

NORTHERN TASMANIA REGIONAL CAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (2020 – 2030)

*Working together for responsible cat management across
Northern Tasmania*



Northern Tasmania

Regional Cat Management Strategy (2020—2030)

Working together for responsible cat management across Northern Tasmania

Prepared by NRM North in collaboration with the Northern Regional Cat Management Working Group (CMWG).

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1. Introduction

The *Northern Tasmania Regional Cat Management Strategy 2020-2030* (the strategy) has been developed to provide an aspirational and long-term framework within which partner organisations can voluntarily contribute, collaborate and align cat management efforts within their region, towards agreed and shared outcomes.

The strategy sought collaboration from a range of partner organisations who operate within the Northern Tasmania NRM region. Partner organisations which participated in the development of the strategy include the Tasmanian Government, City of Launceston, Meander Valley Council, Break O'Day Council, George Town Council, West Tamar Council, Northern Midlands Council, Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service, NRM North, RSPCA Tasmania and Just Cats Tasmania.

There are ten primary cat management issues for northern Tasmania addressed by the strategy, and implementation frameworks have been designed to allow for varied local requirements and resources, whilst achieving the desired outcomes.

Key directions and major initiatives emerging from the strategy include exploring the feasibility of providing an annual cat de-sexing and microchipping program in the region, a voluntary record of cat owner's details to enable the return of lost and wandering cats, identification of priority areas to develop a pro-active approach to protect conservation, commercial and community assets from roaming cats, participation in the development and implementation of Welfare Standard for Cats and trapping of stray cats, the promotion of measures to ensure cat breeding is only by registered breeders, and the establishment of a network to support efficient operation of shared cat management facilities.

To ensure the success and delivery of this *Northern Regional Cat Management Strategy 2020-2030*, partner organisations are calling upon the support of all community members to ensure that the strategy has wide-reaching benefits sought through efficient implementation to minimize costs.

Each strategic direction has been assigned an indicative priority, with the first annual implementation plan initially focusing on those activities deemed to be deliverable now (1-2 years). Each subsequent annual implementation plan will identify projects and activities to be undertaken during the following 12-month period and outline any budget allocations, delivery responsibilities, key performance indicators and critical process improvements to strengthen the working partnership of stakeholders.

2. Rationale

Since their introduction in the early 1800's cats have become a part of daily life for many Tasmanians. An estimated one in five residents own a domestic cat and self-sustaining populations of stray and feral cats can now be found in many parts of the state. As for most of Australia, diverse community views make cat management in Tasmania a difficult and often emotive issue that requires strong collaboration and stakeholder engagement to consider the many competing issues and interests and deliver sustainable change.

The *Cat Management Act 2009* (the Act) and the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022* provide a consistent state-wide framework to address growing community expectations that the rights and benefits of cat ownership are balanced with the need to manage risks and be responsible. Amendments to the *Cat Management Act 2009* will further contribute to addressing issues related to cat management throughout northern Tasmania. The main legislative changes and management principles for responsible cat ownership and management are summarised below (see text boxes).

Objectives of the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022*

Objective 1	Tasmanian pet cat owners manage their cats responsibly
Objective 2	Increased community awareness, participation and commitment in cat management
Objective 3	Best practice techniques are used to guide the planning, management and control of stray and feral cats
Objective 4	Improved knowledge about feral, stray and domestic cats to better inform management
Objective 5	Minimise impacts of cats in areas with important conservation values and agricultural assets
Objective 6	Undertake legislative change to create an effective framework for managing cats and support other objectives
Objective 7	The roles and responsibilities related to cat management are clearly defined and understood by the Tasmanian community

Summary of amendments to the *Cat Management Act 2009*

- Compulsory de-sexing of cats from four months of age.
- Compulsory microchipping from four months of age.
- Removal of care agreements.
- Limiting to four, the maximum number of cats to be kept at a property without a permit.
- Increased measures to protect private land from straying and feral cats—including trapping or seizure of cats (but not destruction) on private property regardless of proximity to other residences as long as returned to owner or taken to a cat management facility.
- Commencing Section 24 of the Act that requires a cat to be microchipped and desexed before being reclaimed from a cat management facility.
- Replacing the State Government registration of cat breeders with a permit system to breed cats.

The strategy seeks to emphasise cat welfare outcomes and broader benefits for the Tasmanian community, environment and businesses. It recognises that a collaborative and pragmatic approach is required to reflect shared stakeholder priorities and build on existing capabilities and resources. Genuine engagement with government, industry and community partners and strong ownership among all stakeholders is critical for this initiative to deliver sustainable long-term change. The strategy addresses 10 primary cat management issues and adopts a proactive and pragmatic approach that integrates state-wide approaches with regional priorities and community expectations.

3. Scope

Geography

The northern Tasmanian region, for the purpose of this strategy, covers 25,200 square kilometres with eight municipalities including Break O'Day, Dorset, George Town, Launceston, Meander Valley, Northern Midlands, West Tamar, and Flinders (covering the eastern Bass Strait islands) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Map of northern Tasmania municipalities.

More than 143,000 people live in the northern region in major urban areas around Launceston and the Tamar Valley and many smaller towns servicing a diversity of rural and coastal communities. The strategy addresses a collaborative approach to cat management in the northern region.

