

# VICTORIAN CAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

2025-2035



We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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# CONTENTS

<b>Minister’s Message</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
Managing cats in Victoria	5
Understanding different cat populations	6
Cat management challenges	7
Why is a Cat Management Strategy necessary?	9
Purpose	9
Guiding Principles	10
Vision	11
Scope	11
Key partners and stakeholders	12
Themes and actions summary	14
Implementation	16
Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework	17
<b>Themes and Actions</b>	<b>18</b>
Theme 1: Promote cat welfare and responsible cat ownership	19
Theme 2: Increase cat desexing rates	20
Theme 3: Expand cat containment	22
Theme 4: Reduce the impacts of semi-owned and unowned cats	24
Theme 5: Manage feral cat populations and impacts	26
Theme 6: Improve collaboration and information sharing	29
Theme 7: Improve laws and processes	30
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>32</b>
Overview of Victorian cat management framework	33
Resources	35





# MINISTER'S MESSAGE



**I am proud to present the Victorian Cat Management Strategy (the Strategy), a comprehensive, long-term plan designed to improve cat management across the state.**

The first of its kind in Victoria, this Strategy addresses a number of key challenges while creating opportunities for positive, long-term change.

The Strategy emphasises the Victorian Government’s unwavering commitment to promoting responsible cat ownership, while also protecting our environment and native wildlife from the impacts of cats.

The Strategy recognises that cats hold a special place in our homes as beloved companions. However, as cat populations grow, so do the challenges surrounding their welfare, their impact on wildlife and public spaces, and the increasing demand on councils, shelters, pounds and other animal care organisations.

Developed through extensive research, expert advice, and thorough consultation, this Strategy reflects the valuable input of a broad range of stakeholders, including councils, animal welfare organisations, land managers, conservation groups, veterinary professionals, cat owners and the wider Victorian community.

This Strategy is built on seven key themes and outlines 24 actions for delivery, focusing on:

- Responsible cat ownership
- Increased desexing rates
- Expanding cat containment
- Urban cat population control
- Feral cat management
- Enhanced collaboration and information sharing
- Improved laws and processes.

Importantly, the Strategy recognises that cat management is a shared responsibility. Success in this effort will require collaboration across all levels of government—local, state, and federal—alongside community members, industry professionals, and relevant organisations. Together, we must foster a culture of responsible cat ownership that protects both animal welfare and the unique biodiversity of Victoria.

With a strong emphasis on community engagement and cooperation, this Strategy aims to bring about lasting changes in how we care for and manage cats across Victoria.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed to the development of this Strategy, including the many professionals, organisations, and members of the public who shared their valuable insights and expertise. Your contributions have been vital in shaping a Strategy that will guide us towards a future where the welfare of cats, the protection of wildlife, and the interests of the broader community are effectively managed.

**The Hon. Ros Spence**  
Minister for Agriculture





# INTRODUCTION



# Managing cats in Victoria

**Victoria has a comprehensive cat management framework in place, with ongoing efforts to improve it. The main groups involved in cat management are state government departments and agencies, local councils, shelters, community foster care networks and animal welfare organisations. Each of these groups have different roles, responsibilities, and challenges.**

**The Victorian Government** sets the overall framework for cat management through laws, codes of practice, policies and plans. The framework is based on the principles of animal welfare, responsible ownership, environmental protection, and community safety and amenity. The state government offers financial support to councils and other groups through Animal Welfare Fund Grants, which have been used to provide low-cost, accessible veterinary and desexing services to Victorians. In addition to these initiatives, the Victorian Government has a broader duty to manage feral cats on Crown land, like National Parks and their negative impacts on biodiversity, including native and threatened species.

**Councils** are responsible for implementing and enforcing domestic cat management laws. This includes registration, identification, desexing, containment, impoundment, and reuniting lost pets with their owners. Councils can tailor domestic animal services to the needs of their community by setting registration fees, as well as through Domestic Animal Management Plans (DAMPs), and introducing local laws like cat-free zones, cat containment, mandatory desexing and pet limits. Council authorised officers have powers to enter properties, seize animals, issue fines and prosecute matters in court.

**Animal welfare organisations** play a vital role in domestic cat management by providing shelter, care, adoption, and education services. They also collaborate with councils and the state government to improve domestic cat welfare and reduce cat overpopulation. In addition, RSPCA Victoria inspectors hold powers to prosecute illegal breeding and animal cruelty offences.

These organisations face significant emotional and financial strain due to the large number of cats that are impounded, adopted or euthanised each year. A more detailed overview of the current management framework is provided in the Appendix.

**Cat owners** play an essential role in responsible cat management in Victoria. By taking these key steps: desexing, registering, microchipping, and keeping their cat contained within their property, owners significantly contribute to several positive outcomes. This includes ensuring their cat's safety and wellbeing, protecting native wildlife from predation, reducing the number of unwanted cats entering shelters, and fostering positive relationships with neighbours. Successful cat management in Victoria relies on a shared responsibility by all stakeholders involved in cat management, especially cat owners.

# Understanding different cat populations

Whether found in your home, backyard, street, industrial estate, farm, or national park, all cats in Australia are the same species: *Felis catus*, commonly referred to as the domestic cat.

As their name implies, domestic cats are meant to live in domestic environments with humans, relying on them for care, food, shelter and companionship.

Domesticated from wildcat ancestors around 7500 BC, domestic cats have undergone relatively few changes in anatomy and behaviour. This means they can survive in the wild and remain extremely effective hunters.

Globally, the role of cats as pets, pests or natural pest controls varies based on cultural and ecological contexts, which sparks ongoing debates about their management. In Australia, cats are an introduced species that can have significant impact on ecosystems when they move outside the domestic environment.

