

TASMANIAN CAT MANAGEMENT PLAN

SUMMARY

June 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tasmanian Cat Management Plan represents the first comprehensive and collaborative approach to managing cats in Tasmania. The Plan recognises that cat management is a shared responsibility across all levels of government, business and the community and includes actions under seven objectives that are summarised below.

This Plan has been prepared by the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) with the guidance of the Tasmanian Cat Management Reference Group, representing the key cat management stakeholder groups in the State. The Reference Group was established by the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Jeremy Rockliff MP, to provide advice on the development of the Plan.

Members of the Reference Group represent a range of organisations with a direct interest in the management of cats:

- Australian Veterinary Association, Tasmanian Division
- Cat Association of Tasmania
- Ten Lives Cat Centre (formerly Hobart Cat Centre)
- Landcare Tasmania Inc.
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Natural Resource Management regional bodies (represented by NRM South)
- RSPCA
- Tasmanian Conservation Trust Inc.
- Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association
- University of Tasmania

2. CAT MANAGEMENT IN TASMANIA – WHY DO WE NEED A CAT MANAGEMENT PLAN?

People respond to cats in different ways and they can be many things to different people: much-loved pets valued for enjoyment and companionship; useful animals that control rats and other vermin; nuisance animals that annoy neighbours; and feral pests that spread disease and impact on native wildlife and agriculture. The polarised views in the community about cats make their management a challenging and often emotive issue. Despite cats being in Tasmania for more than 200 years, our understanding of the ecological role cats play as predators and as competitors with other species, both native and introduced, is not strong. This limits the effectiveness of attempts to manage many cat-related issues. Therefore improving our understanding of cats and their impacts, and of the most effective management and control techniques, is critical to ensure that our available resources are used effectively and efficiently.

3. PROPOSALS TO ACHIEVE BETTER CAT MANAGEMENT IN TASMANIA

This Plan recognises that cat management is a complex and community-wide issue and all sectors of the community have a role in managing the impacts of cats, both feral and domestic. It also recognises the significant impact that feral cats have. The Plan acknowledges that given there is a self-sustaining feral cat population in Tasmania, it is not feasible to totally eradicate feral cats across the State with current resources and techniques, and therefore implementation of the Plan will require a long-term effort and commitment.

The Plan is designed to be flexible, providing the ability to implement the actions over an extended period.

Successful implementation of the Plan will require all levels of Government to participate. Initiatives are being developed to strengthen the involvement of both State and Local Government in the management of cats. Additionally, the Tasmanian and Australian Governments are working together to create opportunities to leverage increased outcomes from their shared resources.

The Plan is based on seven objectives containing actions focused towards improving the management of domestic, stray and feral cats:

OBJECTIVE 1: *Tasmanian pet cat owners manage their cats responsibly*

This objective focuses on educating and increasing awareness in cat owners about their responsibilities and the potential impacts of their pets on the environment, with the intention of improving levels of responsible cat ownership. This objective is also linked to Objective 2 (community awareness) and Objective 6 with some of the amendments being proposed to the legislation for the management of cats.

Desired Outcome: Pet cat owners have a higher level of awareness of the potential negative impacts of roaming owned cats and stray cats and, act responsibly to prevent their cats contributing to those impacts.

OBJECTIVE 2: *Increased community awareness, participation and commitment in cat management*

Successful management of cat impacts requires community support and involvement. The nature of the issue requires the community to understand the most effective approaches to managing the impacts from the feral and stray cat populations in Tasmania. This in turn relies on an awareness of those impacts, the range of techniques available and ultimately adoption of those techniques through community led and supported cat management initiatives.

This objective is closely linked with the other objectives of this Plan, in particular responsible cat ownership (Objective 1) and the development of a Communications Plan described in Objective 7. The actions to achieve increased community awareness,

involvement and commitment in broader cat management focus on integrating effective information development and delivery.