Research by Animal Medicines Australia (2016) found nearly three in ten households across Australia have cats (29%), with an average of 1.4 cats kept per household. With an estimated 60,000 households, this suggests there may be about 25,000 domestic cats living in the northern region. While no scientific studies have been undertaken, the region could also support a stray or feral cat population of about 25,000 animals assuming an average density of one animal per km².

[Cat types](#)

All cats in Tasmania are the same species (*Felis catus*) and are often conveniently categorised as either domestic, stray or feral. In this strategy:

- **Domestic cats** are identifiable as owned by a person/family/property. Most of their needs are supplied by their owners even though they may currently roam beyond their owner's property.
- **Stray cats** are found roaming mostly around cities, towns and rural properties (includes semi-owned cats). Some of their needs may be supplied by humans but they have no identifiable owner.
- **Feral cats** usually 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.

While primarily concerned with the management of domestic and stray cats in and near settled areas, this strategy recognises the significant role feral cat management plays in broader cat management, including efforts by primary producers and conservation land managers. A significant proportion of the region is state conservation lands (e.g. national parks) where feral cat management is a critical priority (Figure 2). The framework provides broad guidance for collaborating organisations voluntarily engaged in feral cat management to support an integrated approach in the landscape. Nationally there is a trend to combining cat and dog management strategies in one document. This strategy could be expanded in the future to potentially cover both cats and dogs.



Figure 2. Map of all reserve networks within northern Tasmanian municipality areas. Reserve networks include areas listed as National Parks, declared conservation areas and covenants, indigenous protected areas, game reserves, historic sites, nature recreation areas, private sanctuaries, state reserves and others.

4. Our vision and guiding principles

Vision

To see the Tasmanian community proactively and responsibly managing cats for the benefit of cat welfare, human health and well-being, native wildlife, and agriculture.

The Tasmania Cat Management Project (TCMP) is a state-wide initiative to engage the Tasmanian community and key stakeholders in promoting responsible cat ownership and management in line with the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022* (see below for further details).

The mission of the Tasmanian Cat Management Project is “To instil a confident and collaborative approach to managing domestic and stray cats, with a focus on building effective partnerships across local and state government, industry, and the community to support the implementation of responsible cat management”.

Guiding principles

- The best outcomes result from working in collaboration.
- Animal welfare is a primary management consideration.
- Domestic pet cats can contribute to the wellbeing of their owners.
- The needs of cat owners must be balanced with the needs of others.
- Responsible cat ownership is highly valued.
- Cat management and education should be proactive.
- Significant assets must be protected from potential impacts of cats.
- Everyone has a role to play in responsible cat ownership and management.

5. Collaborative approach

Managing cats is a shared responsibility across all parts of the community including individual cat owners and non-cat owners, breeders, veterinarians, state and local governments, businesses and the not-for-profit animal welfare sector and others. Everyone has a role to play and by working together in a planned way, cats can continue contributing to our quality of life with minimal impact on the environment, commercial enterprises, and others in the community.

The *Cat Management Act 2009*, *Biosecurity Act 2019* and the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022* provide the legislative and policy framework to achieve the broad goal of responsible cat ownership and management in Tasmania (Figure 3). The strategy outlines priorities for the northern region that balance state-wide directions and local community expectations with the interests and capacity of regional stakeholders and potential delivery partners.

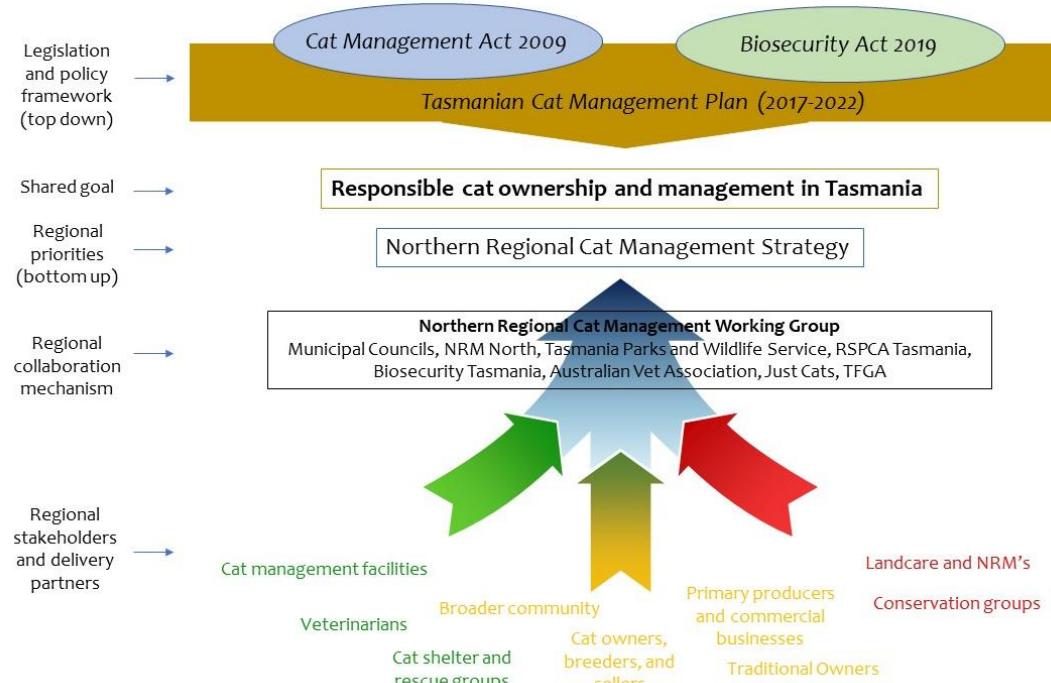


Figure 3. Overarching collaborative governance arrangements for cat management in the northern region.