All cats, if given the chance, will hunt and kill small animals (both native and introduced) at any time of day. Even well-fed pet cats maintain a strong instinct to hunt<sup>1</sup>.

To manage different cat populations effectively and humanely, diverse approaches are needed. Therefore, categories like pet, feral, and stray (among others) are often used, even though they can sometimes cause confusion depending on location and perspective.

Victoria's *Domestic Animals Act 1994* refers only to cats and dogs, meaning the species *Felis catus* and *Canis familiaris*. The Act makes a distinction for cats

only in the cases of wild, uncontrollable, or diseased cats, for the purpose of seizure and euthanasia (s.84O).

This strategy adopts a classification system based on a cat's relationship with humans. However, other jurisdictions and stakeholders may use their own classification systems. The classification approach used in the strategy is outlined in the accompanying text box.

It's important to note that most cat populations can intermingle, migrate, and breed, making management difficult. Categorisation is a convenient simplification of a more complex reality.

Managing cat populations is complicated because all cats belong to the same species, making visual differentiation between categories of cats nearly impossible without proper identification like a tag or microchip. As a result, unidentified domestic cats may be rehomed or euthanised if they are mistaken for other categories of cats deemed unsuitable for adoption due to health, welfare, or behavioural reasons.

Most owned, semi-owned, and unowned domestic cats closely resemble feral cats, making it difficult to differentiate between them. This resemblance puts them at risk of being included in feral cat control measures, particularly when found roaming on Crown or agricultural land. Cat owners should be aware that allowing their cat to roam increases the risk of injury, accidental death, or being inadvertently caught up in feral cat control efforts.

## Categories of cats in the strategy

**Domestic** cats have some form of dependence on humans, either directly or indirectly. They can be classified into three subcategories based on their relationship with humans. These subcategories are:

- **Owned**—these cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependent on humans. They are usually sociable although sociability varies.
- **Semi-owned**—these cats are fed, or provided with other care, by people who do not consider themselves owners. They are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and may be associated with one or more households.

- **Unowned**—these cats are indirectly dependent on humans, with some having casual and temporary human interaction. They are of varying sociability, including some being unsocialised, and may live in groups (e.g., at rubbish tips, shopping centres and other urban environments where they can scavenge for food).

Semi-owned and unowned urban cats have traditionally been referred to as stray cats.

**Feral** cats are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans, and reproduce in the wild.

(Adapted from RSPCA Australia. (2018). Summary of findings and recommendations: Identifying best practice domestic cat management in Australia. Note: In Victoria, the feral cat is a declared established pest animal on specified public land under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*)

1 Legge Sarah, Woinarski John C. Z., Dickman Chris R., Murphy Brett P., Woolley Leigh-Ann, Calver Mike C. (2020) We need to worry about Bella and Charlie: the impacts of pet cats on Australian wildlife. *Wildlife Research* 47, 523-539.



# Cat management challenges

## Cat overpopulation

There are approximately 227,000 cats registered with Victoria's 79 councils. However, a 2023 pet census estimates that Victoria has around 914,000 pet cats,<sup>2</sup> with an unknown number of stray and feral cats. While Council data shows that around 95% of registered cats are desexed, the desexing status of the estimated 680,000 unregistered pet cats remains unknown.

Cat overpopulation presents a significant challenge for councils, shelters, community foster care networks, and rescue groups, who are often managing more cats than can be sustainably housed or rehomed.

The primary cause of cat overpopulation is the lack of desexing among domestic cats. Domestic cats can begin breeding as early as four months of age and produce up to three litters per year. This means that even a small number of undesexed cats can quickly lead to a large, unsustainable population.

While registered cats can benefit from desexing incentives offered to owners, managing and desexing semi-owned and unowned cats is far more difficult. These cats often lack registration, identification, owners and access to proper care. Consequently, they are more likely to reproduce uncontrollably and live short, precarious lives.

These cats can also contribute to the feral cat population as a source of new individuals. Cats may move between the different sub-population categories outlined in this section depending on their level of socialisation, dependence, and relationship with humans.

## Cat welfare

Each year, tens of thousands of domestic cats find themselves in Victorian pounds and shelters. Unfortunately, only about 10% are reclaimed by owners, while 50-60% are rehomed, leaving the remainder to be euthanised. This means that 90% of impounded cats are either semi-owned, unowned or never reunited with their owners. In contrast, more than 50% of dogs are typically reclaimed from pounds and shelters.

These statistics paint a troubling picture when it comes to cat welfare outcomes, especially considering many of these cats are unowned and semi-owned, often with underlying health or behaviour issues that make them difficult or unsuitable for rehoming.

## Biodiversity

Large numbers of cats, both domestic and feral, pose a significant threat to Victoria's biodiversity. Cats are highly effective predators that can kill native wildlife and spread diseases and parasites. It is estimated that the total Australian feral cat population kills about 2 billion reptiles, birds, frogs and mammals each year, and over a billion invertebrates. Pet cats are estimated to kill an additional 390 million mammals, birds and reptiles annually<sup>3</sup>. Effective cat management is important to help protect and conserve Victoria's diverse ecosystems and threatened wildlife.

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<sup>2</sup> Animal Welfare Victoria. (2023) Victorian Pet Census: Survey Findings Report.

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Invasive Species Solutions. "Impact of feral cats in Australia" PestSmart. Accessed 28 October 2024. <https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkit-resource/impact-of-feral-cats-in-australia/>.

## Education

Communicating responsible cat ownership principles, which encompass cat welfare, wildlife protection, public amenity, and population control, presents a significant challenge.

Stakeholders must collaborate to clarify and simplify responsible ownership, emphasising essential welfare needs, pre-pubertal desexing (by 4 months), containment, microchipping, and registration. These behaviours address various issues, including cat overpopulation, disease transmission, nuisance behaviour, wildlife predation, and pet reunification.

