



Getting 2 Zero Submission

Cat Management in Tasmania Discussion Paper

May 2026

Introduction

Getting to Zero (G2Z) is a national program providing free, remote, and onsite, consulting and support services for local government, not-for-profit organisations, and community groups to improve outcomes for lost/stray and homeless animals, and their caretakers, in every community in Australia.

G2Z works closely with governments, animal welfare organisations and researchers and has specific and practical knowledge on companion animal management and welfare. We welcome the opportunity to engage at any level on this topic.

G2Z welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Tasmanian Cat Management Discussion Paper. Our submission is informed by peer-reviewed research, the documented experience of Australian Local Governments, and program-level evidence from established companion animal management models.

Summary of Position and Key Recommendations

G2Z notes the discussion paper's acknowledgement that no evidence-based studies have measured the effectiveness of containment legislation in Australia, that registration revenue does not cover the cost of cat management programs, and that fines alone are not a strong deterrent against feeding of stray cats. These findings align with G2Z's own assessment of the evidence base.

G2Z's overarching position is that effective, humane, and sustainable cat management requires investment in proactive, supportive, evidence-based programs that reduce the source of cats entering the management system, rather than expanded enforcement of regulatory tools that do not address the drivers of cat overpopulation. The state has only two operational cat management facilities for the whole of Tasmania, with a third under development. This is a significant constraint and is, in itself, a strong argument for shifting investment away from intake-based management and towards in-community programs that prevent intake.



Key recommendations:

- **Do not introduce compulsory cat registration.** The discussion paper itself notes that the cost of managing cats is 7 to 10 times greater than registration revenue and that compliance is low even where it is required. Queensland repealed compulsory cat registration in 2013 for these reasons.
- **Do not introduce statewide compulsory containment.** There is no evidence that mandatory containment reduces cat-related complaints, impoundments, euthanasia, or free-roaming cat populations. Where containment is appropriate (for example near sensitive habitat), the Bruny Island Cat By-Law 2018 model of localised, targeted by-laws is the appropriate mechanism.
- **Soften the existing mandatory desexing requirement and pair it with state-funded access to free or very low-cost desexing.** Mandatory desexing without universal access criminalises low-income households and semi-owners and is not associated with reductions in shelter intake in jurisdictions that have implemented it.
- **Do not introduce a statewide prohibition on feeding stray cats.** The Queensland experience demonstrates that such bans cannot be effectively enforced, do not deter feeding, and do not reduce cat populations. Punishing compassionate behaviour erodes community trust and the willingness of semi-owners to convert into owners through desexing programs.
- **Establish a statewide network of subsidised desexing access points, including outreach to King Island, Flinders Island, and remote regions,** modelled on the City of Banyule (Victoria), the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Community Cat Programs (Ipswich), and the RSPCA NSW Keeping Cats Safe at Home program. Match Local Government investment in desexing subsidies with state government funding.
- **Manage stray cat colonies through Return-to-Field (RTF) and managed colony programs,** not through trap-and-kill or feeding bans. Provide a clear legislative pathway for cat management facilities, councils, and authorised rescue organisations to desex, microchip, vaccinate, and return unsocialised stray cats to their location of origin.
- **Do not reduce the 1 km buffer distance for humane destruction of cats on private property.** Reducing the buffer would substantially increase the risk of pet cats being killed. G2Z advocates for the buffer distance to be widened to 3km.
- **Adopt nationally consistent definitions of cat cohorts.** Distinguish between feral cats (genuinely unowned, unsocialised, living away from human habitation) and domestic cats



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(owned, semi-owned, and unowned cats living in and around human settlements). Apply different management strategies to each.

- **Differentiate management approaches between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas**, with domestic cat management frameworks for urban and peri-urban populations and feral cat management frameworks for genuinely feral populations in remote and conservation-priority areas.
- **Increase information and support for rural landowners** to manage feral and stray cats around primary production and high-conservation-value land, including subsidised desexing for farm cats, and access to humane trapping and assessment infrastructure.

Guiding Principles

Definitions of cat cohorts

Effective cat management depends on accurate, nationally consistent classification of the cats being managed. Different cohorts of cats fill different ecological niches and respond to different management strategies. Conflating cohorts produces ineffective policy.

G2Z has worked with stakeholders since 2014 to develop consistent national definitions, which align with those proposed in RSPCA Australia's *Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia* (RSPCA Australia, 2018):

- **Domestic cats:** cats with some dependence (direct or indirect) on humans. Three sub-categories:
 - **Owned:** identified with and cared for by a specific person, directly dependent on humans, usually sociable.
 - **Semi-owned:** fed or otherwise cared for by people who do not consider they own them, of varying sociability, often associated with one or more households.
 - **Unowned:** indirectly dependent on humans, with casual or temporary interactions, of varying sociability.
- **Feral cats:** unowned, unsocialised, with no relationship with or dependence on humans, living and reproducing in the wild (for example in forests, grasslands). This aligns with the Australian Government Threat Abatement Plan (2015).
- **Stray cats:** cats that wander. Straying refers to the activity of wandering, not an ownership status. Stray cats may be owned and temporarily escaped, casually owned and frequently roaming, semi-owned, or born to previously owned cats and living in colonies.