6. Governance arrangements

Governance Structure

The Tasmanian Cat Management Project is a state-wide initiative funded by the Tasmanian Government to progress the objectives of the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan*. State government funding from 2018 to 2021 for the project includes the employment of three cat management coordinators in each of three regions in Tasmania. In the northern region, the Cat Management Coordinator position is hosted by NRM North, the regional natural resource management organisation.

A state-wide steering committee provides support and direction to the regional coordinators but does not oversee cat management activities at a regional level and has no direct role in development or implementation of the strategy (Figure 4).

As one of the objectives of the Tasmanian Cat Management Plan, a regional Cat Management Working Group (CMWG) was convened by NRM North in 2018. This group meets quarterly, providing a forum for information-sharing and strategic planning for cat management initiatives in the northern region. The Working Group is comprised of representatives from key stakeholder organisations including local government (City of Launceston, West Tamar, George Town, Northern Midlands, Meander Valley, Flinders Island, Dorset and Break O' Day), the Australian Veterinary Association, RSPCA, Just Cats, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, NRM North and the Tasmanian Government (represented by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and Biosecurity Tasmania as part of the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment).

General managers of local government in the northern region meet regularly to discuss a broad range of issues. It was from this forum that a request was made to NRM North in its role as a partner in the Tasmanian Cat Management Project and host of the northern region cat management coordinator, to facilitate the development of a cat management strategy for the region. It was agreed that it would be appropriate for the cat management coordinator to work with the CMWG to develop the strategy for endorsement by the participating local governments.



Figure 4. Summary of the governance structure that applies to the Northern Regional Cat Management Strategy.

Governance Responsibilities

Although implementation of the strategy will require involvement of other stakeholders, the northern region local government general manager forum, comprising general managers of participating councils, retains oversight of the strategy development and implementation process, in close consultation with NRM North. Their role includes endorsing the strategy and associated annual implementation plans, reviewing progress towards the strategy objectives, and considering policy requirements, challenges, and opportunities from a local government perspective which may influence strategy implementation. The support of the general managers' forum is also important in terms of maintaining collaborative participation of local government representatives on the CMWG.

NRM North's current role is coordination and facilitation of the strategy development and implementation process, undertaken through the employment of the regional cat management coordinator, the convening of the CMWG, and regular communication with the general managers forum.

The CMWG has existing terms of reference and meets, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis. The CMWG is responsible for planning and initiating activities identified in the strategy's implementation planning process. CMWG members or the organisations they represent may be responsible for implementing actions, as identified in the implementation planning process. The terms of reference for the CMWG are consistent with a planning and implementation role for the regional strategy, with the proposed role and function of the group being as follows:

- identifying common ground and employing a collaborative approach to promote responsible cat ownership and cat management in the northern region;
- sharing information and facilitating communication between stakeholders regarding cat management, and identifying ways to ensure input from the community is incorporated in ongoing planning;
- developing annual implementation plans in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, containing practical and agreed actions to achieve the short and long-term outcomes of the strategy;
- requests to councils for activity funding in time for consideration through the council budget cycle (approximately November of each year) (refer to figure 5); and
- monitoring and reporting on strategy implementation and evaluation of progress towards the desired outcomes, with reports to be provided to participating organisations and the General managers forum, along with recommendations for review and improvement of the strategy and its implementation.

Governance Processes and Implementation

The strategy recognises that each participating organisation has different resources and priorities, and that implementation roles need to be voluntary and flexible at the local level, while still achieving the regional vision and desired outcomes.

The key mechanism proposed to achieve the outcomes of the strategy is through the development of implementation plans (see below for further detail). To provide a longer-term approach but maintain flexibility, it is proposed to develop a three-year rolling implementation plan with an annual review. Greater detail would be included for the upcoming financial year at each annual review.

The proposed annual timeline for the implementation process is provided in figure 5. The CMWG would typically commence the implementation plan development in October each year. At this stage, input from CMWG members would include both recommending the highest priority actions from the strategy that are feasible to implement, as well as indicating the capacity of their own organisation to support

and participate in each activity. In this way, participating organisations will have the opportunity at an early stage to indicate the level of resources they are able to contribute to a collaborative effort.

The implementation plan iteration would be finalised by November in order for any resource requests to be considered by individual local governments (and other stakeholders) in line with their budget cycle.

Activities would commence in July each year, with an interim report on implementation progress to be provided to the general managers' forum in November each year, to facilitate consideration of the subsequent implementation plan and resource request. An annual report on activities, outcomes and expenditure will be provided to the general managers forum and stakeholders in June each year.