## Collaboration and information sharing

Cat management faces challenges due to the perceived lack of coordination and collaboration among stakeholders. In a landscape where domestic cat management involves 79 councils, various pounds, shelters, rescue groups, and community foster care networks, sharing information and improving processes and outcomes can be particularly challenging.

This challenge is further complicated when managing feral cats on Crown land. Feral cats are hard to manage because they're wary, and the methods to control them have limitations. These limitations include, how well they work, where they can be used, how much effort they need, their effects on the cats' wellbeing, how they affect other animals and distinguishing between domestic and feral cats.

To address these issues, the strategy aims to improve collaboration, coordination, and information sharing to make cat management more effective and to facilitate the broader dissemination of key information and best practices across the cat management landscape.

## Laws and process

It is important that government continuously review laws and processes associated with cat management to make sure the best outcomes are achieved for cat welfare, the community and the environment.

There are opportunities for the strategy to improve laws and processes that will improve outcomes associated with domestic cat containment, desexing, registration, rehoming and feral cat management.



# Why is a Cat Management Strategy necessary?

Cats occupy a unique space in our communities, as both valued companions and a source of environmental and societal challenges. Their roles as pets, semi-owned, unowned, or feral animals intersect in ways that complicate their management and exacerbate issues such as overpopulation, animal welfare concerns, and the impact on native wildlife.

While the benefits of cat ownership are widely recognised, unchecked reproduction and irresponsible ownership have contributed to growing concerns. The sheer number of unregistered and undesexed cats leads to unsustainable pressures on shelters, rescue organisations, and local councils. Existing systems are overwhelmed by the volume of cats, many of which cannot be rehomed due to health or behavioural problems.

Moreover, the ecological impact of free-roaming cats—both domestic and feral—is stark. Cats are natural predators, posing a significant threat to susceptible Victorian wildlife. Their predation on native wildlife is particularly concerning, as it threatens already vulnerable species and undermines conservation efforts.

These complex challenges highlight the need for a unified, coordinated, and proactive approach to cat management. A strategy that addresses the root causes of cat overpopulation, promotes responsible ownership, and protects both domestic cat welfare and wildlife, is essential to balance the needs of all stakeholders—pet owners, environmentalists, community members, and animal welfare advocates.

Additionally, improving education around responsible cat ownership is critical. Misunderstandings around containment, desexing, identification and registration hinder efforts to control the cat population and ensure the welfare of domestic cats. The lack of public awareness regarding the consequences of allowing cats to roam freely must be addressed to mitigate the negative impacts on wildlife and community amenity.

A long-term Cat Management Strategy will serve as a framework for addressing these and other challenges in a coordinated manner. It will focus on promoting responsible ownership, improving cat welfare, protecting biodiversity, and fostering collaboration between key stakeholders, including local councils, shelters, rescue groups, and the broader community.

Through this strategy, we can improve public understanding, support community engagement, and ensure that laws and processes evolve to meet the needs of a changing environment. The goal is a future where all domestic cats are cared for responsibly, where wildlife is protected from predation, and where stakeholders work constructively and effectively on cat management.

## Purpose

The Strategy will guide the management of cats in Victoria over the next decade. Its objectives focus on improving collaboration and systems, ensuring the wellbeing of domestic cats, and mitigating issues associated with cat roaming and wildlife predation. The Strategy acknowledges the importance of managing cats in urban, rural and natural settings, while prioritising animal welfare and considering the diverse needs of stakeholders and communities.

The Strategy outlines seven key themes, along with corresponding actions, to achieve its objectives. These themes include promoting responsible cat ownership, encouraging cat desexing and containment, reducing the number of roaming domestic cats, and improving collaboration, systems, and processes.

The Strategy recognises the critical role of community involvement and aims to foster a shared vision for a more effective approach to cat management in Victoria.



# Guiding Principles

The Strategy is shaped by the following principles, which serve as the guiding framework for its implementation:

## 1. Cats deserve caring and responsible owners

Cats are very popular companion animals and deserve owners who ensure their overall wellbeing, including nutrition, health, behaviour and housing needs. Roaming domestic cats pose a significant threat to wildlife and public amenity. It is important to acknowledge that populations of roaming, unowned cats do not have their basic welfare needs met.

## 2. Empowering communities

Cat management is a shared responsibility between government, key stakeholders, and the broader community. The state government plays a key role in delivering reforms to improve Victoria's cat management framework. These reforms aim to empower people to actively participate, encourage flexibility and collaboration, enhance stakeholder capacity and capability, and provide better access to data and information. By working together, we can create an integrated approach to cat management that benefits communities, the environment, and animal welfare.

## 3. Embracing diverse perspectives

Effective cat management requires recognising and respecting the varied views held by the community. Rather than demonising cats or their owners, it is crucial to approach cat management issues with empathy and understanding. Decisions should be data-driven and human-centered, ensuring solutions are based on evidence and compassionate to all involved. By fostering cooperation and inclusivity, we can develop strategies that address cat management challenges in a thoughtful, respectful manner.

## 4. Progress over perfection

While striving for excellence is important, cat management can present significant challenges. A progress-oriented approach allows for steady advancement toward objectives while remaining flexible to new information and emerging issues. Through incremental steps, we can refine and adapt our practices over time, ensuring continual improvement in cat management.

## 5. Safeguarding biodiversity

While cats are beloved companions, we must also acknowledge their potential negative impact on Australia's native wildlife. Free-roaming cats pose a serious threat to our unique ecosystems, which are already vulnerable due to factors like habitat loss and climate change. This strategy aims to implement integrated and coordinated actions that will contribute to the protection of biodiversity.