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The Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2009 currently defines a stray cat as a cat that is not a domestic cat but lives in close proximity to humans, and a feral cat as a cat that lives largely or entirely removed from humans. G2Z recommends that this framework be revised to:

- Recognise stray cats as a behaviour (wandering), not a class of cat;
- Add the semi-owned and unowned categories of domestic cat to the legislative framework, in line with national best practice; and
- Define feral cats by location and ecological niche (cats living and reproducing away from human habitation, without food or shelter provided by people), not by appearance or behaviour at the moment of trapping.

This matters for management. In urban areas, most unidentified free-roaming cats are semi-owned cats, and a substantial proportion of unidentified cats trapped are owned cats whose microchips have not been scanned reliably or whose owners cannot be traced through outdated registry data (Lord et al., 2008; Lancaster et al., 2015; Goodwin et al., 2017; Rand et al., 2023). Misclassifying these cats as feral and applying lethal control to them does not reduce cat populations and causes significant harm to the people who care about them (Scotney et al., 2023).

Evidence-based principles guiding this submission

- **Voluntary compliance scales; enforcement does not.** Cat populations are too large and too dispersed for enforcement-led management to keep up with reproduction (Benka et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2022). Programs that secure community cooperation through subsidised access to desexing achieve faster and more cost-effective reductions in cat populations than removal-based approaches.
- **Family income is the strongest predictor of whether a cat in a household is desexed** (Chu et al., 2009). Mandates without subsidy entrench inequity and produce non-compliance, particularly in low socioeconomic communities where unowned and semi-owned cats are most concentrated (Ma et al., 2023).
- **Around 5 percent of impounded cats are reclaimed** (Lancaster et al., 2015; Chua et al., 2023), because most are not fully owned by any one person. Identification mandates do not solve this; subsidised desexing of semi-owned cats and pathways for semi-owners to take ownership do.
- **Targeted and micro-targeted desexing programs in high intake areas have demonstrated 30 to 70 percent reductions in council impoundments and 60 to over 90 percent**



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reductions in cat euthanasia within 2 to 5 years in Australian and international settings (Levy et al., 2014; Spehar and Wolf, 2018, 2019, 2020; Cotterell, Rand and Ahmadabadi, 2021; Cotterell et al., 2024; Swarbrick and Rand, 2018; Tan, Rand and Morton, 2017).

- **Lethal-control-centred management of cats around human settlements is associated with serious mental health harms** for cat carers and for the animal management and veterinary staff required to deliver euthanasia (Rollin, 2011; Scotney, McLaughlin and Keates, 2015; Scotney et al., 2023; Andrukonis and Protopopova, 2020).
- **Cat predation is highest in heavily modified habitat, fragmented urban-bush interfaces, and cropping landscapes** (Graham, Maron and McAlpine, 2012; McGregor et al., 2015). Vegetation characteristics and habitat condition are stronger predictors of native species diversity than cat regulation alone (Lilith, Calver and Garkaklis, 2010; Franklin et al., 2021). Cat management for biodiversity outcomes works best when integrated with habitat protection and restoration.

Responses to Discussion Paper Questions

Domestic Cats

Question 1. Advantages and disadvantages of compulsory registration of cats compared to microchipping

G2Z's position is that compulsory microchipping with mandatory updating of microchip details is a more effective and lower-cost mechanism than compulsory registration for achieving the stated benefits of identification, return-to-owner, and population data. Community members need to be supported to comply with compulsory microchipping programs through low and no cost access.

Advantages of microchipping over registration:

- Microchipping is a one-time intervention with permanent identification. It does not require annual renewal, fee collection, or compliance enforcement.
- Microchip databases (where data is current) provide a national identification framework, whereas council registration is jurisdictionally bounded and breaks down when cats and owners cross council boundaries.
- The administrative cost burden of registration falls on local councils. The discussion paper notes the cost of cat management is estimated to be 7 to 10 times the revenue generated from registration fees, and Queensland repealed compulsory cat registration in 2013 for this reason.



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- Compulsory registration with fees imposes an ongoing cost barrier on cat owners, particularly low-income owners and semi-owners caring for multiple cats. This is counterproductive to the goal of bringing semi-owned cats into desexing and microchipping programs.

Disadvantages of compulsory registration:

- Estimated compliance is around one third of pet cats in jurisdictions where registration is required (Discussion Paper; G2Z Submission, NSW Inquiry into Cats).
- Registration data does not improve return-to-owner rates beyond what current microchipping provides, because the binding identifier is the microchip number.
- Where registration is bundled with mandatory desexing or containment, it acts as a barrier to participation by semi-owners (cat carers) in low-cost desexing programs, who fear ongoing financial obligations they cannot meet.

Advantages of microchipping (already legislated in Tasmania):

- Permanent identification, lower lifetime cost.
- Subject to the limitations that scanning may not be reliable through metal cage traps (Lord et al., 2008), and that microchip details are frequently not kept up to date (Goodwin et al., 2017; Lancaster et al., 2015). These limitations should be addressed through standardisation of scanning processes and data quality requirements rather than by adding registration.

Investment in microchip data accuracy and in education on the importance of updating contact details would deliver greater public benefit than introducing a registration scheme.

Question 2. Should cat owners be required to register their cat, like dog registration? Yes or No.

G2Z response: No.

G2Z does not support the introduction of compulsory cat registration. The reasoning is set out in response to Question 1 and is consistent with our submissions to other jurisdictions. The Tasmanian Government identified registration's low compliance and high administrative cost as the basis for not requiring it in 2009 and again in 2020. The cost-benefit analysis has not changed.