Reporting on the regional strategy will also be incorporated into other existing reporting cycles, including:

- NRM North annual report and yearbook content, due 30 June annually; and
- NRM North contractual reporting to the Tasmanian Government for the TCMP, due 15 September annually until 2021.

A comprehensive evaluation and review of the regional strategy is to be undertaken after three years (by June 2023).

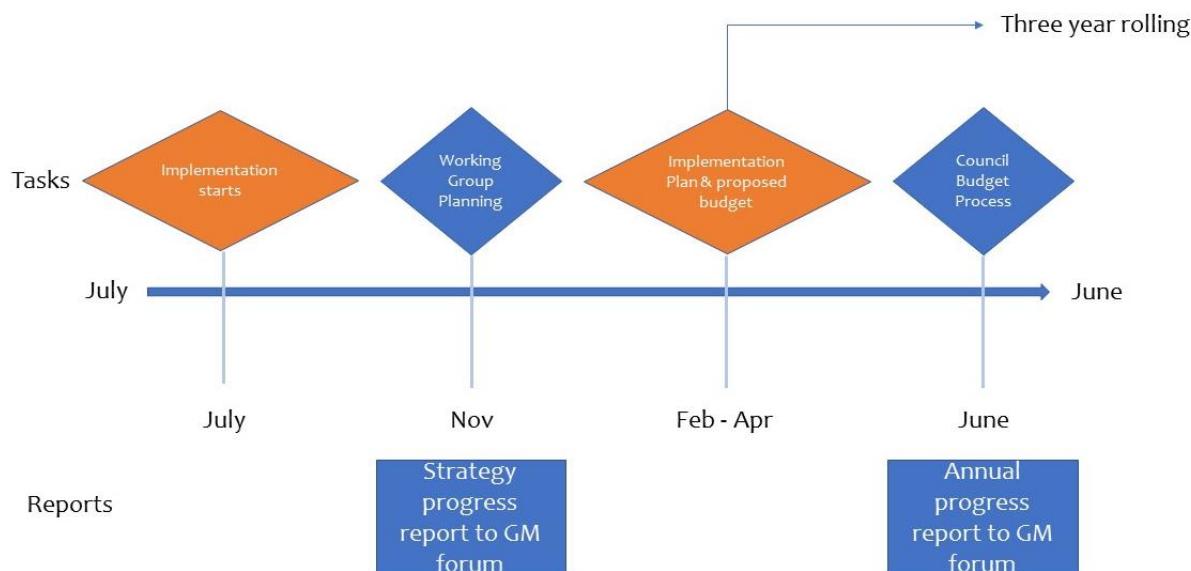


Figure 5. Annual northern regional cat management implementation planning, budgeting and reporting cycle.

Annual implementation plan

The indicative priority for each strategic direction is shown in the body of the document including now (1-2 years), next (3-5 years), and later (5-10 years). Priorities will be further refined in the annual implementation plan. For larger initiatives, a mini-project plan may be required to guide implementation efforts.

The proposed annual implementation plan will identify the:

- priority projects that will be undertaken during the next 12-month period to give effect to the broader directions outlined in the strategy;
- budget allocations and delivery responsibilities for agreed priority projects;
- key deliverable and performance indicators for implementation activities; and
- critical process improvement initiatives to further strengthen capability of the partnership.

The aim is to provide a clear whole of region perspective on all priority actions required to give effect to the broader directions outlined in the strategy. Ideally the annual implementation plan should be as big as necessary but as small as possible—it is expected to be a brief document built around a table of key tasks, lead and support responsibilities, summary budget allocation and other essential supporting information.

Implementation tools

Cat management approaches vary across communities in northern Tasmania. A consistent approach in terms of policies, agreed actions and advice is advantageous for the community and for partners contributing to this strategy.

Potential implementation tools and strategies to drive desired change in attitudes and behaviour include:

- education through information sharing and communication;
- social marketing;
- intelligent data collection and analysis;
- incentives (and disincentives);
- regulation and enforcement;
- innovation and technology; and
- partnerships and collaboration.

7. Strategic directions for cat management in northern Tasmania

The primary cat management issues for northern Tasmania to be addressed by the strategy include:

1. De-sexing and microchipping
2. Responsible cat ownership
3. Protecting significant conservation, commercial and community assets
4. Nuisance and stray cats
5. Feral cats
6. Cat breeding and hoarding (permitting and animal welfare)
7. Professional cat management capacity
8. Shared regional cat management facilities and resources
9. Voluntary compliance
10. Improved knowledge to better inform cat management

For each of the primary cat management issues the implementation framework identifies:

- essential **background** information (where are we now?)
- long-term **desired outcome** (where do we want to be?)
- **strategic directions** and potential actions to work towards achieving the desired outcome including proposed timing—including now (1-2 years), next (3-5 years) and later (5-10 years) (how are we going to get there?)
- and **success indicators** including targets and performance measures where possible (how will we know we are on track?)