## Vision

**“Cats are cared for by responsible owners, ensuring the wellbeing of cats, wildlife and the community”.**

This vision embraces a future where cats are highly valued as beloved pets, and every cat belongs to a caring owner who knows how to keep their cat happy, healthy and safe at home. In this future, cats pose a reduced threat to wildlife, community safety and amenity, and they no longer endure difficult lives on our streets.

## Objectives

The overarching objectives of the strategy are to:

1. Promote cat welfare and responsible ownership.
2. Protect native wildlife, the environment and community from the negative impact of cats.
3. Improve processes, cooperation and knowledge sharing in cat management.

## Scope

The Strategy aims to achieve these objectives by improving cat welfare and reducing cat overpopulation through collaboration with all stakeholders to:

- Increase responsible cat ownership, including increasing desexing and cat containment rates.
- Improve collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders.
- Develop and implement more effective approaches to cat management.
- Focus on education and awareness campaigns to help shift community attitudes toward cats and responsible cat ownership.



# Key partners and stakeholders

The success of the Strategy depends on the active collaboration between various stakeholder groups, from government bodies to the broader community. A wide range of partners and stakeholders have a shared interest in effective cat management. Engaging with these groups throughout the process was crucial in shaping the final strategy, ensuring that it reflects realistic, practical, and inclusive solutions for comprehensive cat management.

Key partners/stakeholders	Roles and responsibilities
Government	<p>Councils (local government) are the primary regulator of domestic cats, including registration, local laws and management of nuisance issues.</p> <p>State government through Animal Welfare Victoria (AWV) sets a state-wide cat management framework through various pieces of legislation (e.g., <i>Domestic Animals Act 1994</i>, <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i>), policy, codes of practice and strategies e.g., The 2037 DEECA Biodiversity Plan identifies responsible cat ownership as a key action for Victorians to protect biodiversity.</p> <p>Commonwealth government develops position documents on feral cat management like threat abatement plans.</p>
Traditional owners	<p>Have an interest in managing feral cats to support healing Country. Traditional Owners may want to be involved in feral cat management and monitoring the outcomes as part of their role in managing Country.</p> <p>We need to start conversations with Traditional Owners to understand the impacts of feral cats on biocultural and cultural values and the outcomes they are seeking from feral cat management.</p>
Victorian residents	Participate in cat management through activities like feeding unowned/semi-owned cats, reporting nuisance behaviour, cat trapping, surrenders, foster care and adoptions.
Cat owners	<p>Required to care for, register and microchip their cat, and ensure it does not trespass on private property.</p> <p>Depending on their council, may be required to contain their cat to property and desex it prior to registration.</p>
Public land managers	The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Parks Victoria, Alpine Resorts Victoria and Phillip Island Nature Parks manage feral cats on public (Crown) land. These land managers can also work closely with the Commonwealth and other groups like Catchment Management Authorities and Zoo's Victoria on specific biodiversity programs.
Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)	The AVA is the peak representative organisation for veterinarians across Australia. It promotes the interests and welfare of the veterinary profession by providing advocacy, education, strategy, policy, career development and support services.
Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria (VetBoard)	The VetBoard is a statutory body responsible for regulating veterinary practitioners in Victoria, to ensure high quality veterinary care across the state. Among other responsibilities it registers veterinarians, issues guidelines, handles complaints and enforces disciplinary procedures.
Veterinary practitioners	Provide care and treatment for pets, and are an important source of information and advice on pet care and wellbeing.
Veterinary and vet nursing schools	These institutions train veterinarians and vet nurses, offering opportunities to teach new approaches such as early-age desexing and high-volume desexing.
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) Victoria	<p>RSPCA Victoria advocates for improved animal welfare and management practices.</p> <p>RSPCA Victoria is partly funded by the Victorian Government to undertake compliance functions (e.g. investigations, seizures, prosecution) associated with animal welfare and domestic animal legislation. It also provides animal education, care, and rehoming services.</p>
Animal shelters and pounds	<p>Provide care, veterinary, adoption, education and rehoming services.</p> <p>Humanely euthanise cats that are unsuitable for rehoming.</p>



Key partners/stakeholders	Roles and responsibilities
Rescue Groups and Community Foster Care Networks	Provide foster care, education and rehoming services. Some have working relationships with pounds or shelters to reduce the pressure on these facilities.
Breeders and sellers	Breeders with three or more fertile females must be registered with council, or be a member of an <b>Applicable Organisation</b> . All cats must be microchipped before being sold or given away, and any advertisements must include the seller's <b>Pet Exchange Register</b> source number, and the individual animal's microchip.
Rural landholders and Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF)	Land management, including pest animal control Manage cats on agricultural land and private sanctuaries
Conservation groups	May be involved in monitoring programs and raise public awareness about the impact of cats on conservation and collaborate on educational programs about feral and domestic cats.
Researchers	Research and develop new tools for management of invasive species, including feral cats, that are humane, efficient, and effective. Undertake research to address key knowledge gaps and uncertainties about feral cats and their management. Undertake research on cat ownership behaviour and attitudes.
Pet shops	Source of information and products for cat care and may sell pet cats in Victoria from approved sources (i.e. council registered shelters, pounds, and foster carers).



# Themes and actions summary

The cat management strategy themes and corresponding actions are outlined below.