Where individual councils wish to operate a register for local management purposes (for example, Kingborough Council under the Bruny Island Cat By-Law 2018), the existing power



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under the Act to do so via by-law is sufficient and appropriate. A statewide compulsory registration scheme would impose costs on all councils, including those without the cat management challenges that justify a register.

As Question 2 has been answered No, G2Z has skipped Questions 3 and 4 in line with the discussion paper structure.

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

Three measures, in order of likely impact:

- **Source-of-sale traceability through a unique source number scheme.** G2Z supports the Victorian Pet Exchange Register approach: a person or business selling or giving away a cat must hold a unique source number, and the source number plus the cat's microchip number must appear in all advertisements. This shifts the enforcement focus from monitoring individual transactions (which is impractical at scale) to monitoring advertisements, which can be efficiently audited including via automated scanning of online platforms. Online classifieds and social media platforms should be required to remove advertisements that do not display a valid source number and microchip number.
- **Mandatory disclosure of compliance information in advertisements.** Sellers should be required to state in advertisements that the cat meets the legal requirements of sale (desexed, microchipped, at least 8 weeks of age, free from external parasites, treated for internal worms at least once, and vaccinated), with the microchip number visible. This is the substance of Question 6, which G2Z supports.
- **Reduce the financial pressure that drives non-compliance.** Many illegal sales originate from accidental litters in households that cannot afford desexing. Free or very low-cost statewide desexing access (see Question 19) reduces the supply of unwanted kittens that fuels the unregulated market. The 'last litter' programs offered by Tasmanian cat management facilities are a sound example and should be expanded with state funding.

G2Z cautions against extending the breeder licensing framework in a way that captures rescue and shelter staff who take pregnant cats into care for adoption preparation. Definitions of 'breeder' should explicitly exclude individuals who take a pregnant cat into care to birth offspring with the intention of desexing the queen and rehoming the kittens once weaned, in line with our SA Breeder Reforms submission.

Question 6. Should a seller be required to state that the cat meets the legal requirements of sale in advertisements?



G2Z response: Yes.

Mandatory disclosure in advertisements has three benefits:

- It places the burden of proof on the seller and removes the buyer's legal uncertainty about whether they are inheriting compliance obligations.
- It provides a low-cost, automatable enforcement target. Auditing of online advertisements is far more practical than auditing of private transactions.
- It signals normative expectations to the public that pet sales are subject to consumer protection-style standards.

Disclosure should include, at minimum, the seller's source number (if a Victoria-style scheme is adopted), the cat's microchip number, desexing status, vaccination status, age, and confirmation of internal and external parasite treatment. Online platforms hosting cat advertisements should be required, as a condition of operating in Tasmania, to refuse listings that do not contain this information.

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

G2Z supports an active role for cat owners in reducing impacts on wildlife, neighbours, and the community, delivered through informed individual choice rather than statewide mandate.

Owners should be supported and encouraged to:

- Desex and microchip their cat (already required under the Cat Management Act 2009) and keep microchip details current.
- Contain their cat to their property, particularly at night, where this is feasible. G2Z supports voluntary containment.
- Provide enrichment, indoor space, secure outdoor enclosures (catios), or cat-proof fencing where containment is the chosen approach, to maintain cat welfare while reducing roaming impacts.
- Contain cats fully where the owner lives near sensitive wildlife habitat or in council-declared cat management or prohibited areas.

Owners cannot be expected to take on these responsibilities without practical support. Research by Rand et al. (2023) found that an owner's perception of their ability to contain their cat is a stronger predictor of containment than legal requirement. McLeod, Hine and Bengsen (2015) identified that cost, time, lack of resources, rental tenancy restrictions, and beliefs about cat



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welfare all act as barriers. These barriers are addressable through subsidised infrastructure (cat enclosure rebates, cat-proof fence subsidies), tenancy law reform allowing reasonable cat containment modifications, and public education on indoor enrichment.

G2Z does not support placing the entire burden of cat impact reduction on individual owners. Most cat-related complaints, predation events, and intake to cat management facilities involve cats whose owners cannot be identified or who are not fully owned. Owner-focused regulation cannot reach this cohort. Reducing community-level cat impacts requires owner-focused measures combined with semi-owner support and free-living cat management programs.

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

Drawing on McLeod, Hine and Bengsen (2015), Rand et al. (2023), and G2Z's work with councils across Australia, the practical challenges fall into the following categories:

- **Cost.** Cat enclosures suitable for suburban backyards range from several hundred to several thousand dollars (Catnets, n.d.; Oscillot, n.d.). Twenty percent of Australian households live on less than \$650 per week (ABS, 2021). Desexing and microchipping a single female cat costs \$300 to \$500 depending on whether the cat is pregnant or lactating. These costs are prohibitive for low-income households and for those caring for multiple cats.
- **Tenancy.** A substantial proportion of cat owners and carers live in rental accommodation. Many rental properties have inadequate fencing and tenants do not have permission to make property modifications.
- **Cat behaviour and welfare.** Owners report concern that confining cats accustomed to outdoor access produces poor welfare outcomes. Door-dasher behaviour means containment is not absolute even when an owner is committed.
- **Information and skill.** Many owners do not know how to contain a cat humanely, what enrichment is required for indoor or contained cats, or how to read their cat's behaviour for signs of confinement-related distress.
- **Social norms.** Where neighbours' cats roam, individual owners report that contained cats are at a disadvantage and that the community norm undermines compliance.
- **Equity and identification.** Stronger measures applied uniformly will affect cat carers (semi-owners) and households in low socioeconomic areas disproportionately, creating a class of cats and people effectively criminalised by their economic circumstances. Around



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3 percent of Australian adults feed an average of 1.5 cats they do not own (Rand et al., 2019); these cats and the people caring for them cannot comply with stronger ownership requirements without substantial subsidy.