7.1 De-sexing and microchipping

Background

Microchipped cats, whose owners keep their contact details current, can be easily identified and reunited with their owners. This also reduces the risk of rehoming or the possibility of euthanising an owned cat. A challenge nationally is inaccurate owner details and the lack of integration across microchip registries and data sharing. The amendments to the *Cat Management Act 2009* will require all cats to be microchipped and de-sexed; municipal councils will continue to be able to establish by-laws for an owner identification system where it is considered necessary to support local planning and improved cat management.

Unwanted litters of cats can cause overcrowding at local cat management facilities. Dumped kittens can turn into feral cats, posing a threat to local wildlife. Unless kept by a permitted breeder, all cats are required to be de-sexed from four months of age.

Desired outcome

For all domestic cats to be de-sexed and identified by microchip from four months of age, and owners to keep their contact details on microchip registries up to date.

Strategic directions

- a) Identify the potential barriers to owners voluntarily having their cats de-sexed or microchipped and explore strategies to overcome these barriers (e.g. subsidies to overcome affordability, education to address lack of awareness, and mobile programs for geographic isolation). (now)
- b) Investigate the feasibility of providing an annual subsidised cat de-sexing and microchipping program across participating municipalities in the northern region (this could include free microchip detail checks and updating of owner contact details). (now)
- c) Promote the requirement for and benefits of cat de-sexing and microchipping through a variety of media using consistent messages across all partners. (now)

- d) Investigate options for improved up to date cat ownership records in conjunction with microchip registry providers, veterinary practices, cat management facilities and potential online and third-party providers. (next)
- e) Support moves towards a nationally consistent owner identification scheme. (next)
- f) Explore options for a voluntary record of cat owners' details to assist with local planning for improved cat management and for the return of lost or wandering cats. (next)
- g) Return lost or wandering cats to identifiable owners preferably through cat management facilities working in collaboration with councils, local veterinary practices and other partners. (now)

Success indicators

- De-sexing and microchipping rates in domestic cats presenting at cat management facilities and veterinary practices.
- Improved cat owner identification system to allow return of cats presenting at cat management facilities and veterinary practices.

7.2 Responsible cat ownership

Background

Cat ownership is a right and a responsibility. A priority outcome of this strategy is to help people understand how they can be a responsible cat owner beyond simply feeding a cat. It includes:

- Making sure the cat is de-sexed and identified as a pet (by microchipping and ensuring up to date owner identification details are recorded).
- Surrendering unwanted cats and kittens to a cat management facility (not dumping them).
- Keeping cats from roaming to ensure their wellbeing and preventing them from killing native wildlife or becoming a nuisance to neighbours and other community members.
- Not feeding or making food available for stray cats.

Emergency planning for pets is also an important part of household emergency preparations to help ensure the safe care of cats in time of crisis (e.g. disaster response or family crisis situations).

Desired outcome

For all cat owners to understand and enthusiastically practice responsible cat ownership.

Strategic directions

- a) Provide advice, links and resources about responsible cat ownership on a shared website maintained over the long-term (e.g. tassiecat.com) including resources that can be easily printed if required. (now)
- b) Work with Stakeholders to develop and deliver a suite of educational materials (e.g. presentations, videos, talks, training sessions, workshops) for use in schools and the broader community to help bring about generational change in attitudes towards responsible cat ownership. (now)
- c) Identify opportunities for funding and partnerships to deliver affordable responsible pet ownership programs for the community including, where possible, support for community groups that promote responsible pet ownership. (next)
- d) Explore potential ways of recognising and celebrating responsible cat ownership, promoting proper valuing of cats as pets and the potential quality of life benefits for cat owners. (next)
- e) Educate residents about how to plan for their pets in emergencies and work with local agencies to refine a process for handling the care of pets in emergency situations. (now)
- f) Promote adoption of cat containment in the interests of cat welfare, conservation and good neighbour relations. (now)

Success indicators

- Number of reported or collected roaming and dumped cats.
- Rates of microchipping, de-sexing and up to date owner details.

- Number and frequency of unique website visits.
- Rates of voluntary containment based on community surveys and veterinarian records.

7.3 Protecting significant conservation, commercial and community assets

Background

Northern Tasmania contains many significant conservation, commercial and community assets that could be impacted by roaming cats and deserve special cat management attention. These can include:

- Areas of high environmental significance such as national parks, conservation reserves and other natural wildlife habitat in coastal areas and wetlands that are home to birds and small ground dwelling animals.
- Valuable commercial and agricultural assets such as aquaculture operations and areas with livestock that are susceptible to cat-borne disease transfer and other impacts.
- Critical community assets like built up residential areas, waste management facilities, entertainment precincts, and primary tourist attractions.

The *Cat Management Act 2009* allows for cat management actions to be undertaken in prohibited areas which include:

- any area of land that is managed by a public authority, or Agency within the meaning of the *State Service Act 2000*, and is reserved land¹; and
- private land that is reserved land.

In addition, the Act allows for local government, after consulting with its local community, to also declare an area of council-controlled land as a cat prohibited area or land within the municipal area of the council to be a cat management area. Cat management action and other measures may be undertaken by the land managers of these areas. Community-led action has a clear role in protecting significant areas.

Desired outcome

To have significant conservation, commercial and community assets identified (mapped) with appropriate strategies identified to mitigate cat related risks at priority sites.