Theme	Actions	Delivery/Partners
1. Promote cat welfare and responsible cat ownership	<b>Action 1:</b> Develop state-wide accessible, clear, and consistent information resources that all stakeholders can use. Resources should have simple messages on responsible cat ownership and cat containment that acknowledge the value cats bring as pets.	AWV /Key stakeholders
	<b>Action 2:</b> Develop specific information resources for multicultural communities and encourage stakeholders to use existing multicultural engagement channels to reach different communities.	AWV/Councils
2. Increase cat desexing rates	<b>Action 3:</b> Support innovative desexing trials and training programs, such as high-volume clinics and pre-pubertal desexing initiatives.	AWV/Shelters, vets
	<b>Action 4:</b> Explore place-based desexing services in regional communities with limited veterinary access. This could include fostering partnerships between stakeholders, including veterinary practices.	AWV/Shelters, vets, Councils
	<b>Action 5:</b> Invest in affordable desexing options, especially for low-income earners, including targeted grants to assist vulnerable Victorians in desexing their cats.	AWV/Councils
3. Expand cat containment	<b>Action 6:</b> Provide cat containment support to councils with curfews to aid in the transition to new requirements.	AWV/Councils
	<b>Action 7:</b> Enhance cat containment education and programs, including reviewing and simplifying enclosure guidelines and conducting research on the welfare of contained cats.	AWV/RSPCA Vic, conservation groups
	<b>Action 8:</b> Foster partnerships with local organisations to assist residents in constructing safe and simple cat enclosures.	Councils/local organisations
4. Reduce the impacts of semi-owned and unowned cats	<b>Action 9:</b> Provide ongoing education on the benefits of taking full responsibility for semi-owned cats.	AWV/Councils, Shelters
	<b>Action 10:</b> Consider implementing shorter holding periods for unidentified cats in shelters and pounds to expedite adoption.	AWV/Shelters
	<b>Action 11:</b> Develop guidelines to support the cat behaviour assessment process for adoption suitability.	AWV/Shelters, rescue groups, CFCNs
	<b>Action 12:</b> Promote targeted Capture, Desex, Adopt programs in 'hot spots' with high unowned and semi-owned cat populations and need.	AWV/Councils, shelters
5. Manage feral cat populations and impacts	<b>Action 13:</b> Explore and facilitate options for improved cat management on private land.	DEECA/VFF, conservation groups, Councils
	<b>Action 14:</b> Implement and monitor humane and effective feral cat control programs informed by decision tools that target and protect key biodiversity values.	DEECA Biodiversity/ Land Managers/ CMAs
	<b>Action 15:</b> Collaborate with local, interstate, and national authorities to enhance feral cat management in Victoria through knowledge sharing and relevant programs.	DEECA Biodiversity/ Other jurisdictions, Land Managers
	<b>Action 16:</b> Engage with Traditional Owners to understand the impact of feral cats on biocultural and cultural values, and collaborate to recognise 'two ways of knowing' in feral cat management decision-making.	DEECA Biodiversity/ Traditional Owners
	<b>Action 17:</b> Support development and implementation of innovative, humane, and effective methods for feral cat control and address knowledge gaps in feral cat management through research and development.	DECCA/Other jurisdictions

Theme	Actions	Delivery/Partners
<b>6. Improve collaboration and information sharing</b>	<b>Action 18:</b> Establish a working group with key stakeholders to drive and monitor Strategy implementation.	AWV/Key stakeholders
	<b>Action 19:</b> Share cat management data on centralised platforms.	DEECA/Councils
	<b>Action 20:</b> Expand opportunities for councils, land managers and other stakeholders to share information and successful cat management practices.	DEECA/Councils/CMAs
	<b>Action 21:</b> Distribute key findings summary report of all council Domestic Animal Management Plans.	AWV
<b>7. Improve laws and processes</b>	<b>Action 22:</b> Review the cat management framework to identify further options for reform, including funding models.	AWV
	<b>Action 23:</b> Investigate aligning cat registration with puberty (4 months) to encourage early desexing.	AWV/Councils, vets, shelters
	<b>Action 24:</b> Provide more flexible registration options to encourage desexing, containment, adoption, and cat registration.	AWV/ Councils

### Strategic framework

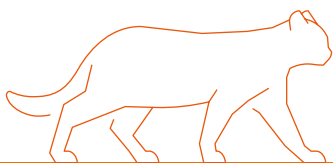




# Implementation

The implementation timeline involves a phased approach to ensure the establishment of essential foundations. While some actions will be ongoing\*, the strategy recognises that certain initiatives require additional time and resources for proper

consultation, development and implementation. Following the establishment of the implementation working group, sequencing may be adjusted to maximise effectiveness.



## Short Term

### 1-3 Years

- Promote cat welfare and responsible cat ownership (Actions 1,2,9)\*
- Invest in affordable desexing options (Action 5)
- Expand cat containment through improved information and partnerships (Actions 7, 8)
- Improve cat adoption decisions and timelines (Actions 10, 11)
- Support integrated feral cat programs (Actions 14,15)\*
- Support research into feral cat control (Action 17)\*
- Improve collaboration and information sharing (Actions 16, 17,18,19, 20, 21)\*
- Review cat management framework (Action 22)

## Medium Term

### 4-6 Years

- Support innovative desexing trials and programs (Actions 3, 4)
- Provide cat containment support to councils with curfews (Action 6)
- Reduce the number of cats in shelters, on the street and in rural areas (Actions 12, 13)
- Encourage early desexing by aligning registration and desexing age (Action 23)

## Long Term

### 7-10 Years

- Provide more flexible registration options to encourage desexing, adoption, and cat registration (Action 24)

# Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework

A monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and improvement framework has been developed to track the strategy's progress towards its long-term vision and measure its effectiveness against its objectives, outputs and outcomes. This framework will remain flexible, supporting adaptive, efficient, and transparent management practices.

## Monitoring:

Reforms introduced in 2023 regarding the mandatory reporting of animal fate data will provide useful indicators from shelters and pounds, such as admissions, transfers, reunifications, rehoming, returns and euthanasia rates. These indicators will help measure the Strategy's impact over time.

