Associated with this, there has been some funding to manage feral cats through the Australian Government's Threatened Species Strategy. Funding was allocated to expand Australia's network of predator-free havens, commence cat eradication programs on five islands, support cat research and undertake trials of new feral cat control mechanisms.

Despite this funding, the **review of the 2015 threat abatement plan**¹ (undertaken in 2021) which provided a summary of progress on feral cat management **concluded that predation by feral cats remains a major threat to Australia's native wildlife.**

During the same period the 2015 threat abatement plan was in place (2015-2023), there have been other notable mechanisms for action on feral cats:

1. The first national Threatened Species Strategy (2015-20) included several targets focused on feral cats, summarised in Appendix 1.
2. A 2020 parliamentary inquiry³ on the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia recommended a reset of current policy and planning, comprising:
 - a. a new iteration of the Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats addressing (i) how it is to be evaluated, implemented and resourced and (ii) a requirement that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to develop complementary and localised plans.
 - b. a revised Threatened Species Strategy comprising (i) relevant targets focused on the rehabilitation of threatened species and ecological communities, accompanied by details on how each target will be achieved, resourced and reported and (ii) restatement of the need to cull feral cats, with new targets for culling consistent with contemporaneous prevalence data
 - c. appropriate consideration of reform opportunities identified through the review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and its administration, including but not limited to: (i) the extent to which recovery plans are created and their actions resourced.

The progress of recommendations (based on ISC's current knowledge) from the parliamentary inquiry report is summarised in Appendix 2.

Additional, more recent documents reaffirm that feral cats pose an ongoing threat to Australian native wildlife. The Australian Government's Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032 states that "reducing the impact of these invasive predators [feral cats and foxes] will support the recovery of at least 38 priority species and many more nationally listed threatened species in priority places and across the landscape.

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub, in its submission to the 2020 parliamentary inquiry on cats in Australia state that "across most of Australia, feral cats remain unmanaged. Where management occurs, it is inconsistent, constrained by a range of factors at each tier of government, poorly resourced and overall, ad-hoc and ineffective²". The background document for this revised 2023 TAP states that "the management of cats in Australia tends to be sporadic, uncoordinated across management areas and of variable effect".

The major shortfall with the 2015 TAP for predation by feral cats (and TAPs broadly) is that there is little obligation to implement, or fund the actions, other than on Commonwealth lands. Conservation

commitments and threat abatement plans are meaningless and are set up to fail, unless there is adequate funding from the outset to implement them⁴.

Summary of recommendations

The Invasive Species Council supports the holistic and integrated approach to cat management that the Threat Abatement Plan attempts to achieve. Below, we detail our recommendations for the TAP, with specific reference to the relevant section of the plan (where applicable).

1. Implementing the threat abatement plan

Recommendation 1: Commit at least \$88 million from the Federal budget to the implementation of the first four years of the plan. This should include:

- \$12 million per year for implementation of the base plan;
- \$10 million per year for Indigenous-led management of feral cats;
- \$100K per year to chair and operate the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group; and
- \$500K (once-off) to revise the humaneness assessment and code of practice for feral cat control tools.

Recommendation 2: Establish a funding pool of A\$10 million per year for the duration of the plan to support and enhance Indigenous-led management of cats in Australia (as per recommendation 1 and supplementary to the baseline funding).

Recommendation 3: Under objective 2, request each state and territory to develop and implement a subsidiary cat action/management plan, specifying their intended actions to implement the national TAP.

2. Maintaining national leadership on feral cats

Recommendation 4. Continue to invest in the Feral Cat Taskforce as a long-term mechanism to coordinate feral cat management and re-establish the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group.

3. Ensure terminology supports effective management, is consistent and broadly understood

Recommendation 5: Include an action under Objective 1 to collaborate with state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders to develop and adopt consistent definitions for categories of cats for management purposes, to provide clarity over responsibilities, expectations and appropriate control tools.

4. Protecting species of cultural significance to Indigenous peoples

Recommendation 6. Expand Objective 6 to specify objectives and actions to protect Culturally Significant Entities (defined as animals, plants, ecological communities with spiritual, cultural or symbolic significance to Indigenous Australians) from the impact of cats. Such entities should be included in the creation of predator-free havens, noting there is likely some overlap with cat-susceptible species.

5. Improving tools to inform decision making on feral cat management

Recommendation 7: Under Objective 2, support the design of an interactive and costed 'map' for optimal cat control across Australia, that integrates the conservation values and susceptibilities of local species (and thus the level of cat control required), the feasibility of

control options, and the employment opportunities for local people (as previously proposed by the Threatened Species Recovery Hub).

Recommendation 8: Under Objective 2, develop a centralised website on feral cat management in Australia that aims to increase overall engagement in feral cat management by supporting and connecting practitioners, and disseminates information on cat management options, decision-making support tools, humane control and community education packages.

Recommendation 9: Under Objective 3, undertake a body of work to refine the predicted prevalence map for *Toxoplasma gondii*, as a tool to help inform key areas to focus research on toxoplasmosis impacts in Australia, including impacts of cat-dependent diseases to native wildlife, livestock and people, and options for responses.

6. Ensuring social licence is maintained to support feral cat management

Recommendation 10: Incorporate into the TAP broader aspects of social licence relevant to the lethal control of cats (e.g. cultural concerns of Indigenous Australians, views of society on animal welfare).

Recommendation 11: Specify as part of action 4.3 that field trials and refinements of new tools like the Felixer grooming traps should also focus on developing the use of PAPP as an option.

Recommendation 12: Support the development of an updated humaneness matrix and model code of practice for feral cat control methods in Australia (estimated to cost A\$500,000 as a once off-cost at the start of the plan) in addition to action 2.11.

7. Demonstrate federal leadership on domestic cat management

Recommendation 13: Lead a process to develop a national domestic cat management plan that sits under, and is supplementary to, the threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats. This plan should be a core objective under objective 9 and refine the actions under this objective.

Recommendation 14: Amend objective 9 to:

- Acknowledge the role of the animal welfare and rescue sectors in domestic cat management, education and uptake of responsible cat ownership practices (such as desexing and containment) and ensure these groups are reflected in the actions, including as responsible organisations.
- Express that any form of control should occur via legal pathways and illegal cruelty to roaming cats around areas of human habitation and infrastructure is not tolerated.

Recommendation 15: Re-establish, fund and support the National Domestic Cat Working Group to improve cooperation on domestic cat management and address complex issues relating to pet cats in Australia (e.g., national pet overpopulation, cat hoarding, and backyard breeding) (relates to Objective 9).

8. Strengthening Australia's threat abatement system

Recommendation 16: Consider as part of the upcoming reforms of the EPBC Act how states and territories can be required (for example, as part of funding agreements) to prepare implementation plans for all relevant threat abatement plans.