Strategic directions

- a) Develop agreed criteria and a consistent regional approach to progressively assess the region and identify (map) significant conservation, commercial and community assets susceptible to impacts from roaming cats. (now)
- b) Identify proactive cat management and control activities for priority areas including declaring prohibited areas or cat management areas where necessary. (now)
- c) Subject to available resources, establish a proactive approach to manage risks in and adjacent to identified priority areas including potentially undertaking spot checks as part of broader patrol programs and upgrading signage where necessary to highlight the increased risks and rationale for increased cat management efforts at priority sites. (next)
- d) Use priority areas as demonstration case studies that promote best practice and encourage collaborative approaches at other sites (e.g. in conjunction with new residential development). (now and next)
- e) Explore the feasibility of volunteer cat management officers to help protect significant conservation, community and commercial assets. (next)
- f) Support landowners, managers, community and conservation organisations to actively manage cats within identified priority areas and using approved approaches. (now)

¹ Reserved land includes reserved land under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*; land subject to a conservation covenant under part 5 of the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*; public reserves under the *Crown Lands Act 1976*; permanent timber production zone land under the *Forest Management Act 2013*; and private timber reserves under the *Forestry Practices Act 1985*.

Success indicators

- Completed maps of significant regional conservation, agricultural and community assets.
- Number of voluntary community-led cat management initiatives.
- Number of case studies published.

7.4 Nuisance and stray cats

Background

Many cats do not have an identifiable owner (but still rely on humans for most of their needs) and even those that are owned can stray onto private property and cause issues. Complaints about nuisance and stray cats can be complicated and very difficult to resolve. While potentially well intended, making food available for stray cats can increase their numbers and compound impacts on wildlife and neighbours. Stray cats will interact with and diffuse into the feral cat population. Containment to private property is expected for all other domestic pets and is considered best practice when keeping cats.

Keeping cats indoors or in an enclosed area outside is the best way to keep them safe and prevent them from wandering and causing a nuisance to neighbours. A contained cat is less likely to be hurt in fights, pick up diseases, be hit by a car or cause a nuisance or prey on native animals. A cat spraying, toileting or disrupting domestic or native animals may provoke anger from neighbours.

Desired outcome

To reduce the impact of nuisance cats by encouraging owners to contain their cats to their property, preventing the feeding of stray cats, educating the community against dumping unwanted cats, and encouraging reporting of stray cats to protect identified significant conservation, commercial and community assets.

Strategic directions

- a) Hold community education sessions for responsible cat management including the benefits of containment (and dispel the ‘right to roam’ ethos). (now)
- b) Promote cost effective containment options including through potential partnerships with not-for-profit community organisations (e.g. men’s sheds/welfare training providers etc.). (now)
- c) Promote containment to ensure animal welfare, reduce nuisance complaints and minimise impacts on native wildlife and explore the potential need for compulsory containment in the long-term. (now)
- d) Explore options to fund and administer a region-wide cat trap loan scheme for use by property owners dealing with nuisance cats. Include advice on their safe and appropriate use to meet animal welfare and other obligations (including potentially at the point of sale, hire or loan). (now)
- e) Advocate for a consistent state-wide approach to reduce the population of stray cats. (now)
- f) Identify options for mediation and conflict resolution services where required to resolve serious neighbourhood disputes. (now)
- g) Develop targeted education and behaviour change programs to significantly reduce deliberate and unintended feeding of stray cats. (now)
- h) Explore options to establish community-based cat management areas where there are ongoing significant issues associated with stray and nuisance cats. (now and next)

Success indicators

- Number and location of complaints about nuisance and stray cats.
- Use of loan cat traps and number of cats caught.
- Reported instances of stray cat feeding.

7.5 Feral cats

Background

Feral cats can have a significant impact on native wildlife and livestock through predation, competition and disease transmission. The amendments to the *Cat Management Act 2009* will permit:

- a person to trap, seize or detain a cat on their land regardless of the proximity to other residences, provided the cat is returned to the owner if possible, or taken to a cat management facility;
- cat management action (includes trap, seize, detain, humanely destroy) that may be undertaken by primary producers.

A person will retain the right to humanely destroy a cat on their land if the cat is found more than 1km from the nearest residence. Cat prohibited areas and cat management areas will continue to allow for cat management action (trap, seize, detain, humanely destroy) to be undertaken regardless of proximity to the nearest residence.

While primarily concerned with the management of domestic and stray cats, this strategy recognises that feral cat management (e.g. on national parks) can be mutually beneficial in terms of reducing impacts on significant conservation, commercial and community assets within nearby council-controlled areas. Feral cats are found throughout the state however and continuous management effort is required to protect specific assets. Under the *Biosecurity Act 2019*, feral cats are managed as a biosecurity risk or impact and industry, landowners, community or government can develop an approved biosecurity program for their control.

This strategy recognises that a long-term, collaborative and integrated approach to cat management across the landscape is best practice and provides flexibility for individual organisations to voluntarily engage in feral cat management programs where it aligns with their organisational priorities.

Desired outcome

To ensure best practice techniques to manage feral cats are developed and implemented to support integrated cat management across all land tenures in the northern region.