Additional data from councils, including registration numbers and containment effort will also be made accessible via a dashboard or web page that consolidates useful metrics.

Periodic surveys with key stakeholders will also be conducted to monitor progress and identify emerging issues.

## Reporting:

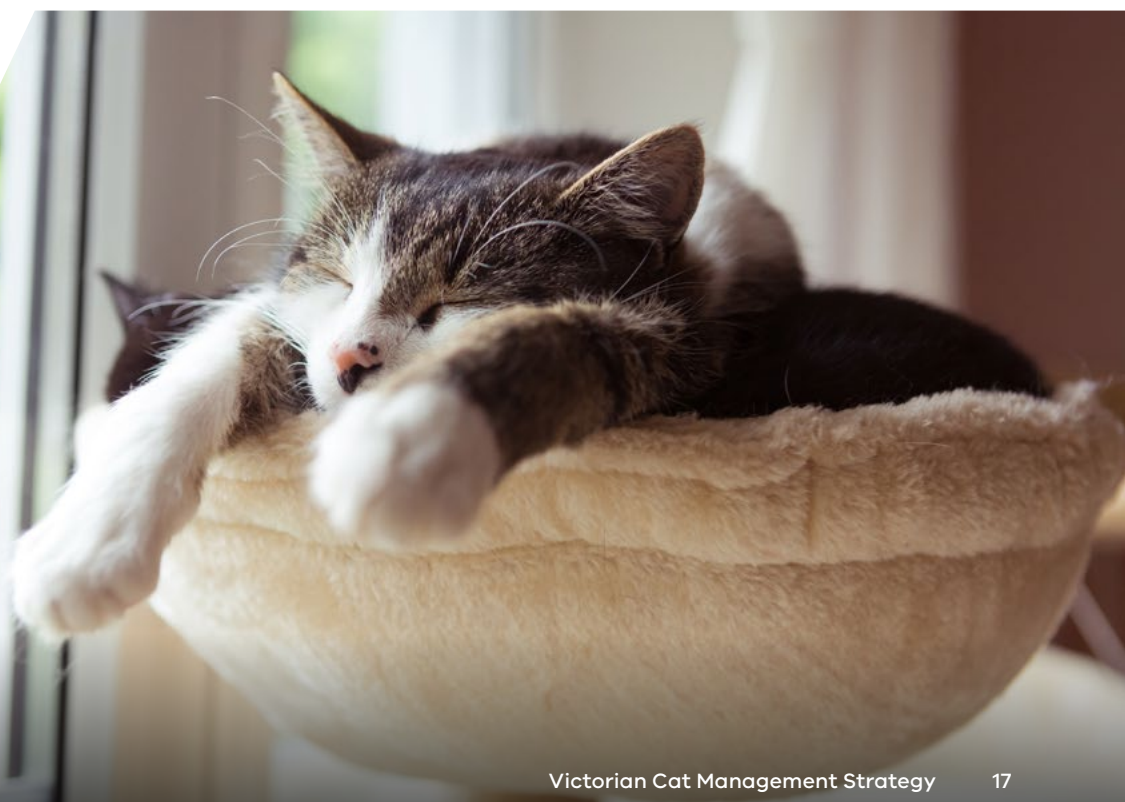
A biennial report (excluding year 10) will provide a concise summary of progress, key findings, achievements, and any improvements or changes made over the previous two years.

## Improvement:

A key component of this process is Action 18, which will establish a working group tasked with driving and monitoring the Strategy's implementation. This group will ensure that the strategy remains relevant and responsive to emerging issues.

## Evaluation

A final evaluation of the Strategy's objectives, outputs, and outcomes will occur after the Strategy concludes in year ten, to assess its overall long-term impact.



# THEMES AND ACTIONS



# Theme 1: Promote cat welfare and responsible cat ownership

Cats are beloved pets that bring joy and companionship to their owners. Responsible cat ownership means understanding how to meet the needs of your feline companion, ensuring they receive the care and protection necessary for a healthy, happy life.

This theme outlines the key components of responsible cat ownership, including:

- Meeting a cat's welfare needs
- Microchipping and registering cats with council
- Desexing cats before puberty (by 4 months)
- Containing cats to their owner's property.

Responsible cat ownership goes beyond basic needs like providing food, shelter, veterinary care, exercise, and play. Owners must also comply with relevant laws designed to support both cat welfare and community wellbeing.

In Victoria, it is mandatory to register your cat with the local council once it is over three months of age. Cats must also be microchipped before being registered, sold, or given away.

Microchipping and registration enable councils to identify and reunite lost cats with their lawful owners, while also helping monitor pet populations in the community. Registration fees fund important domestic animal services like investigations, collections, reunification, impoundment, and rehoming.

Roaming cats are a leading source of nuisance animal complaints and make up the largest proportion of animals that are captured and impounded in Victoria's shelters and pounds. This places significant emotional, financial and resource strain on councils, shelters, rescue groups, and community foster care networks, as they try to manage and place these cats into good homes.

Desexing cats before puberty helps prevent unplanned litters, reduces potential neighbourhood disturbances, and ensures cats avoid the risks of living short, hazardous, and vulnerable lives on the streets. Early desexing (by 4 months) is a responsible decision that benefits not only the cats but also the

broader community and environment.

Containing cats to their owner's property further ensures their safety and wellbeing. See Theme 3 for more details on cat containment.

The strategy also aims to improve connections between stakeholders and partners—including shelters, councils, veterinarians and Catchment Management Authorities—to help co-design and distribute materials that address the unique needs of diverse communities.

## ACTIONS

### Action 1

Develop state-wide, accessible, clear, and consistent information resources that all stakeholders can use. Resources should have simple messages on responsible cat ownership and cat containment, that acknowledge the value cats bring as pets.