1. Implementing the threat abatement plan

Ensuring the plan is adequately resourced

The major impediment to effective threat abatement in Australia is a lack of funding⁴. For feral cats, there has been some funding (e.g. oversight of the national Feral Cat Taskforce, and through the Threatened Species Action Plan), but it is piecemeal and has been inadequate for achieving broadscale, strategic control of feral cats.

We acknowledge there has been some progress achieved through the allocation of funding via the Threatened Species Strategy (2015-20) and Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-32. For example, the pool of funds provided through the Threatened Species Strategy (2015-2020), allowed for local scale management action in target and priority areas (e.g. islands), however, the review of the 2015 Threat Abatement Plan (undertaken in 2021) and the parliamentary inquiry on cats highlight that feral cats remain largely unmanaged across most of Australia (see Appendix 1 and 2).

For example, in Kakadu National Park, a Commonwealth reserve where there is an obligation to manage Key Threatening Processes, efforts for cat management are largely limited to opportunistic shooting. The biodiversity values of Kakadu are being diminished (as a result of altered fire regimes, grazing by introduced herbivores, climate change, the impacts of invasive species, and possibly disease, and interactions between these threats¹). The Invasive Species Council submits there is a pressing need for the Australian Government to meet its obligations and implement strategic and targeted management for key threats on Commonwealth lands, including for feral cats, as well as committing to proper threat abatement more generally (see Recommendation 16).

In Queensland, feral cat management efforts by the state government are largely focused on Taunton and Astrebla National Parks; there are no other known efforts in other national parks within the state. A performance audit report for the management of invasive species in Queensland found that over \$29 million was allocated to cluster fences (for dingoes), while \$1.3 million was allocated to the management of feral cats in these national parks⁵. The audit report stated that there was “a lack of objective rationale for how Biosecurity Queensland allocated funding across the various species based on the impact, such as feral cats”⁵.

Western Australia has a feral cat management strategy in place and dedicated funding to implement the plan but elsewhere in Australia, the resources allocated to management are grossly inadequate for the scale and impact of feral cats.

Adequately resourcing the implementation of the TAP is a fundamental step towards reducing the adverse impacts of feral cats on wildlife by reducing predation, disease transmission and ‘landscape of fear’ effects, and will also provide benefits to people and livestock due to reduced transmission of cat-borne diseases, like toxoplasmosis.

If the revised TAP was fully funded by the Australian Government from the outset, it would enable long-term implementation planning, leverage for funding agreements with states and other organisations and result in more holistic, strategic, ambitious and effective threat abatement at the national scale. Having adequate funding for the plan from the outset would also support improved cooperation between stakeholders due to increased levels of certainty regarding resourcing, as well as monitoring of progress against the plan.

Accelerating Indigenous-led programs

Australia has an extensive network of Indigenous ranger groups which have an integral role in caring for Country, including through the management of fire, weeds and feral animals. With vast areas of land to manage, rising costs of operation and equipment, and cats being recognised as a threat in various

Indigenous planning documents/ instruments (e.g. [Wunambal Gaambera Healthy Country Plan](#)), there is considerable scope to better support Indigenous-led cat management.

The TAP highlights that supporting Indigenous Australians involvement in feral cat management – such as through improved collaboration, sharing of equipment and knowledge amongst Indigenous ranger groups, and implementation of improved fire management – is critical to the success of the plan.

Many Indigenous ranger groups receive some funding through federal and/or state/territory mechanisms. However, many still face funding shortfalls and have high operating costs associated with extreme remoteness. As flagged in Appendix 7 of the revised TAP, many ranger groups expressed interest in managing feral cats but are currently unable to do so due to lack of funding for staff and/or equipment, as well as access to appropriate information and expertise.

Funding is also required to support better management of roaming cats living with Indigenous communities; there is some evidence that pet cat populations are rapidly increasing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and sustained resources are required to provide veterinary services in remote communities to mitigate the risks associated with cat overpopulation.

The Invasive Species Council recognises the valuable work being done by the non-government organisation, Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC) and other veterinary service providers, to deliver veterinary services (including surgical desexing) in these areas. We highlight that substantially increased resourcing for cat management in remote and very remote Australia is warranted, given the scale of the issue, the high breeding potential of cats, and the high biodiversity values in these areas. We fully endorse the allocation of additional staff and resourcing to enable more integrated management of cat populations in remote Indigenous communities, as well as improved collaboration between the veterinary and conservation science sectors to support this.

Encouraging state and territory engagement

There is strong merit in encouraging states/territories to develop and implement state/territory-based cat management strategies, funding and action plans that align with the national TAP for predation by feral cats and seek to achieve positive outcomes for cats, native animals, people and the environment. The WA Government has a Feral Cat Strategy 2023-28 in place⁶, with committed funds of A\$7.6 million for implementation⁷. Importantly, the WA feral cat strategy was co-developed between the state's environment and agriculture agencies and a range of stakeholders⁷. This cross-sector approach is considered a useful model for feral cat strategies in Australia.

Recommendation 1. Commit at least \$88 million from the Federal budget to the implementation of the first four years of the plan. This should include:

- \$12 million per year for implementation of the base plan;
- \$10 million per year for Indigenous-led management of feral cats;
- \$100K per year to chair and operate the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group; and
- \$500K (once-off) to revise the humaneness assessment and code of practice for feral cat control tools.

Recommendation 2: As detailed above and supplementary to the baseline funding, establish a funding pool of A\$10 million per year for the duration of the plan, to support and enhance Indigenous-led management of cats in Australia.

Recommendation 3: Under objective 2, request each state and territory to develop and implement a subsidiary cat action/management plan, specifying their intended actions to implement the national TAP.

2. Maintaining national leadership on feral cats

The Invasive Species Council has been a member of the national Feral Cat Taskforce since its inception. The Australian Government should be commended for its long-term commitment to convening the Feral Cat Taskforce. The Feral Cat Taskforce is a useful information sharing forum and mechanism for improved coordination of feral cat management.

We note that one of the recommendations from the 2020 parliamentary inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats was to:

“Strengthen the remit of the National Feral Cat Taskforce to enable it to lead a process to harmonise existing feral cat legislation and regulation across Australia. In particular, a strengthened Taskforce should:

- I. Review the effectiveness and consistency of current state and territory feral cat legislation, regulation and management plans;
- II. Develop principles for the harmonisation of existing state and territory feral cat-related legislative and regulatory instruments to the best-practice standard; and
- III. Develop principles for best practice cat management plans³”.

There may be scope to expand the role of the national Feral Cat Taskforce. In line with the recommendations from the inquiry, an expanded role could comprise (subject to consultation, agreement and resourcing):

- Leading a process to harmonise existing feral cat legislation;
- Continuing its efforts in identifying, and working to reduce barriers to the implementation of effective feral cat control in each state/territory;
- Monitoring the progress of plan implementation; and
- A strengthened role in communicating and disseminating best-practice and new information on feral cat management.