Desired Outcome: The Tasmanian community is aware of the Plan and is actively participating in programs that help reduce the impacts of feral and stray cats.

OBJECTIVE 3: *Best practice techniques are used to guide the planning, management and control of stray and feral cats*

It is important that management and control programs consider all options and have a good understanding of the extent and nature of the impacts being caused; what the program aims to achieve and how; the likely outcomes of any given program; the most effective and efficient methods to employ; and the level of community and stakeholder support. Approved biosecurity programs under the proposed Biosecurity Act can be used to formalise such programs for the management of feral cats as a biosecurity risk or impact. Such programs can be initiated by industry, landowners or the community or by Government.

The Plan will seek to ensure formal criteria are used to guide decision-making based on appropriate principles, and the Plan will also seek to ensure relevant government, community and industry are aware of and implement these criteria in undertaking project development and funding.

Desired Outcomes: Effective, efficient and humane control and management techniques are developed and implemented to manage stray and feral cats.

OBJECTIVE 4: *Improved knowledge about feral, stray and domestic cats to better inform management*

Despite current research findings there are still significant knowledge gaps in the role cats play in the Tasmanian environment. Research projects have published a range of findings related to the impact of cats in Tasmania, yet these often relate to defined geographic areas and cannot be reliably applied to other environments. There is an evident need to expand data to different ecological systems and environments to improve the efficacy of cat management projects. Where cat management actions are employed based on assumptions from other study areas, the reliability of projects and their outcomes may be limited.

A key objective of this Plan is improving the knowledge of feral cats, their impacts and the most effective control techniques, both direct and indirect, to ensure resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Desired outcome: Knowledge gaps about the distribution, impacts and behavior of feral cats are addressed.

OBJECTIVE 5: *Minimise impacts of cats in areas with important conservation values and agricultural assets*

Environmental assets will be assessed, and where they coincide with the presence or likely occurrence of feral cats, become priorities for cat management programs. A similar process will be undertaken for agricultural areas that are particularly sensitive to cat-related impacts. Consultation will be initiated with industry groups in relation to protecting primary industry assets, and environmental stakeholders in relation to protecting important conservation values.

Once priority areas have been identified, targeted control programs can be developed. Community-led action has a clear role in ensuring this objective can achieve the on-ground goal of protecting values and assets.

Desired Outcomes: The impact of feral cats on areas containing important conservation values and priority agricultural assets is reduced.

OBJECTIVE 6: *Undertake legislative change to create an effective framework for managing cats and support other objectives*

Strengthening existing regulatory powers for the management of cats will occur through a new legislative framework that includes both the existing *Cat Management Act* and the proposed Tasmanian Biosecurity Act. Under this framework, feral cats will be dealt with under the proposed Biosecurity Act, whilst all other cat management would remain under the existing legislation. It is expected that this framework will provide greater clarity around roles and responsibilities and facilitate better management outcomes for all stakeholders. The amendments will also support a process to facilitate involvement by relevant statutory authorities.

Desired Outcome: To improve the legislative framework that underpins effective cat management to support greater levels of responsible cat ownership.

OBJECTIVE 7: *The roles and responsibilities related to cat management are clearly defined and understood by the Tasmanian community*

Cat management should be a shared responsibility amongst the Tasmanian community, both Local and State Government, industry bodies, landowners, pet owners and broader community groups. Having a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholder groups, particularly Local and State Government, is crucial in achieving effective cat management outcomes.

The proposed legislative framework for managing cats will ultimately provide for State and Local Government to determine the highest priorities for individual councils in relation to enforcement. The State Government will have responsibility for administering the proposed Biosecurity Act along with the *Cat Management Act*. Local Government has the power to enforce the legislation along with other animal control responsibilities within their municipality to the degree they consider necessary or relevant and can resource.

Desired Outcome: All stakeholders have a clear understanding of, and are able to exercise, their responsibilities in relation to the legislative framework for the management of cats.