



# Australian Academy of Science

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Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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By email [Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary,

## Australian Academy of Science Submission to the Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia

The Australian Academy of Science welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia.

Invasive species are a major threat to Australia's biodiversity. Invasive species, cats are the most damaging due to their ubiquity and presence in all terrestrial habitats, their voracious predation habits, support of dependent diseases such as

Australians trust science and trust scientists. This trust has developed because the scientific process is based on fidelity and transparency to data, a robust peer review process, and a respect for the expertise embedded in scientists and scientific organisations and Australian universities.

The hallmarks of good science are demonstrated expertise, accurate and unbiased reporting, and a valuable research is that which appears in peer-reviewed literature and is open to examination and critique. This openness builds trust and this trust is essential allowing scientists to expand their thinking and their hypotheses, leading to a deeper understanding of the world. Through greater understanding better public policy is made.

## Science and cats

### Detailed knowledge of cat prevalence and impacts (TOR a, b)

Cats were introduced to Australia in 1788 and spread rapidly across the continent. They are now present on over 99.9% of the mainland, and 100% of the islands. The population of feral cats in towns and cities in Australia is over 700,000. The population of domestic cats in Australia is 3.8 million.<sup>2</sup>

Cats are internationally recognised as a threat to species conservation efforts. In the last 400 years, cats in Australia has the worst record of mammal extinctions in modern times compared with any other country. Of the 34 mammal species that have become extinct in the past 250 years, cats have been a primary contributor to 25 of these extinctions.<sup>5,6</sup>

Cats continue to cause declines in native species. A recent series of articles provides reliable estimates of predation by cats on frogs,<sup>7</sup> reptiles,<sup>8</sup> birds,<sup>9</sup> invertebrates<sup>10</sup> and mammals.<sup>11</sup> Cats have been found to prey on up to 151 native mammal species, including 50 species listed as threatened under the IUCN or Australian legislation.<sup>12</sup>

Cats also act as vectors for pathogens such as *Toxoplasma gondii*, *Toxocara cati*, *Sarcocystis* and *Bartonella henselae*, which cause infection and disease in people, and inflict substantial costs to livestock production.<sup>13</sup>

The impacts of cats in Australia, including through predation, competition, and as vectors for disease have recently been comprehensively summarised in the scientific literature. See, for example, *Cats in Australia: Companion and Killer* by Woinarski, Legge and Dickman.<sup>5</sup>

Although the threat abatement plan focuses on predation by feral cats, pet cats are also significant predators.<sup>14</sup> Any strategy to manage cat predation should consider pet and stray cats as well as ferals.

Cat populations are inflated to high levels in areas that support high densities of introduced prey species such as rabbits.<sup>15</sup> Cat abundance and impacts can be moderated by the presence of other predators such as foxes and dingoes.<sup>16</sup> Because of this, cat management must be integrated with the management of different species.





Evolve the current threat abatement plan into a nationally coordinated and implemented plan for the strategic management of cats, that includes specific targets for native species conservation at identified locations. Effective controls for cats will be long term and multifaceted (i.e., using a combination of conservation fencing, poison

## References

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