Recommendation 4. Continue to invest in the Feral Cat Taskforce as a long-term mechanism to coordinate feral cat management and re-establish the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group.

3. General support for actions outlined within the threat abatement plan

In general, the principles and actions outlined within the updated TAP for predation by feral cats present a promising opportunity to better manage the impact of feral cats. The Invasive Species Council broadly agrees with the actions outlined against objectives 1-8 in the updated TAP, including:

- Focusing feral cat management efforts to protect the native species which are most susceptible to predation by feral cats as well as Culturally Significant Entities (Objective 6),
- Prioritising actions with the highest biodiversity impacts, such as eradicating cats from islands, expanding the fenced haven network and translocations,
- Utilising a range of control tools including baiting, trapping and ground shooting,
- Ensuring strategic, justified and humane use of available tools, and tailoring management approaches for local circumstances to minimise non target impacts as much as possible,
- Managing habitats to better support native wildlife in the landscape e.g. maintaining vegetation cover for native animals through management of fire and grazing,
- Maintaining public support for feral cat control through education about the impacts of feral cats,

- Supporting integrated and strategic land management practices that aim to maximise positive outcomes for native biodiversity,
- Continuing to integrate feral fox and cat management, including achieving better coordination through long-term investment in the National Feral Fox and Cat Coordinator role,
- Encouraging the careful integration of management for rabbits, introduced rodents, foxes and feral cats where they co-occur,
- Elevating Indigenous Australian perspectives into environmental and agricultural practices and management in Australia, through support for Indigenous led, or collaborative cat management approaches.
- Recognising that dingoes are culturally significant to Indigenous Australians and that allowing dingo populations to persist or re-establish in the landscape is a strategy for managing feral cats,
- Filling research gaps to better understand how dingo management can aid ecosystem resilience,
- Enabling consistent pet ownership laws across jurisdictions including cat containment,
- Discouraging the release of cats into the environment (e.g. trap-neuter-release) as a management strategy, noting trap-neuter-adopt as an encouraged alternative, and
- Creating a practitioner resources and network.

4. Ensure terminology supports effective management, is consistent and broadly understood

Definitions used to describe the categories of cats should first and foremost, facilitate effective management. The updated TAP uses a binary definition of feral and pet cats is a significant change from the previous iteration of the plan which used the terms feral, stray and pet, and occurred without broad consultation. While the Invasive Species Council is comfortable with either a binary or three-part definition, we are concerned that without broad acceptance by relevant stakeholders, the change to a binary definition may cause some important stakeholders significant concern without improving management.

Universal agreement on how cats are categorised and defined is a difficult and unresolved challenge in Australia, and the current range of definitions used to describe cats is broad (see Appendix 3). Inconsistent use of definitions, and the resulting management implications/difficulties (such as lack of clarity and ownership over responsibilities), is recognised broadly by companion animal, conservation, research and government sectors. In 2017, RSPCA Australia undertook public consultation to identify opportunities for improved domestic cat management. Following an analysis of over 2000 submissions, RSPCA Australia recommended a need to improve consistency of definitions, concluding ‘the lack of universally agreed cat definitions causes confusion and conflict creating inconsistencies in legislation and difficulties in implementing cat management initiatives². This was reiterated again by the Western Australia Biodiversity Science Institute (WABSI) in 2020³.

Shifting to a binary definition for cats in the TAP without a more extensive consultation process may create complications for achieving objective 9 (‘reduce density of free-roaming cats around areas of human habitation and infrastructure’). Strategies to manage cats around areas of human habitation and infrastructure should have the overarching goal of limiting the number of cats freely roaming and not support a culture of cats persisting in the environment.

Ultimately almost all cats which have a connection to humans should have a clearly responsible owner and be contained to that owner's property, but achieving this will require a long-term cultural shift. For this reason we believe the plan should clearly acknowledge that stray cats occupy a ‘between space’ - they are not pets with a responsible owner, but there is sometimes a community connection which requires different management approaches to feral cats with no human connection, particularly such approaches require sensitivity, collaboration and education to ensure long term cultural change.

Definitions of cats should not create legislative impediments to governments and responsible organisations effectively managing roaming cat populations, regardless of where they are found. For ‘stray’ populations that should allow both adoption programs and if adoption is not possible, humane killing, while acknowledging that working with and educating communities who are resistant to this will be more effective in the long run. Achieving change in the management of ‘stray’ cats will be particularly difficult, and possibly impractical, in some communities where high levels of socio-economic disadvantage, overcrowding and/or different cultural norms will be a barrier to universal responsible pet ownership.

Table 1 demonstrates the difference between strategies currently used for managing cats depending on their classification/locality.

Table 1. Strategies currently used to reduce the number of roaming cats in the environment based on the cat’s categorisation and relationship with humans.

	Pet	Stray (“feral cats” in urban areas)	Feral cats
Strategies to reduce the number of roaming and hunting cats	Human behaviour change to encourage cat containment through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Incentives • Laws Reduce no. cats born: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desex 	Preventative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desexing of pet cats • Removal of feed sources e.g. fencing around tips, discouraging feeding. • Education Control: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trap/neuter/adopt • Humanely kill 	Control: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lethal/killing programs via various methods e.g. baiting, shooting, traps. Landscape management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe havens • Maintain vegetation cover for wildlife Indigenous hunting
Key stakeholders involved in control	Cat owners Local governments Animal welfare groups Animal shelters Animal rescues Council pounds Veterinarians Community	Cat carers Local government Animal welfare groups Animal Shelters Animal rescues Council pounds Veterinarians Community Pest control services	Land managers, including Indigenous ranger groups Pest control services

Irrespective of what wording is used for definitions, the Invasive Species Council submits that the management actions for stray cats around towns, cities and farms requires both preventative and control strategies. Targeted and assisted desexing programs of pet cats are a resource-effective way to reduce the number of cats that enter the pool of ‘stray’ cats in the first instance, and control programs for ‘stray’ cats should aim to (1) where possible, transition strays to pet cats managed in line with the principles of responsible cat ownership or (2) humanely kill them (where ownership is not possible or unrealistic).

Trap, Neuter, Release should be discouraged as a management strategy for ‘stray’ cat populations (Objective 9). Such programs do not consistently improve the health or welfare of the individual cats, or mitigate the impacts to native wildlife.

Recommendation 5: Include an action under Objective 1 to collaborate with state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders to develop and adopt consistent definitions for categories of cats for management purposes, to provide clarity over responsibilities, expectations and appropriate control tools.

5. Protecting native species of cultural significance to Indigenous peoples

Resources for environmental management are frequently limited, thus creating the need to direct these resources to areas where the greatest conservation gains and benefits to biodiversity (islands and cat-susceptible wildlife) can be made; prioritisation of limited resources should also explicitly encompass Culturally Significant Entities. Culturally Significant Entities are defined as “animals, plants and ecological communities (landscapes/seascapes) of spiritual, cultural and/or symbolic value to Indigenous Australians”^{9,10}.