### Action 2

Develop specific information resources for multicultural communities and encourage stakeholders to use existing multicultural engagement channels to reach different communities.



## Theme 2: Increase cat desexing rates

Cats are prolific breeders. Females can begin reproducing as early as 4 months old, having up to three litters a year, with an average of four kittens per litter<sup>4</sup>.

Desexing cats before they can reproduce is important to stop unplanned litters and reduce the issues caused by cat overpopulation.

When cats breed unchecked, their numbers can quickly increase, posing significant challenges for communities and ecosystems.

Unowned cats in particular, often lead much shorter, more difficult lives compared to pet cats. Less than half will survive their first year<sup>5</sup>. These cats can negatively impact local amenity through nuisance behaviours, prey on wildlife, spread diseases, and threaten the health of pets, livestock, and people.

Additionally, overpopulation places heavy strain on councils, veterinary services, shelters and rescue groups, resulting in overcrowded facilities, stretched resources, and cat euthanasia.

Research and current practices show that desexing cats before puberty (4 months old) —known as pre-pubertal desexing (PPD)—is safe. Shelters routinely conduct a form of PPD called early-age desexing (EAD) on healthy kittens between 8 to 12 weeks old, typically when they reach 1kg in weight<sup>6</sup>. EAD ensures kittens are desexed before adoption.

The Strategy aims to increase desexing rates by removing barriers and supporting innovative desexing trials, education, and training programs that promote pre-pubertal desexing. Veterinary and vet nursing schools, alongside shelter veterinarians, will be essential in expanding knowledge and skills related to desexing approaches, such as early-age and high-volume desexing.

In addition, shelters can collaborate with regional veterinarians to run place-based desexing days in areas that are traditionally underserved by veterinary services.

Since 2012, the Victorian Government has invested significantly in affordable desexing and veterinary service initiatives through its Animal Welfare Fund Grants program. This program aims to improve companion animal welfare, promote responsible pet ownership, and enhance animal welfare services for pets and Victorians. As of 2024, the program has distributed almost \$13 million in funds, including grants to help establish low-cost veterinary clinics and free or subsidised desexing programs.

The Strategy will focus on providing these services to vulnerable Victorians, including low-income households and areas with high problem cat populations.

### ACTIONS

#### Action 3

Support innovative desexing trials and training programs, such as high-volume clinics and pre-pubertal desexing initiatives.

#### Action 4

Explore place-based desexing services in regional communities with limited veterinary access. This could include fostering partnerships between stakeholders, including veterinary practices.

#### Action 5

Invest in affordable desexing options, especially for low-income earners, including targeted grants to assist vulnerable Victorians in desexing their cats.

4 Little, S.E. (2011) Female Reproduction In: *The Cat: Clinical medicine and management*. Elsevier Health Sciences, pp 1195-1227.

5 Crawford, H. M., & Fleming, T. (31 August 2021). Street life ain't easy for a stray cat, with most dying before they turn 1. [So what's the best way to deal with them? The Conversation](#).

6 RSPCA Australia (2021) Pre-pubertal desexing in cats, *RSPCA Australia Research Report*, June.

## CASE STUDY

The Bendigo Animal Relief Centre (BARC), operated by the City of Greater Bendigo, exemplifies a community-driven, innovative approach to cat population management, focusing on removing barriers to responsible pet ownership.

BARC's philosophy centres on working directly with cat owners to reduce the number of unowned and unwanted cats, rather than simply responding to complaints and impounding animals.

Key approaches include:

1. **Partnering with the National Desexing Network**  
– Offering discounted desexing services to low-income residents, particularly those hesitant to engage with council services.
2. **Providing affordable desexing, microchipping, vaccination, and registration** through the Bendigo Community Cat Program, targeting low-income earners who have acquired or are feeding stray cats.
3. **Offering free microchipping** – Promoting proactive microchipping to reunite lost cats with their owners before they are impounded, in collaboration with local vet clinics.
4. **Encouraging cat registration** through free registration for kittens under 12 months and offering free reclaim for impounded pets that are microchipped and registered.
5. **Supporting a Relinquish and Re-Adopt option**  
– Helping cat owners who cannot afford reclaim fees by offering a program where cats are relinquished, desexed, microchipped, and re-adopted at a reduced cost.
6. **Providing desexed, microchipped “farm cats”** through the Farm Cat Program – Preventing the proliferation of undesexed cats on rural properties for rodent control.
7. **Reducing surrender rates** through behaviour support services like Petcademy and alternative rehoming options such as Pet Rescue's Home 2 Home program.
8. **Managing adoption demand** – To meet adoption demand, BARC began accepting cats from other shelters under an 84Y agreement, as the success of their cat management programs led to fewer local cats being available for adoption. This approach ensures residents can still adopt desexed and microchipped cats, preventing the community from turning to private sources where cats may not be desexed or microchipped, which could increase the population of unregulated cats in the region.

BARC's programs still face challenges, particularly in meeting legislative requirements. Reducing the stray hold time from 8 days to 4 would improve program efficiency and lower costs by shortening the length of stay for impounded pets. Additionally, allowing animals to leave the shelter before completing the 8-day post-vaccination quarantine period would facilitate quicker rehoming or return to their owners, especially through programs like Relinquish and Re-adopt.

These programs have contributed to reducing shelter intake, increasing reunification of lost pets with their owners, and promoting responsible cat ownership across the Greater Bendigo community.

# Theme 3: Expand cat containment

Cat containment is important for keeping domestic cats safe and protecting wildlife. By keeping cats within defined boundaries, whether indoors or in secure outdoor enclosures, containment can significantly extend a cat's lifespan and reduce its negative impacts on the environment.

