

31st August 2023

Lane Cove Council
C/- Mr Jeff Culleton
Co-ordinator Bushland

Email: jculleton@lanecove.nsw.gov.au

RE: Introduction of Wildlife Protection Areas

Dear Mayor & Councilors,

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association established to consult with government in advocating for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

ACA is currently recognised by the Office of Local Government and Department of Primary Industries as a key stakeholder in the review of NSW’s Animal Welfare Act and Companion Animals Act. ACA is directly consulting and advising during reviews, including the future revision of Codes of Practice for the keeping of all pets.

Nationally, ACA is finding Local Councils utilising ‘restrictive-response’ surveys in order to claim public consultation has been undertaken while ensuring a specific outcome by the use of Yes/No style questions and/or open text boxes with limited characters – in this case ONLY 255 characters – thereby restricting the feedback possible.

Animal Care Australia also notes that in order to provide feedback one has to Register as a local resident by providing a postcode restricted to just your Shire. This implies Council is not seeking or willing to accept consultation from national or state-based organisations such as Animal Care Australia. Would Council accept a response from the RSPCA? If so, how so?

To this end, ACA would like to make the following statements in reference to the current Council Proposal:

While Animal Care Australia supports the intent of the Proposal the lack of information about Council’s intentions on how the proposal will be implemented is concerning.

The proposal/background information on the HaveYourSay page is lacking any detail other than a link to the Invasive Species Council’s statistics relating to how many native animals are killed by cats each year.

It outlines some of the dangers urban life has with regard to roaming cats but does not go so far as to suggest containment possibilities for owned cats, it just states that the aim will be to reunite pet cats with their owners if caught in bushland areas.

Whilst the proposal has the intention to reunite any cats caught in the bushland areas, the fact is that stray cats and colony cats are generally not microchipped or information is out of date. If owners are not able to be identified or located, this will mean that the cats will enter the Pound System and there is a high likelihood of the cat being euthanised if not claimed by an authorised rescue or sold.

It is unfortunate that not all cat owners are as responsible as they need to be to ensure their cats are microchipped, desexed and kept away from wildlife. This subject is challenging as animals are being killed in either scenario – wildlife by cats, and cats via being unclaimed pets, strays or feral colony cats and kittens.

Cats do not ask to be let loose in bushland but the outcome of this initiative is not going to improve unless there are significant changes in the mindset of the humans who are not taking ownership and responsibility for their cats. By removing one cat, you are removing the immediate threat to wildlife - but it won't take long for another colony or cat to take the territory.

Cats are not required to be contained under the Companions Animals Act or Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, and by enforcing this proposal you are requiring the people living within your council catchment area to abide by a specific council requirement which is not supported by any other legislation in NSW relating to animal welfare or the prevention of animal cruelty.

The proposal by Lane Cove Council will impact not only the residents and cats inside the council boundaries but also those outside of it whose animals might stray across boundary lines.

Animal Care Australia accept and agree that outdoor cats face daily dangers of being injured, killed, contracting diseases, stolen and being poisoned. Animal Care Australia appreciate that the sentiment is to provide better welfare outcomes to cats within your local government area, but as noted above, the consequences for those cats who find themselves captured and removed from bushland is uncertain.

Animal Care Australia supports cat containment that requires cats to remain on their owners property at all times as curfews have limited impact on the issues relating to roaming cats unless it is a 24/7 containment. However, there are some items that need serious consideration and any changes to local animal management laws should provide an avenue for greater consultation and feedback.

- Cats that have been allowed to roam need time to adjust to be confined and it may have detrimental welfare impacts if the cat is not allowed time to become accustomed to the changes
- Costs of installing cat runs or other methods are expensive and this should be taken into consideration in the current cost of living crisis
- Council should provide assistance for cat owners wishing to construct or instal appropriate containment enclosures. Councils should recognise the need to consult with all residents in their catchment area and to provide assistance with approval processes for the construction of enclosures etc.

Therefore, how will Council protect owned cats with non-functioning microchips? Will cats automatically be deemed 'feral' if no microchip reading can be ascertained, regardless of the behaviour of the cat?

There is also no information regarding how cats in those designated areas will be caught/removed. Will it be via trapping – requiring dedicated manpower to manage effectively - or will council be utilising baiting? The latter does not discriminate between owned or unowned animals, nor does it exclude native animals not actually targeted.

As outlined above, there are better management plans that could be proposed/enacted, such as cat containment legislation requiring pet cats being restricted to owners' properties, and thorough targeted educational campaigns to inform owners of their obligations, not only to their cats' health and wellbeing, but to the local area as a whole.

There are a great number of questions to be answered and yet cannot be addressed by a survey that asks 3 questions.

We respectfully request a meeting with you and look forward to hearing from you regarding a suitable time to discuss the now urgent matter.

Please do not hesitate to make contact if we can assist further.

Kind regards,



Michael Donnelly
President
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