

**EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL**

**PUBLIC FORUM**

**Ordinary Meeting of Council on 19 September 2023**

Please refer to the minutes of the [Council Meeting](#) for outcomes of the agenda items.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Subject/Comments</b>	<b>Presentation Provided</b>	<b>Hybrid</b>
Louise Webb	NOM23/004 Advocacy to NSW Government to amend the Companion Animals Act 1998 regarding pet cat containment	Attached	In Person
Robyn Bradley	NOM23/004 Advocacy to NSW Government to amend the Companion Animals Act 1998 regarding pet cat containment	Attached	Council Staff presenting on behalf of.
Alan Nash	NOM23/004 Advocacy to NSW Government to amend the Companion Animals Act 1998 regarding pet cat containment	Not provided.	In Person
Shane O'Keefe	NOM23/004 Advocacy to NSW Government to amend the Companion Animals Act 1998 regarding pet cat containment	Not provided.	In Person

## **EUROBODALLA SHIRE COUNCIL MEETING 19 SEPTEMBER 2023**

### **PUBLIC FORUM CONTRIBUTION – LOUISE WEBB**

#### **NOM23/004 ADVOCACY TO NSW GOVERNMENT TO AMEND THE COMPANION ANIMALS ACT 1998 REGARDING PET CAT CONTAINMENT**

Good afternoon, councillors. I would like to speak today in support of Councillor Worthington's motion, to advocate for local government power to apply rules around cat containment, for the provision of resources to fund related policies, and for a statewide "Safe Cat Safe Wildlife" campaign.

Australians are great pet owners, with 28.7 million pets nationwide. Sixty-nine per cent of households have a pet, and 33 per cent of those have a cat. Cats make wonderful companion animals, which is why they have evolved from being handy mouse catchers to family members. Cats were greatly valued by the ancient Egyptians, and are seen today as symbols of good fortune in many cultures.

Of course, cats are not native to Australia. When they arrived in this country from Europe in the early 1800s, they had an immediate and devastating impact on the existing fauna. According to an article by several academics\* and published on the University of Sydney website in 2020, cats have played a leading role in most of Australia's 34 mammal extinctions since 1788, and are a big reason why populations of at least 123 other threatened native species are dropping.

These same academics compiled the results of 66 different studies which showed that pet cats are responsible for an average kill rate of 186 mammals, birds and reptiles, mostly native species, per roaming cat per year. That adds up to 390 million animals a year.

Cats are killing machines. Humans introduced them to this continent. Humans keep them as pets. Humans must take responsibility for ensuring the welfare of both our pets and our precious wildlife.

All roaming cats are a danger to themselves and to the creatures they prey upon.

During my work with RSPCA Eurobodalla, I saw time and again the vulnerability of cats in our modern world. Cats wandering around a neighbourhood faced threats from dogs, cars, snakes, other cats and toxic chemicals. They could be stolen, or injured or killed by people who dislike them or their owners. Two horrific incidents have stuck in my memory: one poor cat which was fortunately rescued from inside a wheelie bin half filled with water, and another, very distressing incident where a pet cat was savagely killed by his owner's neighbour.

Cats can live happily when contained within an owner's property, ideally with an enclosed area which provides access to the outside. Pet cats should also have suitable enrichment opportunities such as toys, hidden food, scratch poles and hiding places.

Even cats that have been used to living out of doors can adapt to life principally inside. Some cats also enjoy walking on a lead.

According to the Humane Society of the United States, indoor cats live up to four times longer than those allowed to roam.

On 7 September, Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek announced a strategy for dealing with feral cats, due to their impact on wildlife. The Government's draft plan, currently open for public comment, includes the following proposals:

- Develop incentive programs for registration, identification and desexing packages, especially in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.
- Work with local communities to build support for expanding areas requiring 24/7 cat containment. This is likely to include collaborations with local vets and RSPCA to disseminate information on caring for indoor and contained cats.
- Establish cat-free suburbs near areas of high biodiversity value; this is most tractable in new housing developments.

The Minister is quoted in her media release as saying: "If we don't act now, our native animals don't stand a chance".

Domestic cats can easily become feral through human neglect and mistreatment. I have seen many instances of people moving house and leaving their pet cat behind. I've also witnessed blatant disregard for the NSW law requiring cats to be desexed by four months of age, unless an annual fee is

paid. This is despite the availability of help with the cost of desexing available from animal welfare charities. .

The ACT has introduced laws requiring containment to apply to cats born after 1 July last year; it also has 17 cat-free suburbs. In Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, local councils have the power to make laws around cat curfews. This is a power that belongs in the hands of local government, so that it can be applied according to the particular needs of their areas.

Cats should not be demonised for doing what they were made to do. The responsibility for dealing with this issue rests with us.

We cannot go on closing our eyes to the threat to our native animals posed by cats, when the solution is so easy. Pet ownership comes with responsibility. During my time as an RSPCA volunteer, I saw too much irresponsible behaviour from dog and cat owners who saw their pets as property, which needed little care and no maintenance. As a society, we owe it to the animals who provide us with wonderful companionship to look after their needs as sentient beings, and at the same time to care for the unique environment we have been blessed with in this country, and in our beautiful shire.

How many millions of native animals did we lose during the fires? How can we justify letting more of them be killed? Keeping cats safe at home is a great first step to addressing a serious issue.

I would urge all councillors to support Councillor Worthington's motion.

*\*Article written by Jaana Dielenberg, University of Queensland; Association Professor Brett Murphy, Charles Darwin University; Professor Chris Dickman, University of Sydney; Professor John Woinarski, Charles Darwin University; Leigh-Ann Wooley, Charles Darwin University; Associate Professor Mike Calver, Murdoch University; Professor Sarah Legge, Australian National University.*

## Robyn Bradley - Public Forum Presentation

Our street in North Narooma is adjacent to a nature reserve and zoned for rural and environmental living. Native birds and marsupials abound including a prolific group of lyrebirds that forage in our gardens and delight us with their calls. But long term residents note the gradual decline in numbers, the mockery of laws tolerating wandering pets and lack of council driven feral animal interventions.

After the 19/20 bushfires the area felt like an ark but when our previously friendly neighbours got a cat, the entire conviviality of the street changed. The cat is allowed to roam dawn to dusk and we learnt the futility of legal influence through multiple engagements with the council rangers.

Current laws tolerate daytime killer cats. A dog has to be controlled on a property but a cat can do what it wants and owner condones.

There is another home whose cat is often seen after dark. Illegal but, without photographic evidence, another behaviour impossible to curtail without trapping.

Because of this our street is no longer harmonious. A toxin has set in between the residents who allow their cats to roam and those who find their kill in yards or nearby bush and whose managed dogs bark and stress watching a cat prowl unimpeded in their view.

There are enough challenges for our native fauna without continuing tolerance for introduced predators. The challenges to maintaining healthy and happy communities also abound. Clear rules facilitate community harmony.

ESC can lead the way in NSW for but your rangers will also need tools to bring about the necessary correction.