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

Yes. G2Z strongly supports voluntary containment but does not support statewide mandatory containment, because there is no published Australian evidence that mandatory containment legislation reduces free-roaming cat populations, complaints about wandering cats, intake to shelters, or any other metric in routine use (RSPCA Australia, 2018; Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, 2022). Australian councils that have implemented 24/7 mandatory containment have reported increased complaints, increased impoundments, increased euthanasia, increased exposure of staff to mental health harms, and no measurable reduction in roaming cats.

Alternative and more effective approaches include:

- **Targeted and micro-targeted free desexing programs in high cat intake areas.** The City of Banyule program achieved a two thirds reduction in cat intake and a more than five-fold reduction in euthanasia (Cotterell, Rand and Ahmadabadi, 2021; Cotterell et al., 2024). The Australian Pet Welfare Foundation Community Cat Programs in Ipswich (Queensland) achieved 30 to 50 percent reductions in council intake within one year. The RSPCA NSW Keeping Cats Safe at Home program partners with councils to deliver targeted desexing in high-intake postcodes.
- **Cat Assistance Teams.** Community-based outreach that supports semi-owners to take ownership of the cats they feed, with free desexing, microchipping, and basic veterinary support (Richardson, 2023).
- **Localised by-laws in areas of demonstrated need.** The Bruny Island Cat By-Law 2018 demonstrates that targeted, place-based containment can be implemented under existing legal powers where there is local justification (in Bruny Island's case, sensitive wildlife and a defined geography). This is preferable to statewide mandate. Councils should be supported with model by-laws and implementation funding.
- **Subsidy of containment infrastructure.** Cat enclosure rebates, cat-proof fence subsidies, and partnership with manufacturers to reduce costs make voluntary containment accessible to low and middle-income owners.



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- **Tenancy law reform.** Permitting tenants to make reversible cat-containment modifications with landlord notification (rather than veto) increases compliance among renters.
- **Public education on indoor enrichment and gradual transition.** Owners willing to contain a previously roaming cat need information on environmental enrichment and behavioural transition support.

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

If additional measures are introduced, monitoring and compliance design should observe the following principles:

- **Compliance support precedes enforcement.** Universal access to free or very low-cost desexing, microchipping, and (if introduced) registration must be in place before any new compliance obligation is enforced. Penalties applied to households unable to access the underlying service entrench inequity.
- **Targeted enforcement on supply-side actors, not individual cat carers.** Online sellers, unlicensed breeders, and pet retail platforms hosting non-compliant advertisements are a higher-leverage enforcement target than households feeding strays. The Queensland experience shows that fines on individual feeders are absorbed and re-incurred, with no reduction in cat numbers.
- **Outcome metrics, not activity metrics.** Compliance regimes should be evaluated on whether they reduce cat impoundments, reduce euthanasia rates, reduce nuisance complaints, and improve cat welfare. They should not be evaluated on infringements issued or prosecutions completed.
- **Data transparency.** Councils, cat management facilities, and the state should publish standardised annual data on cat intake, source cohort (owned, semi-owned, unowned, feral), reclaim rates, adoption rates, euthanasia rates, and cat-related complaints. Without published data the policy cycle cannot self-correct.
- **Procedural protections for trapped cats.** Any expansion of trapping must be accompanied by mandated minimum holding periods, mandatory microchip scanning by trained staff with appropriate equipment (recognising that scanning through metal cage traps is unreliable; Lord et al., 2008), and behavioural assessment over a minimum of three days using validated protocols (Slater et al., 2010, 2013) before classification of a cat as unsocialised.



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- **Carer engagement, not carer punishment.** Where a property is identified as a feeding location for stray cats, the workable response is to engage the resident in a Community Cat Program (free desexing, microchipping, vaccination, and support to take ownership where appropriate) rather than to issue infringements.

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

G2Z accepts that stronger measures (including local containment and prohibited areas) may be reasonable in defined and limited circumstances:

- **Areas of demonstrated threatened species predation.** Where local data shows cat predation on listed threatened species, place-based measures (containment by-laws, cat prohibited areas, intensive trapping programs) are justified. Stronger measures should be focused on areas where the predation pathway is documented, not applied universally.
- **Areas adjacent to National Parks, Conservation Areas, State Forest, and properties with conservation covenants.** The existing prohibited area framework under the Cat Management Act 2009 should be applied actively, with adequate resourcing for trapping and monitoring.
- **Defined geographies with localised cat impact.** The Bruny Island Cat By-Law 2018 is the established Tasmanian model. Council-led, by-law-based containment in geographies with both wildlife sensitivity and a constrained cat population is workable and democratically legitimate.

Stronger measures are not reasonable as a statewide default for all of Tasmania's diverse urban, peri-urban, and rural environments. The discussion paper itself notes the absence of evidence-based studies measuring the effectiveness of containment legislation in Australia (page 16). A statewide mandate enacted ahead of evidence would not be justifiable.