At present, there is no national framework or legislation for defining and protecting native species or entities that are considered culturally significant by Indigenous peoples. As a result, native species that are of cultural significance to Indigenous Australians do not receive the same protections and attention as those protected in threatened species legislation. Indigenous Australians have called for native plants and animals which are of cultural significance to be recognised in legislation.^{9,10}

The revised Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats is commended for considering Indigenous communities and values throughout the plan. The Invasive Species Council recommends minor additions to better embed the protection of Culturally Significant Entities (CSEs) into actions within the plan detailed in recommendation 7, and for CSEs to be included in the creation of additional predator-free havens. The Invasive Species Council fully supports the recognition of CSE in reforms to environmental legislation.

The Australian Government’s National Environmental Science Program (Resilient Landscapes Hub) is currently leading a research project to better support ‘national policy and program development and reforms for the recognition of culturally significant species’. Where actions can currently be taken towards recognising CSEs in existing legislation and management frameworks – these should be undertaken by all levels of government.

Recommendation 6. Expand Objective 6 to specify objections and actions to protect culturally significant entities (defined as animals, plants or ecological communities of spiritual, cultural or symbolic value to Indigenous Australians). Culturally Significant Entities should be included in the creation of havens, noting there is likely some overlap with cat-susceptible species.

6. Improving tools to inform decision making on feral cat management

Developing a centralised platform for feral cat management

Feral cat management relies on activating diverse stakeholders across the Australian continent to fulfil their biosecurity duty to manage feral cats; information and advice on best practice management needs to be easily accessible and easily disseminated across a large network.

A centralised and accessible ‘go to’ source of information would help to disseminate information on cat management, support and connect practitioners, and increase overall engagement in feral cat management. A logical and feasible solution is to develop a centralised website, conceptually similar to the National Feral Deer Action Plan website¹¹ and sitting within its own ‘independent’, stand-alone domain (as opposed to being placed under the remit of an existing organisation or platform). The website should provide key information on: management options, decision-making support tools, humane control and community education packages (e.g. factsheets, and information to dispel common misconceptions). The web platform should be viewed as a long-term investment in feral cat management, that is updated regularly, and houses new decision-making tools as they become available, such as those details in recommendations 9 and 10.

Such a platform would support multiple objectives in the TAP (objectives 2, 3, 4) and particularly support actions 2.8 ‘Create a practitioner resources and network...’ and 2.9 ‘Support land managers to plan for and implement effective feral cat control programs by improving guidance about which cat control option(s) are most appropriate for their particular context and conservation objectives’.

Building on existing work to provide decision-making tools for land managers

In 2020, the Threatened Species Recovery Hub developed a model of *Toxoplasma gondii* prevalence based on infection data combined with data on temperature and moisture (variables which are known to affect *Toxoplasma* oocyst survival)¹². The study was the first to investigate the prevalence of *T.gondii* across Australia and model how it may be influenced by environmental variables (temperature, rainfall, cat density, urbanisation), and whether toxoplasmosis is a driver in mammal declines¹². The Invasive Species Council suggests that this model (or subsequent refinements to the model) can be used to inform where best to target research on toxoplasmosis in Australia.

The draft prevalence model suggests very high prevalence of the parasite in southern Australia-Victoria, Tasmania, eastern New South Wales, south east Queensland and south of Perth, Western Australia, in association with cooler, wetter conditions¹². The model offers another decision-making support tool that can be reviewed, refined and used as part of the knowledge base to help inform cat management and target research efforts strategically.

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub also made the recommendation to the 2020 parliamentary inquiry on the impact of cats in Australia that a ‘map’ should be developed that consolidates key information on cat control². There is value in equipping land managers with easy-to-use visual and informative tools to assist in planning and implementing effective cat control programs. Such tools would support actions 2.8 and 2.9 within the TAP.

Recommendation 7: Under objective 2, support the design of an interactive and costed ‘map’ for optimal cat control across Australia, that integrates the conservation values and susceptibilities of local species (and thus the level of cat control required), the feasibility of control options, and the employment opportunities for local people (as previously proposed by the Threatened Species Recovery Hub).

Recommendation 8: Under objective 2, develop a centralised website on feral cat management in Australia that aims to increase overall engagement in feral cat management by supporting and connecting practitioners, and disseminates information on cat management options, decision-making support tools, humane control and community education packages.

Recommendation 9: Under objective 3, undertake a body of work to refine the predicted prevalence map for *Toxoplasma gondii*, as a tool to help inform key areas to focus research on toxoplasmosis impacts in Australia, including impacts of cat-dependent diseases to native wildlife, livestock and people, and options for responses.

7. Ensuring social licence is maintained to support feral cat control

The Invasive Species Council supports the strategic, humane, targeted and justified lethal control of feral cats, and fully supports the TAP approach of focusing these efforts on protecting the most cat-susceptible species. We support the retention and appropriate use of all feral cat control tools by all jurisdictions, and highlight that having all control tools available is vital, particularly for island eradication projects.

Ensuring lethal control tools are used effectively and improving the use of lethal control tools to achieve better animal welfare outcomes is important for maintaining long-term support for feral cat management.

Current approaches for managing the impact of feral cats strongly rely on the use of lethal control options such as baiting and shooting. Such tools are regularly used across the Australian landscape, including for other invasive vertebrates, and in general, there is a strong understanding of the need to control feral cats to protect Australian wildlife⁶. However, there are some public concerns over the effectiveness and humaneness of such techniques⁷.

The Western Australian Biodiversity Science Institute notes in its research plan that:

“social licence to operate refers to the community’s acceptance and approval for an initiative to exist or take place. With increasing attention paid to the human dimensions of wildlife management in recent decades, it has become apparent that, to gain and maintain public support, wildlife managers need to respect and actively take into consideration the variety of views of society in relation to animal welfare. This approach is particularly important for the management of feral cats, as there are members of the community that have a strong emotional connection with cats¹³”.

The principles and objectives of the updated plan recognise that maintaining public support and social licence to control feral cats is important and identifies ways to achieve this via improving community education and engagement (action 2.16). However, the plan largely overlooks the role that increasing the humaneness of lethal control tools can play in maintaining social licence.

A recent independent survey by Behaviour Works Australia found that community expectations for better animal welfare are not being met by the Australian Government⁷. Demonstrating a genuine commitment to improve animal welfare through the incorporation of concrete actions and strategies within the updated

TAP that would support the development of increasingly humane control tools and enable the uptake of such options as they become available, is necessary to maintain social licence for feral cat management.