Strategic directions

- a) Participate in consultation regarding state-wide (feral) cat management initiatives and, subject to available resources, participate in feral cat management where it aligns with local community priorities and integrates with complementary initiatives. (now)
- b) Consider adopting the *Model Code of Practice for the Humane Control of Feral Cats* including related standard operating procedures (Sharp and Saunders, 2012). (now and next)
- c) Participate in developing and implementing the *Welfare Standard for Cats* which includes best practice for trapping and euthanasia of stray and feral cats. (now and next)
- d) Ensure that cat control programs are coordinated strategically across different land-tenures, are integrated with local control programs of other species, complement relevant local cat management activities and are formalised under the *Biosecurity Act* where appropriate and necessary. (now and next)
- e) Support programs to educate the community about what a real feral cat is (i.e. on the far end of the wild and uncontrolled spectrum). (now)

Success indicators

- The number of feral cat management projects supported or undertaken with collaborating partners and application of best management practices.

7.6 Cat breeding and hoarding (permitting and animal welfare)

Background

The breeding of cats by unregistered breeders is an offence under the *Cat Management Act 2009*. The amendments to the Act will require a person who wishes to breed a cat to either be a member of a cat organisation or hold a permit to breed a cat. As with the *Dog Control Act 2000*, there will be a limit of four cats allowed to be kept on a property without a permit (exclusions will apply to members of a cat organisation; holders of a cat breeding permit; vet practices; cat boarding facilities; and approved cat foster carers).

Without professional management, keeping an excessive number of cats on a single property can compromise cat welfare and cause community conflict. Unless they are siblings from the same litter, keeping multiple cats can impact on their wellbeing and from a welfare perspective best practice is for households to keep only a single cat.

Cat hoarding is where individuals keep a very large number of cats as pets without the ability to properly house or care for them, while at the same time denying this inability and inadvertently compromising their welfare. Extreme situations of cat hoarding require careful management to ensure the welfare of both the cats and people involved.

This strategy recognises that achieving animal welfare objectives and responsible cat ownership is fundamental to uphold the right for cat ownership in Tasmania.

Desired outcome

For all cat breeding in the region to be only undertaken by registered or permitted breeders and animal welfare standards maintained including by discouraging the keeping of multiple cats and preventing cat hoarding.

Strategic directions

- a) Promote measures to ensure cat breeding is only by registered cat breeders and thereby stopping 'backyard breeding of cats'. (now)
- b) Develop and maintain publicly available listing of all registered cat breeders in the region. (now)
- c) Encourage community members to report suspected unauthorised cat breeding to ensure compliance with the *Cat Management Act 2009*. (now and next)
- d) Liaise with animal welfare organisations on suspected animal cruelty cases. (now)
- e) Provide information to the community on new legislative requirements regarding cat management including links to new legislation fact sheets and related resources. (now)
- f) Work towards developing Tasmanian cat breeding standards (Code of Practice or Welfare Standards for domestic pet ownership). (now)
- g) Explore options to develop a preventative and integrated response strategy for cat hoarding. (next and later)

Success indicators

- Number of registered and reported unregistered cat breeding cases.
- Number of reported instances of cat hoarding resolved successfully and outstanding cases.

7.7 Professional cat management capacity

Background

Responsibility for cat management in the northern region is shared across many organisations and is often undertaken as part of a broader range of responsibilities. Currently, resources for cat management in each individual organisation and local government area are very limited and a collaborative approach that makes best use of existing resources and expertise is considered essential.

Qualified and competent staff with the knowledge and tools to do a professional job will need to be developed incrementally over time to deliver the high standards of service expected by the communities of northern Tasmania.

Desired outcome

To have improved professional cat management capacity that is shared across all collaborating cat management partners in the northern region.

Strategic directions

- a) Focus on strengthening a collaborative approach across all organisations involved in cat management in the northern region to harness available resources and expertise. This could include exploring the option of introducing ‘cat rangers’ (or similar) that work across multiple municipalities. (next)
- b) Support development of a Welfare Standard or Code of Practice for responsible cat management to ensure consistent high professional standards are applied across the northern region. (now)
- c) Develop and deliver annual training to support implementation of the *Cat Management Act 2009* including for animal management officers regarding common law nuisance and humane cat control methods. (now)

Success indicators

- Number of “Rangers” appointed.
- Number of training sessions conducted.

7.8 Shared regional cat management facilities and resources

Background

Cat management facilities can be established to receive stray, lost and surrendered cats. Cats in their care will be scanned for microchips to establish ownership. Under the *Cat Management Act 2009* the facility is required to hold microchipped cats for five days to provide cat owners with time to look for lost pets. After this time the cat management facility may rehome, sell or euthanise the animal.

Cat management facilities are expensive to operate and not every community has access to a nearby facility. Experience elsewhere has shown that a shared facility serving multiple communities and operated by a suitable not-for-profit organisation with support from a network of voluntary temporary carers can be a viable approach. This approach could include a network of participating veterinarians, community-based organisations and councils working with volunteer carers and transporters to enable rural and remote communities to access shared regional facilities and cat management facilities. Potential collaborative cost sharing arrangements across the region are expected to make such an approach sustainable.