Stronger measures are also not reasonable where they are introduced without commensurate investment in compliance support (free desexing, free containment infrastructure, education) and without protection for the cat carer cohort and the cats they feed. G2Z's experience across Australian jurisdictions is that stronger measures imposed without these supports produce more cat killing, more carer trauma, more staff trauma, and no measurable reduction in cat populations.

Stray Cats

Question 12. Should feeding of stray cats be prohibited? Yes or No.



G2Z response: No.

G2Z does not support a statewide prohibition on feeding free living cats. The discussion paper itself sets out the reasons. In Brisbane, an estimated 60,000 residents feed an average of 1.5 cats they do not own, totalling 90,000 cats (Rand et al., 2019). Queensland enforcement experience shows that some individuals receive multiple convictions, demonstrating that fines do not deter the behaviour. People feed stray cats for emotional, ethical, and practical reasons including companionship, a sense of responsibility, pity, sympathy, and a lack of confidence in the management actions of authorities (Discussion Paper, page 18; Centonze and Levy, 2002).

More fundamentally, prohibition does not solve the underlying problem. The presence of free-living cats persists once feeding stops because cats establish at any location with food, water, or shelter, and an established colony does not disappear when the food source is removed. What does happen is that the colony's welfare deteriorates (cats become hungrier, more diseased, more aggressive, hunt more) and the carers experience grief, distress, and disengagement from authorities (Scotney et al., 2023).

Feeding bans criminalise compassion and erode the community trust that desexing programs require. The carers feeding 1 to 2 cats represent the largest pool of potential adopters and the largest cohort that targeted desexing programs need to reach. Prosecuting them removes the entry point for population control.

G2Z recommends instead that the legislative framework explicitly authorise responsible feeding as part of a managed colony program (with desexing, microchipping, vaccination, and registration of feeders to a council or cat management facility program), and that nuisance feeding be addressed through Community Cat Program engagement rather than prosecution.

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

Drawing on the Queensland experience and on the G2Z submissions to the QLD Biosecurity Act review and the NSW Inquiry into Cats:

- **Scale of the behaviour.** Feeding of stray cats is too widespread to enforce. Survey data indicate that 9 to 22 percent of Australian adults daily feed a stray cat or a cat they do not perceive to own (Discussion Paper, page 17, citing Rand et al., 2019).
- **Difficulty of evidence collection.** Establishing that an individual is responsible for ongoing feeding (rather than incidental feeding) requires sustained surveillance, which is resource-intensive and often not legally robust.



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- **Penalty insufficiency.** Where convictions have occurred in Queensland, individuals have continued the behaviour and incurred multiple convictions. Fines are absorbed as a cost of caring for cats.
- **Displacement.** Cats fed at one location move to other locations when feeding stops or is concealed, redistributing the issue rather than resolving it.
- **Welfare deterioration.** Removing food without removing cats produces poorer welfare, increased predation pressure on wildlife as cats hunt more for food, increased disease, and increased fighting.
- **Public health and zoonotic risk.** Unmanaged colonies pose higher risks of toxoplasmosis, sarcocystis, and other zoonoses than managed and desexed colonies (Eppink et al., 2021 noted that desexing cats on piggeries significantly decreased *Toxoplasma gondii* titres in pigs within 12 months, whereas rodent control did not).
- **Erosion of community engagement.** Carers who experience prosecution withdraw from contact with councils and cat management facilities. Those carers are the contact point for desexing programs. Once trust is lost, it takes years to rebuild.
- **Mental health harm to carers.** Scotney et al. (2023) documented serious psychological harms in cat carers affected by enforcement-led cat removal. This is a foreseeable consequence of feeding bans.
- **Mental health harm to enforcement and shelter staff.** Animal management officers and shelter staff required to prosecute feeders and to euthanise the resulting trapped cats are at high risk of moral injury (Rollin, 2011; Scotney, McLaughlin and Keates, 2015; Andrukonis and Protopopova, 2020).

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

G2Z proposes the following framework, which addresses the issue without the harms of a prohibition:

- **Reframe feeders as program participants, not offenders.** Establish a registered carer pathway under which a person feeding free living cats commits to (a) participating in desexing and microchipping of the cats they feed, (b) reporting cats fed to a designated council or cat management facility program, and (c) accepting assistance from a Cat Assistance Team. Where the cats are sociable, support the carer to take ownership.



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- **Universal access to free or very low-cost desexing for unowned and semi-owned cats.** This is the highest-leverage intervention. The Banyule, Ipswich, and RSPCA NSW programs all demonstrate that targeted desexing is what actually reduces free living cat populations.
- **Authorise Return-to-Field for unsocialised free living cats.** Provide statutory authority under the Cat Management Act 2009 for cat management facilities, councils, and authorised rescue organisations to desex, microchip, vaccinate, ear-tip, and return unsocialised free living cats to their location of origin where the location is not in a prohibited area, conservation covenant, or council-declared cat management area.
- **Address property-level cat hoarding through human services partnership.** Where a single property accumulates large numbers of cats, the underlying issue is often mental health, social isolation, or financial distress. Partnership between councils, cat management facilities, and human services agencies (mental health, aged care, neighbourhood houses) is more effective and humane than escalation through animal management infringements.
- **Statewide carer assistance line and field response.** A funded statewide service that members of the community can call when they are feeding cats they cannot afford to manage, with rapid response by trained outreach staff who arrange desexing and ongoing support.
- **Integration with state human-animal welfare data.** Track the source cohort of cats entering management facilities by area to inform where targeted programs are deployed.

