



NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF THE ACT INC.

Nature Conservation

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

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Via epsddcomms@act.gov.au

Submission on the Draft ACT Cat Plan

The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) welcomes the release of the draft ACT Cat Plan (the Plan) and the opportunity to comment on its content.

The NPA ACT is a community-based conservation organisation with more than fifty-nine years of working to protect our natural environment through an active outings and work party program; participation in Parkcare activities; an extensive publication program; public meetings and conferences and engagement with government policies and programs. Given the potential that cats can have on the environment, this is an area that the NPA ACT has maintained an interest in.

Introduction

The NPA ACT commends the ACT Government for producing a comprehensive and well researched plan with links to informative references. The plan includes a balanced message about the positive benefits of pet ownership, the owner's responsibility for the welfare of the pet and toward the broader community and the natural environment.

The NPA ACT supports the vision, objectives and the eight strategies of this plan as well as 24 of the 26 actions. The NPA ACT would make the following general comments on the other 2 sections.

Time frame for implementing actions (p10)

The proposed short term actions (1-2 years) are appropriate except for a proposal to *increase cat-free conservation area –extend predator proof fence (Action 22)*. As discussed further below, the NPA ACT does not support Action 22.

The medium term actions (3-5 years) are appropriate for the time frame.

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Long term actions (6-10 years). Given that Action 15 *Consider options for how and when to expand the area of compulsory cat containment* is one of the short term 1-2 year actions, it is a rather lengthy extension of the implementation of the Plan for it to take an additional 4 or more years to move to action 16 *Expand area declared (mandatory) cat containment*. Depending on which option or option mix for the expansion of cat containment is chosen surely some expanded containment could start to happen before 2025.

Monitoring reporting and review (p10)

The NPA ACT supports the proposed actions under this heading and looks forward to the annual reports and the five year review.

Comment on specific Strategies and Actions

1. Promote responsible cat ownership. Strongly support actions 1 and 3 but is concerned about a potential for the over commitment of resources for action 2. There is existing well understood and recorded research within Australia and around the world and therefore funding for this action should be only to cover the specific gaps relevant to the ACT.

2. Improve compliance and enforcement. Strongly support actions 4 and 5 including cat registration.

3. Reduce number of semi-owned and unowned domestic cats. Strongly support actions 6, 7, 8 and 9. The problem of semi-owned and unowned domestic cat populations being sustained by people sympathetic to the cats situation is an age old one. In the past it has often been associated with places where food is processed –in the belief that rodents are suppressed or around institutions and homes where pets are not permitted. There is an opportunity for research, community engagement and publicity to determine the specific circumstances for the existence of semi-owned and unowned cat populations in the ACT.

4. Continuously improve domestic cat welfare and management practices. Strongly support actions 10, 11, 12 and 13.

5. Expand cat containment. Strongly support actions 14, 15, 16 and 17 and, in particular, the NPA ACT wholly supports the rollout of cat containment across the ACT.

In regard to Action 15 *Consider options for how and when to expand the area of compulsory cat containment*. The NPA ACT favours options A and B over the introduction of containment measures only for new pet cats after a specified date (option C). The “grandfathering” process, option B would make the benefits of city

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wide cat containment slow to appear, would lead to misreporting of non-compliance and make other actions under the Plan difficult to implement. Option A has many advantages, the refinement of the process for proceeding with containment, the assessment of the process as it proceeds from suburb to suburb and an understanding of resource requirements and public engagement. Option C would require a surge of resources from the ACT Government for publicity, community outreach/contact, responding to non-compliance reporting and enforcement requirements. If introduced too quickly, the animal welfare organisations would be tested with a rise in surrendered animals and private installers of cat enclosures may have difficulty in meeting demand.

6. Reduce impacts of feral cats. Strongly support actions 18,19,20 and 21. The NPA ACT does not support action 22 *increase cat-free conservation area –extend predator proof fence.* for the following reasons.

- There is only a brief mention of this in the Plan, being *Expanding the Sanctuary will reduce impacts of feral pest animals, including cats, and allow for successful reintroduction of native wildlife within the larger fenced area (Box 6).* There are no details provided about cost of installation or ongoing management requirements.
- The extension of the Mulligans Flat Sanctuary enclosure will be straight forward and very effective in reducing both feral and domestic cat impact at that site but does not progress the complex and costly process of introducing cat containment across the city or removing semi-owned and unowned domestic cats from circulation or have any impact on the feral cat population across the majority of the ACT's conservation estate.
- This is a worthy project but the cost should not be included within the Cat Plan.

We therefore believe predator proof fence construction should be outside the scope of the Cat Plan 2019-29.

The Sanctuary at Tidbinbilla nature reserve, if feral cats are still present, offers the opportunity for protecting high value environmental assets from feral cats and trialling and improving the cost-effectiveness of control methods in a more densely wooded environment.

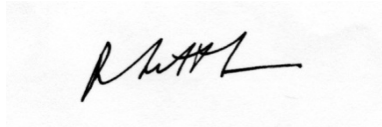
7. Engage rural landholders in improved cat management. Strongly support actions 23, 24, 25, and 26

8. Reduce risks to human health. Strongly support action 26

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Should you require any further information regarding the NPA ACT's input, please do not hesitate to contact the NPA ACT office, attention of Mr Rod Griffiths, Convener, NPA ACT Environment Sub-committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rod Griffiths', is centered on a light-colored rectangular background.

Rod Griffiths
Convener,
Environment Sub-committee
National Parks Association of the ACT

28 June 2019