Social licence for feral cat control amongst Indigenous Australians is another issue which warrants targeted attention. The State of the Environment Report highlights the need for Indigenous representation at all levels of policy and decision making⁸. In most government policy and practice, including on feral cat management, Indigenous Australians have had minimal involvement in policy and decision making; we commend Principle 2 of the TAP.

Goolmeier and van Leeuwen (2023) indicated that the use of baiting to manage feral predators is of substantial health and environmental concern to some Indigenous communities, notably those which hunt and eat feral cats¹⁰, as well as on the basis of possible impacts to dingoes, a Culturally Significant Entity which many communities wish to retain in the landscape¹⁰. As a notable example of Indigenous-led management for feral cats, the Kiwirrkurra Rangers, who practice hunting and consumption of feral cats as a source of protein, undertook their own risk assessment and decided to proceed with Eradicat baiting in the Kiwirrkurra Indigenous Protected Area, in colder weather when the risk to goannas is somewhat reduced (Kiwirrkurra Rangers, pers.comm).

We support the plan's principle that all measures to reduce feral animal populations should be strategic, humane, justified, targeted, effective and evidence based, with a focus on optimising conservation outcomes. We also add that measures should be led by, or developed in collaboration with, local Indigenous ranger groups and communities, and tailored according to local community perspectives and circumstances, as part of the TAP principle to support the management objectives and expertise of Indigenous Australians. This is particularly important in the use of baiting programs to manage feral cats, where there are concerns about impacts to human health and Culturally Significant Entities⁹.

The Invasive Species Council strongly recommends a longer-term goal of considering the net welfare of both feral cats and cat-susceptible native wildlife in future humane assessments.

Recognising and increasing the use of humane tools

The toxin, Para-aminopropiophenone (PAPP) is registered for use in Australia in bait form for feral cats. PAPP is considered relatively more humane to feral cats than 1080, as the toxin 'acts faster and appears to be less aversive'¹⁰. We recognise that PAPP still has non-target risks (e.g. to native reptiles, particularly goannas)¹¹, and its use needs to be planned and carefully targeted and timed to minimise these impacts.

There are trials underway for the use of PAPP in the Felixer grooming trap (J. Read, pers. Comm.); if PAPP can be successfully used in the Felixer device, this would offer a target-specific, relatively more humane control tool suitable for use in areas where other tools, such as food-based baits, cannot be used because of high risk of non-target effects.

Where suitable, the Australian Government should support trials to improve the use of PAPP, encourage the use of PAPP as a replacement for 1080, and enable the uptake of PAPP through regulatory approvals, and removal of legislative barriers.

Updating assessments on the relative humaneness of available control options

'Humaneness' refers to the overall welfare impact of a control method on an individual animal. The main tool used to assess the relative humaneness of control methods is a humaneness matrix that was developed under the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)¹⁴. The AAWS strategy lapsed in 2014 and a commitment has only been recently made in the 2023 budget to renew the strategy¹⁵. As a result, the control of introduced animals has been undertaken in the absence of a current overarching strategy.

The feral cat control methods humaneness matrix and model code of practice was developed in 2008 and revised in 2017¹². However, these have not been updated to include all available tools (e.g., 1080 poison baiting, Felixer grooming trap) for feral cat control. Recognising there are widespread and growing concerns about the humaneness and non-target impacts of feral animal control methods, particularly poison baiting, the Australian Government should support the development of an updated matrix and model code of practice as a high priority. In the long-term, such assessments should be refined to consider the net welfare of both cats and cat-susceptible prey species.

If possible, such an assessment should include the PAPP-based Felixer grooming trap. The humaneness assessment process is undertaken by an independent panel comprising veterinarians, RSPCA Australia and vertebrate pest researchers. The revision of the matrix and model code of practice are regarded as vital tools to underpin humane, strategic and justified control of invasive species.

Recommendation 10: Incorporate into the TAP broader aspects of social licence relevant to the lethal control of cats (e.g. cultural concerns of Indigenous Australians, views of society on animal welfare).

Recommendation 11: Specify as part of action 4.3 that field trials and refinements of the Felixer grooming traps should also focus on developing the use of PAPP in Felixers, as a relatively more humane toxin to 1080 that is currently delivered via the devices.

Recommendation 12: As a high priority, support the development of an updated humaneness matrix and model code of practice for feral cat control methods in Australia (estimated cost A\$500K as a once off-cost at the start of the plan). This should be completed in addition to action 2.11.

8. Demonstrating federal leadership on domestic cat management

Developing appropriate national guidance to improve domestic cat management

To reduce the impact of cats on wildlife, it is necessary to consider the management of pet cats which are allowed to roam, and stray cats. Pet ownership is at an all-time high; there are currently an estimated 5.3 million pet cats in Australia¹². Subsequently, recent research has estimated that people that allow their cats to roam are responsible for the death of 323 million native animals per year due to predation¹³.

The management of pet cats (and other stray cats in suburbia and around areas of human habitation and infrastructure which depend on humans but do not have a clear responsible owner) differs significantly from feral cat management. Some of the core differences include:

- **Different stakeholders:** The responsibility for companion animal management is given to local governments under state legislation. The key providers of cat management services are local governments, animal welfare groups, shelters and animal rescues. This significantly differs from feral cat management which is delivered by land managers e.g. state government agencies such as National Parks, private conservation managers, landowners.
- **Social science/human behaviour focus:** The majority of cats in human-inhabited areas are pets. As a result, reducing the number of roaming cats in these areas has a strong focus on shifting human attitudes and behaviours to adopt a desired action, to achieve a particular outcome. For example, increasing the uptake of responsible pet ownership practices like 24/7 cat containment, and discouraging the feeding of cats in urban areas.
- **Community engagement:** Cats in human-inhabited areas live in closer proximity to humans and may have varying levels of connection and interaction with humans. Thus, best practice and effective cat management in these areas often involves community consultation and engagement. Issues (and thus, appropriate responses) will vary across communities,

particularly between urban and rural local governments, as well as remote Indigenous communities.

Animal control in suburban areas (and areas around human habitation) also involve impoundment and rehoming processes. It is worth defining the three separate avenues via which this occurs:

- **Pounds:** a council facility that holds pets found wandering in the community, seized by rangers, or surrendered by the public.
- **Animal shelters:** kennel services provided by a registered, charitable animal welfare organisation, such as RSPCA or Animal Welfare League. Some accept surrenders from the public, but they often have waiting lists due to space constraints.
- **Rescue/rehoming groups:** generally a collaboration of volunteers working in their community to provide a safety net for rescue pets, often through fostering (caring) for pets in their own homes.

Animal shelters and rescues deliver significant services to the community. For example, in NSW during the 2020-21 period over 72,000 companion animals (dogs and cats) were either surrendered or seized. Of these, around two thirds were initially received into animal pounds, and one third to animal welfare/rehoming organisations. Of the two thirds originally received by pounds, 42% were transferred to animal welfare/rehoming organisations. Thus, animal welfare/rehoming organisations provided support to over 60% of the total intake of surrendered or seized animals in NSW in 2020-21¹⁴.