Question 15. How should colony cats be managed?

G2Z's position, consistent with the international and Australian evidence base, is that colony cats should be managed through desexing and managed colony programs with the following components:

- **Desexing, microchipping, vaccination, and ear-tipping** of every cat in the colony that is not adoptable, with return to the original location.
- **Adoption pathway** for kittens and sociable cats, into homes through cat management facilities and rescue partners.
- **Carer recognition and support**, with the carer responsible for ongoing food provision, basic shelter, monitoring of cat health, and reporting to a designated program coordinator.
- **Ongoing management to prevent immigration.** Where stable, desexed colonies exist, immigrant cats are quickly identified and either desexed and added to the colony or



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rehomed if sociable. Swarbrick and Rand (2018) demonstrated that maintaining desexing rates above 54 percent of the colony, combined with prompt management of immigrant cats, produced 30 percent reductions in colony size over 2 years and 50 percent over 5 years on an Australian university campus.

- **Documented exclusions.** RTF should not be used in areas with documented threatened species predation pathways, in council-declared prohibited or cat management areas, or on private land where the landholder does not consent. In these areas, cats should be transferred to a cat management facility for assessment and rehoming where possible.
- **Outcome monitoring.** Each managed colony should have baseline numbers, age and sex composition, and ongoing tracking. Spehar and Wolf (2018, 2019, 2020) demonstrated significant reductions in shelter intake and euthanasia in jurisdictions implementing RTF and targeted TNR; Australian work by Tan, Rand and Morton (2017) and Swarbrick and Rand (2018) confirms transferability.

The Tasmanian Cat Management Act 2009 should be amended to provide explicit legal authority for these programs, currently obstructed by the requirement that any cat trapped must be taken to a cat management facility (which then must desex and microchip before reclaim or rehoming, but cannot return the cat to the location of origin without statutory authority). Cat management facilities, councils, and authorised rescue organisations should be empowered to deliver these programs under conditions that include data collection and reporting.

G2Z acknowledges the concerns raised in Crawford, Calver and Fleming (2019) about TNR ethics in Australian contexts. Those concerns are largely addressed where: (a) TNR/RTF is deployed in urban and peri-urban areas with low or no overlap with sensitive native species, (b) ongoing care including food and basic veterinary support is provided, (c) immigrant cats are promptly managed, and (d) program funding is secured for the lifetime of the colony. RTF is not being proposed for areas with active threatened species recovery programs or for remote or wilderness environments. It is proposed for the urban and peri-urban locations where the colonies described in the discussion paper exist.

Feral Cats

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

G2Z supports active management of genuinely feral cats in rural, conservation, and primary production landscapes. Effective support for landowners and managers requires:



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- **Clear definitional separation between feral and domestic cats based on location.** The current definition in the Cat Management Act 2009 (a feral cat is a cat that lives largely or entirely removed from humans in the wild and does not depend for its survival on humans intentionally providing food, water, or shelter) is conceptually sound and should be retained. G2Z's concern is operational. In practice, cats trapped or shot near rural infrastructure (sheds, farm buildings, outbuildings) are sometimes presumed feral when they are in fact farm cats, semi-owned barn cats, or roaming pet cats from neighbouring properties. Practical guidance for landowners and authorised officers should clarify that the strongest indicator of feral status is location and ecological niche (away from human habitation, no human-provided food or shelter), not appearance or trap behaviour.
- **Subsidised desexing and microchipping for farm cats and rural-property cats.** Working farm cats provide value in rodent control and reduce farm reliance on rodenticides (which themselves cause secondary poisoning of native predators including raptors and quolls). Farm cats should be desexed, ear tipped, microchipped to the property, and managed at sustainable numbers. State funding should provide subsidy and mobile veterinary access for properties that are far from clinical infrastructure. Eppink et al. (2021) demonstrated that desexing cats on piggeries significantly decreased *Toxoplasma gondii* titres in pigs within 12 months, whereas rodent control did not. Similar zoonotic and biosecurity benefits apply to other primary production settings.
- **Targeted research investment.** There is limited Tasmania-specific peer-reviewed evidence on the effectiveness of various feral cat management interventions. State research funding into landscape-scale feral cat management, integrated with habitat work, would inform program design and provide a basis for adaptive management.

Question 17. Should the distance from the nearest residence for humane euthanasia of cats on private property be reduced to less than 1 km? Yes or No.

G2Z response: No.

G2Z does not support reducing the 1 km buffer distance and advocates for it to be widened to 3km. The 1 km buffer is supported by the published evidence on cat home ranges in Australia and internationally however a widened buffer zone would reduce the risk to cats that have a relationship with humans.

Owned (pet) cat home ranges are generally small however there are occasional outliers. Oorebeek and Pauza (2021), the Cradle Coast Cat Tracker Project, GPS-tracked 11 pet cats in north-west Tasmania and recorded a median home range of 1.4 hectares (range 0.2 to 7



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hectares) and a maximum distance travelled from home of 367 metres. No cat in the Tasmanian study travelled more than 0.4 km from home. Roetman et al. (2017), tracking 428 pet cats in South Australia, recorded a median home range of 1.04 hectares. Kays et al. (2020), tracking 925 pet cats across Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, found that only 3 cats out of 925 had home ranges exceeding 1 km squared (100 hectares); the great majority were homebodies that rarely strayed more than 100 metres from home. Huang et al. (2018) report that 75 percent of lost pet cats are found within a 500 metre radius of their point of escape.

