

Animal Welfare Victoria
Agriculture Victoria
Online submission; cc: pet.welfare@agriculture.vic.gov.au

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24 April 2024

Dear Animal Welfare Victoria,

RE: Victorian Cat Management Strategy

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Government's consultation on its draft Cat Management Strategy.

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

The land conservation efforts of ALCA's seventeen member organisations have influenced over 3 million square kilometres with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$325 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding, and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Please note that ALCA is happy for this submission to be published in full.

Summary

The scale and accelerating consequences of the nature crisis facing Australia and the world has been well-documented, having been set out by ALCA and Australia's private land conservation sector, the 2021 State of Environment Report, the UK Government's Dasgupta Report, various World Economic Forum reports, and by many others across the national and international community more broadly. **Together, we know that the nature crisis is an existential threat for humanity, and it is gathering pace.**

Invasive species are the biggest cause of the decline of Australian nature, and cats are one of largest vertebrate pest species responsible for that decline – indeed, cats affect 123 EPBC Act (i.e. Commonwealth environment law) -listed threatened species – putting it behind only feral rabbits and feral pigs as invasive vertebrate species pressuring threatened species.

The full impact upon Australian nature from cats – as detailed in the *2021 State of Environment Report* – is alarming:

“Since cats arrived in Australia in the early 1800s, the combined population of feral and domestic cats has grown to more than 6.5 million and they are now present across 99.9% of the Australian landmass.

Both feral and pet cats continue to have an extensive and harmful impact on Australian fauna. Cats are known to eat over half of Australian mammal species, including 50 threatened species. Nearly half of all Australian bird species have been recorded as being eaten by cats, including 71 threatened species.

Feral cats in the bush kill an estimated 2,414 million animals annually – mostly native species – including:

- 769 million invertebrates
- 815 million mammals
- 466 million reptiles
- 272 million birds
- 92 million frogs.

In built environments, cats that roam kill an estimated 714 million vertebrates annually, including:

- 338 million mammals
- 162 million birds
- 213 million reptiles
- at least 1 million frogs.

Most of these kills are made by pet cats.”¹

The animal welfare and relationship between humans and cats is socially and culturally important. However, the impact of cats on native animals, as outlined above must also be considered – **an annual death toll of 2.359 billion vertebrate animals in Australia** – and most of these native Australian animals.

The private land conservation sector significantly contributes to the management of feral cats, both on private land under direct management, and in partnership with other landholders. Collectively, ALCA’s member organisations are a key repository of Australia’s invasive species expertise, especially in the effective implementation of practical, on-ground feral cat management activities.

However, the private land conservation sector is generally under-resourced and underfunded to undertake feral cat management and suppression at the scale needed. The positive contribution of the private land conservation sector – and potential for scaling our impact if adequately resourced – should be elevated in the Strategy.

The final Victorian Cat Management Strategy is an opportunity to reflect the stark existential challenge that cats pose to Australian biodiversity, and explicitly draw upon the private land conservation sector to help scale the management and suppression of Victorian feral cats.

¹ <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/biodiversity/pressures/invasive-species-problematic-native-species-and-diseases>

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Victorian Cat Management Strategy be revised to further reflect the urgent, pressing, and existential challenge posed by cats to native Australian wildlife.

Recommendation 2: The Strategy should explicitly seek to partner with the private land conservation sector to help scale the management and suppression of Victorian feral cats. Our sector should be listed as delivery partners as a separate action, e.g.:

“Action [x]: Collaborate with the private land conservation sector to enhance feral cat management in Victoria through knowledge sharing and relevant programs.”

At minimum, our sector should be incorporated within one of the existing actions, e.g:

*“Action 13: Explore options to improve cat management on private land, **including with the private land conservation sector.**”*

Recommendation 3: The Strategy should align with the Commonwealth approach to classifying cats, namely, ‘pet cats’ and ‘feral cats’. Using this approach, feral cats are cats which *“are not formally owned, or cared for, by people. They survive by hunting or scavenging for themselves and live in diverse habitats.”*²

Recommendation 4: Feral cats should be declared as pest animals across all land tenures as a matter of priority.

Recommendation 5: Whilst it is recognised that the Victorian Government is responsible for management of feral cats on Crown land, given the centrality of the challenge that cats pose to Victorian nature – and biosecurity more broadly – as we know that the Victorian Government responsibility for feral cat management does not end at the border of its National Parks. The broader Government duty to combat feral cats should be explicitly mentioned under the section: “Managing cats in Victoria”, “The Victorian Government”.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Victorian Cat Management Strategy. ALCA would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further with the Victorian Government.

Australian Land Conservation Alliance

² <https://consult.dcceew.gov.au/draft-updated-threat-abatement-plan-for-predation-by-feral-cats>

About the Australian Land Conservation Alliance

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage, and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity, and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

Our seventeen members are:

- Arid Recovery
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- Biodiversity Conservation Trust NSW
- Bush Heritage Australia
- EcoGipps
- GreenCollar
- Greening Australia
- Landcare Australia
- Nature Foundation
- NRM Regions Australia
- Odonata
- Queensland Trust for Nature
- South Endeavour Trust
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy Australia
- Trust for Nature (Victoria)
- World Wildlife Fund - Australia

ALCA member land conservation efforts have influenced over 3 million square kilometres with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$325 million. Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance, and funding and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in rural communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spill-over effects for community, wellbeing, and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Some ALCA members are statutory entities; the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily represent the views of the Government administering those statutory entities.