Objective 9 within the TAP focuses on local government and does not acknowledge the significant role animal shelters and rescue groups have to play in animal control.

It is important to ensure the right stakeholders and actions are included to achieve the goals of Objective 9.

Re-establishing the national domestic cat management working group

The 2020 parliamentary inquiry on cats recommended that the Australian Government establish a National Domestic Cat Management Working Group¹⁵. Accordingly, the Australian Government initiated the formation of the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group in May 2022. The Australian Government provided funding to chair the first meeting of the group, however, provided no subsequent support to ensure the continuation of the group. Three subsequent meetings of the working group were held between August 2022 and March 2023; one supported by the Victorian Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and two supported by the Invasive Species Council.

The key intentions for the formation of the group were to: drive concerted effort to reduce roaming pet cats and their impact on wildlife, promote greater uptake of responsible pet cat ownership practices, and information-sharing with the national Feral Cat Taskforce.

This iteration of the TAP includes information and actions to enhance management of pet cats across Australia. The knowledge base on the impacts of pet cats in Australia has grown considerably in recent years, but there are still gaps in the way this information is shared and communicated amongst pet owners, and some issues related to the management of pet cats are polarising and contested.

The Australian Government should provide resources to resume the National Domestic Cat Management Working Group, as a complementary body to the Feral Cat Task Force. An appropriate vision should be set by the Australian Government to guide the group. An example of an appropriate vision is: Wildlife are no longer preyed on by cats in urban, peri-urban and regional areas because all domestic cats are owned, desexed, microchipped, registered and live at a home where they are provided with care that meets their physical and mental needs.

The group should play an advisory role, similar to the Feral Cat Taskforce.

Recommendation 13: Lead a process to develop a national domestic cat management plan that sits under, and is supplementary to, the threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats. This plan should be a core objective under objective 9 and refine the actions under this objective.

Recommendation 14: Amend objective 9 to:

- Acknowledge the role of the animal welfare and rescue sectors in domestic cat management, education and uptake of responsible cat ownership practices (such as desexing and containment) and ensure these groups are reflected in the actions, including as responsible organisations.
- Express that any form of control should occur via legal pathways and illegal cruelty to roaming cats around areas of human habitation and infrastructure is not tolerated.

Recommendation 15: Re-establish and support the National Domestic Cat Working Group to improve cooperation on domestic cat management and address complex issues relating to pet cats in Australia (e.g., national pet overpopulation, cat hoarding, and backyard breeding) (relates to Objective 9).

9. Strengthening Australia's threat abatement system

The impact of feral cats is just one part of the broader environmental and biodiversity crisis in Australia. The Australian Government should elevate the importance of the environment, through: strong and effective law reform and associated increased staff and resourcing to the Department of Climate Change, Energy and the Environment, improving the use of conservation research to inform decision making and policy, and prioritisation of environmental management in the national budget. The Australian Government can implement some of these actions immediately – including making a commitment to ensure the Threat Abatement Plan for predation by feral cats is the first fully funded TAP; this would be a significant step towards achieving the target of no new extinctions in the current Threatened Species Action Plan.

As part of its 'Threats to Nature' project, the Invasive Species Council in collaboration with Bush Heritage Australia, BirdLife Australia, the Australian Land Conservation Alliance and Humane Society International has identified a suite of reforms to improve Australia's threat abatement system¹⁶. As mentioned above, the feral cat TAP is just one piece of addressing the biodiversity extinction crisis in Australia and the Australian Government should be commended for its commitment to: updating and implementing the plan, periodically reviewing progress against the plan, coordinating action through Feral Cat Task Force and funding priority projects. However, of 21 listed key threatening processes, only 12 have threat abatement plans, and there are many failures of the threat abatement system. In 'Averting extinctions – the case for strengthening Australia's threat abatement system'¹⁶ we propose the Australian Government undertake three major reform tasks:

1. Strengthen the threat abatement system – focused on improving the statutory processes to list threats and apply effective threat abatement responses.
2. Secure adequate funding for threat abatement – focused on defining the level of funding needed for effective threat abatement, the economic benefits of abatement and the potential sources of funding.
3. Inspire a strong national commitment to threat abatement – focused on intergovernmental commitments, nationally coordinated and collaborative threat abatement, community participation and independent oversight of progress¹⁶.

Recommendation 16: Consider as part of the upcoming reforms of the EPBC Act how states and territories can be required (for example, as part of funding agreements) to prepare implementation plans for all relevant threat abatement plans.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Progress on targets relating to feral cats in the Threatened Species Strategy.

Target	Outcome (from 5 year report)	Comments
Feral cats eradicated from five islands (Dirk Hartog, Bruny, French, Kangaroo, Christmas)	Not achieved	<p>Feral cats eradicated from Dirk Hartog Island. Eradication efforts on other islands are continuing.</p> <p>The Invasive Species Council strongly supports the continued work and completion of these island eradications as a high priority.</p>
10 feral cat-free mainland exclosures established	Target met	<p>Exclosures established were Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve and Tidbinbilla (ACT), Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary (NT), Wandiyali-Environs Wildlife Sanctuary, Hunter Wetland Centre, Aussie Ark, Sturt NP, Pilliga NP, Mallee Cliffs NP (NSW), Mallee Refuge (SA).</p> <p>The Invasive Species Council commends the establishment of these exclosures, but highlights such efforts should be focused at protecting native species at greatest risk to predation by feral cats, and this should be done concurrently with efforts to conserve populations in the wild.</p>
10 million hectares of feral cat action, using best practice techniques for each location	Target exceeded (estimation: over 18 million hectares)	The Invasive Species Council supports the use of best-practice techniques for feral cat control, but highlight that these should also be strategically targeted for a biodiversity conservation benefit and humane.
Best practice feral cat action implemented across 2 million hectares of Commonwealth land	Target partially met	The Australian Government has notional commitments to implement applicable Threat Abatement Plans in Commonwealth lands. This target

		therefore represents an action which should already be occurring. The Invasive Species Council calls for strategic implementation of TAPs in Commonwealth managed lands, focused on protecting the native species at highest risk of predation by cats.
2 million feral cats culled at the national level	Target partially met	The Invasive Species Council highlights that targets should be based on good science. The target of 2 million cats seems arbitrary and is not necessarily focused on improving recovery of native species.