Australian feral cat home ranges, by contrast, are generally larger than pet cat ranges. Molsher et al. (2005) recorded a mean feral cat home range of 248 hectares in central-western New South Wales agricultural landscapes. Bengsen, Butler and Masters (2012) recorded a median feral cat home range of 5.11 km squared (511 hectares) on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. McGregor et al. (2015) recorded mean home ranges of 855 hectares for males and 397 hectares for females in the central Kimberley region of Western Australia. Bengsen et al. (2016) synthesised across Australian datasets and found that feral cat home range size scales predictably with landscape productivity and population density, and confirmed that males have larger ranges than females in most populations. Documented Australian feral cat home ranges range from approximately 50 hectares in productive landscapes to over 15,000 hectares in arid and remote areas.

Unowned and semi-owned cats around human settlements operate at intermediate scales. Horn et al. (2011), found that unowned cats had significantly larger home ranges than owned cats in a peri-urban Illinois landscape, but unowned cats remained associated with farmsteads and urban infrastructure. They are predominantly within or close to populated areas, not in remote landscapes.

Pet cats and most semi-owned cats range over a few hectares around human dwellings. Feral cats range over hundreds to thousands of hectares away from human dwellings. The minimum 1 km buffer provides a margin of protection for pet cats and semi-owned cats. Reducing the buffer would predictably increase the number of pet cats and semi-owned cats killed under feral cat provisions. This would:

- Cause direct welfare harm to those cats and grief to their owners and carers;
- Undermine community trust in cat management programs and reduce participation in desexing and microchipping initiatives;



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- Generate the kind of community conflict and litigation experienced at the Port of Newcastle (Scotney et al., 2023);
- Risk killing cats whose microchips have not been scanned (microchips are unreliably read through metal cage traps; Lord et al., 2008), creating an evidentiary gap that prevents accountability.

G2Z's recommendation is to, at a minimum, retain the minimum 1 km buffer and ideally to extend it to 3km. As Question 17 has been answered No, G2Z has not provided a response to Question 18.

G2Z further recommends that the operational definition of a feral cat (for the purposes of authorising humane destruction) be reinforced by location-based criteria. A cat trapped or observed more than 3 km from any place of residence and not associated with farm buildings or human infrastructure has a high probability of being a feral cat. A cat trapped within or near human infrastructure has a high probability of being a domestic cat (owned, semi-owned, or unowned). Using location and ecological niche to determine cat status, rather than appearance and behaviour at the moment of capture, provides clarity for landowners, authorised officers, and the community, and protects pet cats and semi-owned cats from misclassification. Including ear tipping as a standard practice when desexing cats will also assist with identifying domestic cats.

Other

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

G2Z's experience across Australian jurisdictions identifies the following as the highest impact, most cost-effective measures. These should be implemented as a package, with state government funding and Local Government delivery, in partnership with cat management facilities, veterinarians, and rescue organisations.

Subsidised access programs

- **Statewide network of free or very low-cost desexing access points.** Including outreach clinics for King Island, Flinders Island, and other remote and underserved regions where the existing two cat management facilities cannot practically provide service. Mobile veterinary clinics, fly-in fly-out desexing days, and partnerships with local veterinary practices funded by the state are workable models.
- **Free microchipping and chip-detail-update services** co-located with desexing.



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- **Last-litter programs.** Expanded statewide funding of programs in which a pregnant cat is desexed after giving birth, kittens are surrendered for rehoming, and the queen is returned to her household microchipped, ear tipped and desexed. The discussion paper notes that Tasmanian cat management facilities operate these programs; state funding should ensure they are universally available.
- **Cat enclosure and cat-proof fencing rebates.** Targeted at owners in nominated areas (such as council-declared cat management areas) and at low-income households across the state.

Behaviour change and education

- **Public education campaign on humane pet care standards** aligned with the principles of human behaviour change research (Glanville, Abraham and Coleman, 2020; Philpotts, Dillon and Rooney, 2019). Effective campaigns are tailored to specific behavioural barriers, segmented by audience, and supported by tangible service access. They are not standalone awareness campaigns.
- **Information for prospective cat owners on indoor enrichment, containment options, and pet-friendly tenancy.**
- **Education within schools** on humane pet care standards, animal welfare, and the role of cats in the environment.
- **Information on sale-of-cat compliance for buyers,** with clear public guidance on what to look for in an advertisement and how to verify a seller's source number.

Community programs

- **Cat Assistance Teams** (per Richardson, 2023). Field outreach teams that engage with cat carers, deliver desexing and microchipping, support carers to take ownership where appropriate, and connect carers to wider community services where indicated.
- **Partnership with human services.** Mental health, aged care, neighbourhood houses, family violence services, and homelessness services frequently encounter cat issues among the people they support. Cross-sector funding agreements that include cat support reduce surrender, abandonment, and uncontrolled breeding.
- **State funding match for council investment in desexing subsidies.** The most reliable predictor of council investment in desexing programs is matched state funding (AIAM Submission, Draft TAP for Feral Cats 2023). The Victorian and South Australian Governments operate matched funding programs. Tasmania should establish an equivalent.