Many veterinarian practices receive healthy stray cats from the community which they temporarily house and attempt to find the owners. The preferred practice is for these animals to be presented directly to a cat management facility as soon as practicable.

The amendments to the Act allow cat management facilities to nominate a person, business or organisation to hold and care for cats on their behalf.

Desired outcome

To progressively develop a network of partners to enable rural and remote communities’ access to shared regional resources including cat management facilities to service the northern region.

Strategic directions

- a) Work with cat management facilities to identify potential partners, locations, and arrangements for local cat management services across the region (this includes undertaking a cost benefit analysis and developing a business case for alternative delivery models). (now)
- b) Consider maintaining temporary holding facilities as a short-term alternative to impoundment. (now)
- c) Progressively establish a network of temporary holding facilities, voluntary cat foster carers and transporters to support efficient operation of the shared cat management facility. (next)
- d) Promote the use of cat management facilities through existing communication channels. (now)
- e) Develop and promote consistent cat receiving guidelines for veterinarian practices. (now)
- f) Ensure that all cats are de-sexed and microchipped prior to being released from a cat management facility. (now)
- g) Contribute where required to developing and implementing a state-wide Code of Practice for cat management facilities. (now)

Success indicators

- Access to cat management facilities, cost of operation, number of cats received and outcome trends.
- Code of Practice for cat management facilities.
- Business case and feasibility study completed.

7.9 Voluntary compliance

Background

The *Cat Management Act 2009* and Cat Management Plan identify a range of obligations for responsible cat ownership and provide the option for councils to establish additional powers where necessary to support greater compliance with community expectations. Voluntary compliance, where individual cat owners do the right thing and voluntarily meet their legal and moral obligations to care for and contain their cats, is by far the most practical and preferred approach. Stronger enforcement action (e.g. fines and prosecution) is only appropriate where there have been serious breaches of the rules (for example, deliberate, repeated failure to appropriately care for animals).

A long-term education campaign will be required to change the culture and lift the understanding and knowledge of the community of the new state-wide legislative requirements applying to cats. This approach acknowledges that some confusion continues to exist in the community, including about the difference between dog and cat management requirements.

Desired outcome

For all cat owners and community members to voluntarily comply with their legal and moral rights and obligations for responsible cat ownership and management.

Strategic directions

- a) Continue to focus on education and preventative measures to help the majority of people do the right thing most of the time to reduce the likelihood of cat related conflict and issues. (now)
- b) Use clear consistent communications across multiple channels to promote cat ownership rights and responsibilities and encourage responsible cat management by all parties and high levels of voluntary compliance with community expectations. This includes using communication networks with cat interests and local and state government communication networks. (now and next)
- c) Continue to liaise with DPIPWE around compliance roles and responsibilities across all organisations involved in cat management in the northern region. (now and next)
- d) Monitor rates of voluntary compliance and consider the cost benefit analysis of implementing stronger compliance mechanisms at the regional level to address identified significant issues. (now and next)

e) Subject to available resources, undertake proactive compliance efforts where a risk assessment has highlighted priority threats to significant conservation community and commercial assets. (next)

Success indicators

- Reported rates of non-compliance and likely reasons.
- Knowledge of cat management legislation in community improved and supported.

7.10 Improved knowledge to better inform cat management

Background

Improved knowledge about the number, distribution and behaviour of cats is essential to designing effective programs to manage and minimise their impact on highly valued conservation, community and commercial assets in the region and generally achieve responsible cat ownership and management. Existing research about cats and cat ownership in Tasmania is limited and cannot be applied to all environments and different communities (including cat owner attitudes, behaviours and barriers to behaviour change). Filling these gaps in knowledge will be a continuing challenge to ensure that available resources are directed towards the highest priorities using the most cost-effective management actions. Consistent approaches to collecting basic information across all parts of the region will be an important first step to better understand the scale of existing problems and to identify practical long-term solutions.

Desired outcome

To have cat management in the region guided by best available science and regionally relevant data to support evidence-based decision making.

Strategic directions

- a) Work towards standard data collection and reporting systems so that all organisations involved in cat management in the northern region have shared access to basic information (e.g. community complaints to councils, surrendered cats, microchipping rates etc.). (now)
- b) Identify priority knowledge gaps and pragmatic options to fill these gaps with qualitative and quantitative research and monitoring (e.g. facilitating university projects). (now)
- c) Where possible use monitoring strategies before, during and after any targeted cat management activity to measure impact and effectiveness. (now and next)
- d) Participate in state-wide and national programs to keep abreast of developments and continually improve evidence-based decision making for cat management. (now and next)
- e) Participate in citizen science projects for data collection related to cat home ranges and impacts in urban environments and related projects. (next)
- f) Promote the voluntary use of reporting portals such as *FeralCatScan* for monitoring feral and stray cats by the community. (now)

Success indicators

- Number of cat management organisations using consistent data collection processes and reporting mechanisms in northern region.
- Adequacy of information for evidence-based decision making.

8. Additional resources

For more information on responsible cat ownership and management refer to tassiecat.com and dpipwe.tas.gov.au/invasive-species

Commonwealth of Australia (2015) *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats*. Department of the Environment, Canberra

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