Appendix 2: Summary of recommendations from the 2020 parliamentary inquiry on cats in Australia

Note: text has been truncated for brevity

Parliamentary inquiry recommendation to the Australian Government	Australian Government response (Feb 2022)	Status of recommendation (November 2023) and comments
Recognise and prioritise the problem of feral cats in Australia consistent with its status as a matter of national environmental significance, that must be addressed effectively to ensure the continued survival of native wildlife and ecological communities.	Agreed, noting that Key Threatening Process are not listed as matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act.	The problem of feral cats in Australia is well recognised and prioritised by the Australian Government (as demonstrated through the Threatened Species Action Plan, chairing the national Feral Cat Taskforce), but feral cats remain a major and ongoing threat to native wildlife.
Undertake a body of work to improve understanding of the impact of cats in Australia by a. collaborating with state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders to develop and adopt a consistent definition of feral, stray and domestic cats, to be applied across national, state, territory and local government legislative and regulatory frameworks relating to cats.	Agreed.	The definitions for feral, stray and domestic cats has been revised in this iteration of the plan, with stray cats being defined as a subcategory of stray cats. Some stakeholders have flagged they do not agree with the categorisation of cats in the revised TAP.
Undertake a body of work to improve understanding of the impact of cats in Australia by commissioning further research on: -the prevalence, impact and control of feral, stray and domestic cats including in urban environments; -emerging cat control methodologies such as gene drive technology; -the impacts and management of toxoplasmosis and other cat-borne diseases on native species and productive farmland; and -the relationship between habitat degradation and cat predation, including with respect to bushfire impacts.	Agreed	The Resilient Landscapes Hub has a research component on feral cats which will contribute to (1).
Develop a clear strategy to inform its resourcing of and response to the problem of feral cats, including through a 'reset' of current policy and planning, through: -a new iteration of the TAP for predation by feral cats addressing:	Agreed-in-part/Agreed	Revised iteration of TAP completed, which includes information on evaluation. There is no obligation to fund the TAP; there is no budget allocation for implementation of the plan

<p>-how it is to be evaluated, implemented and resourced; and</p> <p>-a requirement to work with state and territory governments to develop complementary and localised plans.</p> <p>-a revised Threatened Species Strategy comprising relevant targets focused on the rehabilitation of threatened species and ecological communities and a restatement of the need to cull feral cats, with new targets for culling consistent with contemporaneous prevalence data</p> <p>-Appropriate consideration of reform opportunities identified through the current review of the EPBC Act and its administration, including but not limited to the extent to which recovery plans are created and their actions resourced.</p>		<p>at the time of writing.</p> <p>Revised Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-32 released, with a key objective being to prevent new extinctions and two targets directly related to feral cats (Target 8: Feral cats and foxes are managed across all important habitats for susceptible priority species using best practice methods and Target 9: Feral cats and foxes are managed in all priority places where they are a key threat to condition, using best practice methods for the location)</p> <p>Australian Government has committed to work through the recommendations of the EPBC Act review with stakeholders, including in relation to addressing threats through more effective and coordinated planning processes.</p>
<p>Spearhead, in partnership with states and territories, an expansion of Australia's network of predator-free safe haven enclosures and feral cat free islands through a new program, Project Noah, as a new national conservation mission.</p>	<p>Agreed-in-part</p>	<p>While Project Noah was not funded or formalised, there has been some growth in Australia's predator free-haven network (e.g. Dirk Hartog Island and some fenced areas).</p>
<p>Develop and disseminate best practice domestic and stray cat management strategies, including increasing public awareness of the impact of cats in native wildlife and habitats.</p>	<p>Agreed-in-principle notes some of this work has been done through the RSPCA 'Identifying best practice domestic cat management in Australia' document, and through work by the national Feral Cat Taskforce members.</p>	<p>No known substantive progress (?)</p>
<p>Develop a positive national cat ownership education campaign to be</p>	<p>Agreed-in-principle</p>	<p>There has been no coordinated efforts on this</p>

delivered through the Australian Veterinary Association, local councils and community groups.	notes that local councils should lead the development of a national domestic cat education campaign, as regulators with an understanding of their specific socio-economic demographic.	recommendation.
Reduce the barriers to responsible domestic cat ownership with programs to support desexing, registration and microchipping for domestic cats, as well as night curfew and containment programs.	Agreed-in-principle notes it is “not within the government’s mandate to assist with microchipping, desexing and registration of pet cats, this falls to local councils”.	Some progress, as a growing number of local governments have a focus on encouraging responsible cat ownership practices.
Require all local governments to actively consider whether night-time curfews should be put in place for all or part of their areas of responsibility.	Not agreed notes AG recommendation for local governments to actively consider 24/7 containment option.	Some progress.
Design and implement a pilot program for subsidised or free desexing of pet cats in areas of high need, redeemable through vouchers issued by veterinarians or local governments in targeted locations.	Not agreed notes this falls into the jurisdiction of local councils.	No known additional progress, noting that there are desexing initiatives (National Desexing Network, Operation Wanted) in place.
Expand the membership of the national Feral Cat Taskforce to include experts on agriculture and veterinary issues, including the ethical treatment of animals, and any other matters deemed relevant.	Agreed	Complete
Strengthen the remit of the Feral Cat Taskforce to enable it to lead a process to harmonise existing feral cat legislation and regulation across Australia.	Agreed-in-part notes the Feral Cat Taskforce is already undertaking a body of work to review and harmonise feral cat legislation, regulation and management plans.	In progress

Remove barriers to full implementation by all jurisdictions of the National Declaration: feral cats as pests.	Agreed.	Feral cats are declared as a pest as follows: ACT-no VIC-on specified Crown land NSW-listed as a key threatening process, but not as a pest WA-yes TAS-no QLD-yes SA-yes NT-yes
Facilitate collaboration with relevant Commonwealth agencies, scientists and states and territories to consider the most effective feral cat control methods, and provide advice on the broad-scale usage of these methods.	Agreed notes that the AG facilitates collaboration through the national Feral Cat Taskforce.	Ongoing
Ensure that local governments are resourced appropriately to deal with cats, including requiring all local governments to develop and implement domestic cat management plans consistent with relevant state and territory laws.	Agreed-in-principle “not within the scope of the government to resource local councils for cat management or stipulate how they should be resourced”.	Ongoing challenge. Domestic cat management plans are a requirement in Victoria.
Develop principles for local government animal management staff to manage local cat issues, including easily accessible resources.	Agreed-in-principle notes it is not within scope of the AG to provide principles to local councils for domestic cat management.	No known substantive progress/no lead organisation

Appendix 3: Table of definitions used in cat management frameworks across Australia