Sector capacity

- **State-level provision of an evidence-based reference library** and continuing education opportunities for council animal management officers and cat management facility staff.
- **Standardised cat management data collection.** Common data definitions, common reporting templates, and a state cat management dashboard that publishes intake, outcome, complaint, and program participation data quarterly.
- **Tasmanian membership in the National Desexing Network** (www.ndn.org.au), which currently supports 24 councils across Australia at no cost to develop and manage cooperative desexing programs.

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

G2Z response: Yes. Different cohorts of cats live in different environments and respond to different management strategies. A single statewide approach will fail in at least one of the three contexts.

Urban areas

In urban Tasmania, the predominant cat management challenge is owned, semi-owned, and unowned domestic cats. Free-roaming cats in urban areas are overwhelmingly domestic cats (with semi-owned cats forming the largest unidentified cohort), not feral cats (G2Z Submission, QLD Biosecurity Act).

Urban management priorities:

- Targeted and micro-targeted free desexing in high intake postcodes;
- Cat Assistance Teams supporting semi-owners;
- Adoption pathways for sociable cats and kittens;
- RTF for unsocialised stray cats outside prohibited and cat management areas;
- Voluntary containment supported by infrastructure subsidy;
- Localised by-law containment (for example, the Bruny Island model) where there is local justification.

Peri-urban areas

Peri-urban Tasmania, where suburban development meets bushland, is the highest-stakes setting for cat impact on native wildlife.



Peri-urban management priorities:

- All urban priorities, with greater emphasis on containment subsidies and cat-proof fencing rebates;
- Habitat connectivity and restoration alongside cat management, recognising that habitat condition is a stronger predictor of native species diversity than cat density alone (Lilith, Calver and Garkaklis, 2010; Franklin et al., 2021);
- Coordinated cat management across council-private-public land boundaries.

Rural areas

Rural Tasmania includes farm cat populations (semi-owned working cats around primary production properties).

Rural management priorities for farm cats:

- Subsidised desexing, microchipping, and basic veterinary care;
- Recognition of legitimate working cat populations and management of these populations at sustainable numbers;
- Mobile veterinary clinic access;
- Education on the zoonotic and biosecurity benefits of desexing farm cats (Eppink et al., 2021).

Question 21. Are there any other matters which you would like to raise in relation to improving cat management in Tasmania?

Cat management facility capacity is a constraint, not a destination

With only two operational cat management facilities for the whole state and a third under development, Tasmania does not have the intake and assessment infrastructure to manage cats through an impounding model. G2Z's view is that this is not a problem to be solved by building more facilities. It is a strong argument for shifting investment, policy attention, and legislative authority to in-community programs that prevent intake.

Every cat that does not enter a facility because its mother was desexed before she had kittens is a substantial saving in welfare burden, staff time, and money. The Banyule data show 2.7 cats prevented from intake for every cat desexed in a targeted program (Cotterell et al., 2024). Investment in subsidised, targeted, in-community desexing reduces the load on the state's two cat management facilities and produces better outcomes for cats, communities, and staff than expanded facility capacity alone.



Tasmania's threatened species context

Tasmania has unique endemic species and is the last refuge for several species lost from the mainland. Cat predation is one of multiple pressures on these species, alongside habitat loss, fragmentation, road mortality, climate change, and disease. G2Z equally cautions against treating cat management as a standalone solution to species decline. Best-practice species recovery integrates cat management with habitat work and adaptive monitoring (Lilith, Calver and Garkaklis, 2010; Graham, Maron and McAlpine, 2012; Franklin et al., 2021).

Tasmania-specific research is recommended on:

- Cat predation pathways for priority threatened species;
- The relative effectiveness of cat management interventions (containment by-laws, prohibited areas, RTF, lethal control) on local biodiversity outcomes;
- Integration of cat management with habitat condition outcomes.

Language matters

Animals assigned labels with negative connotations receive less welfare consideration than valued species (Dubois et al., 2017). The discussion paper is largely measured in tone, but ongoing public communication about cats in Tasmania should adopt scientifically accurate, neutral language. Using divisive language exacerbates community polarisation, alienates the cat carer cohort whose engagement is essential to population reduction, and risks normalising cruelty (G2Z Submission, Draft TAP for Feral Cats 2023).

Data and transparency

To inform the next plan, the state should commit to publishing standardised annual data on cat intake, source cohort, outcomes, complaints, and program participation. Without published baseline data, the effectiveness of policy choices cannot be assessed, and the policy cycle cannot self-correct. The state should also fund the rigorous evaluation of any pilot programs (for example, Bruny Island, Cat Assistance Teams, RTF pilots) so that evidence accumulates over the life of the next plan.

Match-funding cat management

G2Z recommends that the next Tasmanian Cat Management Plan include a dedicated, recurrent state matched-funding pool for council cat management programs, conditional on outcome reporting.

One Welfare framing



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Cat management is at the intersection of animal welfare, human welfare, and environmental welfare. The most effective programs are those that recognise the bonds between cats and the people who care for them, address the human drivers of poor cat outcomes (poverty, housing instability, lack of veterinary access, mental health), and integrate biodiversity protection with habitat work. G2Z commends the One Welfare framing to the development of the next Tasmanian Cat Management Plan.

Closing

G2Z appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next Tasmanian Cat Management Plan and would welcome the chance to engage further with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania on the design and evaluation of programs arising from this consultation.

Contact:

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