Terms and definitions used to categorise cats

Table 1. Comparison of terminology used by different bodies

		Term									Source/notes
		Domestic	Pet	Owned	Nuisance	Stray	Semi-owned	Community	Unowned	Feral	
Body	Commonwealth policy										Feral cat threat abatement plan
	QLD legislation										Animal Management Act 2008 ‘A cat is an animal of the species <i>Felis catus</i> , or domestic cat.’ Classified as invasive species in the Biosecurity Act 2014 ‘cat (<i>Felis catus</i>) other than a domestic cat’
	QLD policy										Other terms used: semi-feral urban cats
	NSW legislation										Companion Animal Act 1998 : ‘ cat means an animal of the species <i>Felis catus</i> , whether or not domesticated’. Cats not listed in biosecurity act or regulation.
	NSW policy										Key threatening process listing – predation by feral cats. Defines domestic, stray, feral. Specifies the determination concerns only feral cats.
	ACT legislation										Domestic Animals Act 2000 – doesn’t define cat
	ACT policy										ACT cat plan 2021-2031
	VIC legislation										Domestic Animals Act 1994 – doesn’t define cat.
	VIC policy										Feral cats declared a pest under the <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i> on public land. Info sheet accompanying the declaration defines feral cats as separate to stray (or semi-owned) and domestic cats.
	TAS legislation										Cat Management Act 2009
	TAS policy										Tasmanian cat management plan defines feral, stray and domestic, pg 2.
	NT legislation										No Act specifically for companion animal management. No definitions found in Local Gov Act , Animal Protection Act 2018 or Environment Protection Act 2019 & regulations.
	NT policy										No definitions found on government website .
	SA legislation										Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 defines cat as ‘an animal of the species <i>felis catus</i> ’. Pest declaration under Landscape South Australia Act 2019 only specifies ‘ <i>Felis catus</i> ’.
	SA policy										No webpage/plan with definitions found.
	WA legislation										Cat Act 2011 ‘ cat means an animal of the species <i>felis catus</i> or a hybrid of that species’.
	WA policy										Feral cats declared pest under <i>Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007</i> , accompanying policy defines feral, stray and domestic.
	AMRRIC (Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities)										Pers comms. Also articulated in Submission 90 to federal cat inquiry .
	AIAM (Australian Institute for Animal Management)										Pers. comms. Also articulated in Submission to federal cat inquiry .
	Australian Pet Welfare Foundation										Pers. comms. Also articulated in Submission 142 to 2020 federal cat inquiry and on APWF website .
	Australian Veterinary Association										Pers. comms. Also articulated in Submission 180 to 2020 federal cat inquiry and on AVA website .
	Birdlife Australia										Pers. comms. Also articulated in Submission 94 to 2020 federal cat inquiry .
	Centre for Invasive Species Solutions										Pers. comms. Also articulated in Submission 120 to 2020 federal cat inquiry .
	RSPCA Australia										RSPCA 2018 report, Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia
	RSPCA NSW										RSPCA 2018 report, Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia
	WA Feral Cat Working Group										Pers comms. Also articulated on WAFCWG website .
	WIRES										Terminology on WIRES website .

Table 2. Common terms and definitions used to describe cats

Term	Definition
Abandoned	Free-roaming cats reliant on feeding on human scraps, often being fed by people.
Community	<p>Cat lives within a human-centric environment but is not directly cared for by an individual, unless as part of a colony of free-living cats dependent on care-giving by humans. The cat may be indirectly dependent on resources provided by humans (APWF, pers comms.).</p> <p>Unowned, free-ranging cats for which a human community acknowledges responsibility and, by common agreement, is implementing a management strategy that involves managing these cats in a free-ranging setting (Lepczyk & Calver 2022).</p> <p>This is the term used to refer to semi-owned or unowned cats. These are cats of varying sociability, who may have casual and temporary interactions with humans and indirect dependence on humans, or long-term interactions and direct dependence on humans. They live in areas in cities/towns where they can scavenge food or are fed by one or more people, e.g. in school/university grounds, factory areas and shopping complexes. (RSPCA SA 2019).</p>
Domestic	<p>All cats with some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans which can be split into three subcategories – owned, semi-owned and unowned (RSPCA Australia 2018).</p> <p>Domestic cats are those which are identifiable as owned; most of their needs are supplied by their owners. They may roam beyond their owner’s property, including into bush and park land, but they spend most of their time with a specific person/family/property (Biosecurity Tasmania 2017).</p>
Feral	<p>Cats who are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans and reproduce in the wild should be defined as feral cats (RSPCA Australia 2018)</p> <p>Cats that live in the wild and can survive without relying on people for food or contact (Woinarski <i>et al.</i> 2019).</p> <p>Feral cats are those that live and reproduce in the wild, largely or entirely removed from humans, and survive by hunting or scavenging; none of their needs are satisfied intentionally by humans (Biosecurity Tasmania 2017).</p> <p>A cat who lives outside of human-centric environments and is not dependent on humans (APWF, pers. comms.)</p> <p>Feral cats are free-living; they have minimal or no reliance on humans for their ecological requirements, and survive and reproduce in self-perpetuating populations (NSW Scientific Committee 2021).</p>
Nuisance	Free-roaming pet cats in residential areas which cause disturbance to residents (fighting, fouling) or cause adverse effects on native wildlife (Woinarski <i>et al.</i> 2019).
Owned	<p>Cat belonging to an owner who identifies that the cat belongs to them and performs ownership behaviours (APWF 2023, pers. comms.).</p> <p>These cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person, and are directly depending on humans. They are usually sociable although sociability varies (RSPCA Australia 2018).</p>
Pet	Owned by people and cared for in a responsible and consistent manner (Woinasrki <i>et al.</i> 2019).
Semi-owned	<p>These cats are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider they own them. They are of varying sociability with many socialised to humans and may be associated with one or more households (RSPCA Australia 2018).</p> <p>Cat is cared for by a person who does not identify as the owner of the cat (APWF 2023, pers. comms.).</p>
Stray	<p>Feral cats living as fringe dwellers in towns and cities, profiting from the opportunities for shelter and food. These may be wayward pets, ex pets, semi-socialised or unsocialised feral cats. They may be fed by people or not (Woinarski <i>et al.</i> 2019).</p> <p>(Semi-feral) are often found in and around urban areas, rural properties, industrial areas or rubbish tips. They are either in self-sustaining populations or become stray following neglect or irresponsible pet ownership; some depend on resources provided by humans (WAFCWG 2021)</p> <p>Stray cats are those found in and around cities, towns and rural properties; they may depend on some resources provided by humans but have no identifiable owner (Biosecurity Tasmania 2017).</p> <p>This term is often used to refer to unowned or semi-owned cats, but ”stray” refers to the activity of cats “stray cats”. Management strategies however should relate to ownership status rather than activity (RSPCA SA 2019).</p> <p>Stray cats rely only partly on humans for provision of their ecological requirements, and include animals in urban fringe situations, dumped animals, and cats kept on farms for rodent control (NSW Scientific Committee 2021).</p>
Unowned	These cats are indirectly dependent on humans with some having casual and temporary interactions with humans. They are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and some may live in groups (e.g. common aggregations (RSPCA Australia 2018).

Some other terms used: [semi-feral urban cats](#), urban strays, free-living, colony cats

Reference for Table 2.

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