One of the most important advantages of cat containment is safeguarding the health and wellbeing of pet cats. Roaming cats are vulnerable to injury or death from traffic, other animals, or even humans. They can also spread diseases and cause traffic collisions, leading to property damage and human injuries. A survey found that two-thirds of owners who let their cats roam had lost at least one cat, with a third of these losses caused by traffic collisions<sup>7</sup>.

Another significant advantage of cat containment is the protection of local wildlife. Roaming cats can have a devastating impact on bird populations and other small animals. Studies estimate that Australian pet cats kill approximately 143 million reptiles, 134 million birds and 252 million mammals (both native and introduced) annually<sup>8</sup>. Cat containment can help to reduce these impacts and protect our native wildlife. Cat containment is especially important where vulnerable native species are nearby and to support neighboring feral cat control programs on Crown Land.

Containing cats also helps address public nuisance concerns such as noise disturbances, soiling, and trespass disputes. These behaviours can strain neighbourly relationships and make it difficult for people to enjoy their homes and communities. Cat containment can help to reduce these behaviours and create a more peaceful and enjoyable community for everyone. Additionally, cat containment assists feral cat management efforts by removing the challenge of distinguishing between pet and feral cats.

Although research on the welfare of indoor cats is still growing, it is clear that indoor contained cats generally have longer lifespans, face fewer hazards, and are also less likely to become lost. This reduces the burden on councils, animal shelters and rescue organisations, by lowering the number of nuisance, lost or abandoned cats.

Many councils and communities have already recognised the benefits of cat containment. As of the end of 2024, over half (44) of Victoria's 79 councils have introduced a cat curfew, with another 12 considering doing so. Councils also have the authority to establish cat-free zones under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* in areas where native wildlife are at risk. This could include entire suburbs or towns, especially those bordering natural areas with high biodiversity.

Despite the advantages of cat containment, several barriers remain. These include a lack of awareness of the benefits and misconceptions that cats need to roam. By addressing these and other barriers, the Strategy aims to make cat containment more accessible, benefiting cats, wildlife, and Victorian communities.

## ACTIONS

### Action 6

Provide cat containment support to councils with curfews to aid in the transition to new requirements.

### Action 7

Enhance cat containment education and programs, including reviewing and simplifying enclosure guidelines and conducting research on the welfare of contained cats.

### Action 8

Foster partnerships with local organisations to assist residents in constructing safe and simple cat enclosures.

7 Elliott, A., Howell, T.J., McLeod, E. and Bennett, P.C. (2019). Perceptions of Responsible Cat Ownership Behaviours among a Convenience Sample of Australians. *Animals*, 9(9), 703.

8 Stobo-Wilson, Alyson M., Brett P. Murphy, Sarah M. Legge, Hernan Caceres-Escobar, David G. Chapple, Heather M. Crawford, Stuart J. Dawson et al. (2022) "Counting the bodies: Estimating the numbers and spatial variation of Australian reptiles, birds and mammals killed by two invasive mesopredators." *Diversity and Distributions* 28, no. 5, 976-991.







## Theme 4: Reduce the impacts of semi-owned and unowned cats

Victoria has around 227,000 registered cats, but many more are unregistered, semi-owned or unowned. These semi-owned and unowned cats – often referred to as strays – present significant management challenges. Unlike owned pets, these cats lack consistent caregivers, leading to various issues that affect both the cats themselves and the environment they live in.

One of the primary challenges is the sheer size of these cat populations. They can reproduce rapidly, leading to unchecked population growth. Their unmanaged and often nomadic lifestyles increase the risk of disease transmission, injuries, conflicts with other animals and negative impacts on wildlife and biodiversity. While they often receive food from the community or scavenge, they also prey on small animals, including native wildlife, and can contribute to feral cat populations.

Many of these cats end up in pounds and shelters. Their unsocialised nature and compromised health reduce their chances of successful adoption, leading to a disproportionate number being euthanised. This highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address welfare concerns and reduce the burden on communities, councils and animal shelters.

The Strategy will tackle these challenges through an ongoing education program that encourages responsible ownership of semi-owned cats. It will consider shorter holding periods for unidentified cats in shelters and pounds to facilitate quicker adoption, and work with stakeholders to develop guidelines for assessing cats' suitability for adoption.

Stakeholder consultation will be integral to reviewing holding periods, balancing disease risks with appropriate holding times. Consistent guidelines for cat behaviour assessments will assist rehoming groups in determining adoption suitability based on temperament.

The Victorian Government will also promote targeted Capture, Desex, Adopt programs in areas with high cat impoundment rates – i.e. 'hot spots'. While the primary goal of these programs will be to rescue and adopt out as many cats as possible, it is important to acknowledge that compromised health and sociability may unfortunately lead to euthanasia in some circumstances.

The need to manage the impact of free-roaming cats on private land adds complexity to cat management. Distinguishing between roaming domestic, semi-owned, unowned, and feral cats can be difficult, making it challenging to apply the feral cat pest declaration on private land. This complicates management efforts and limits the tools available in certain situations. Under the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, private landholders can currently manage cats on their property primarily through trapping, in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats* and the web published requirements for the 'Humane cage trapping of cats'.

The Strategy will explore options to improve the management of cats on private land, to achieve improved cat welfare outcomes and reduce their impact on biodiversity and other values. Private land managers such as farmers and the private land conservation sector, can play an important role under Action 13.

The actions under this theme aim to balance finding loving homes for as many cats as possible, with the overall welfare of the cats.

## ACTIONS

### Action 9

Provide ongoing education on the benefits of taking full responsibility for semi-owned cats.

### Action 10

Consider implementing shorter holding periods for unidentified cats in shelters and pounds to expedite adoption.

### Action 11

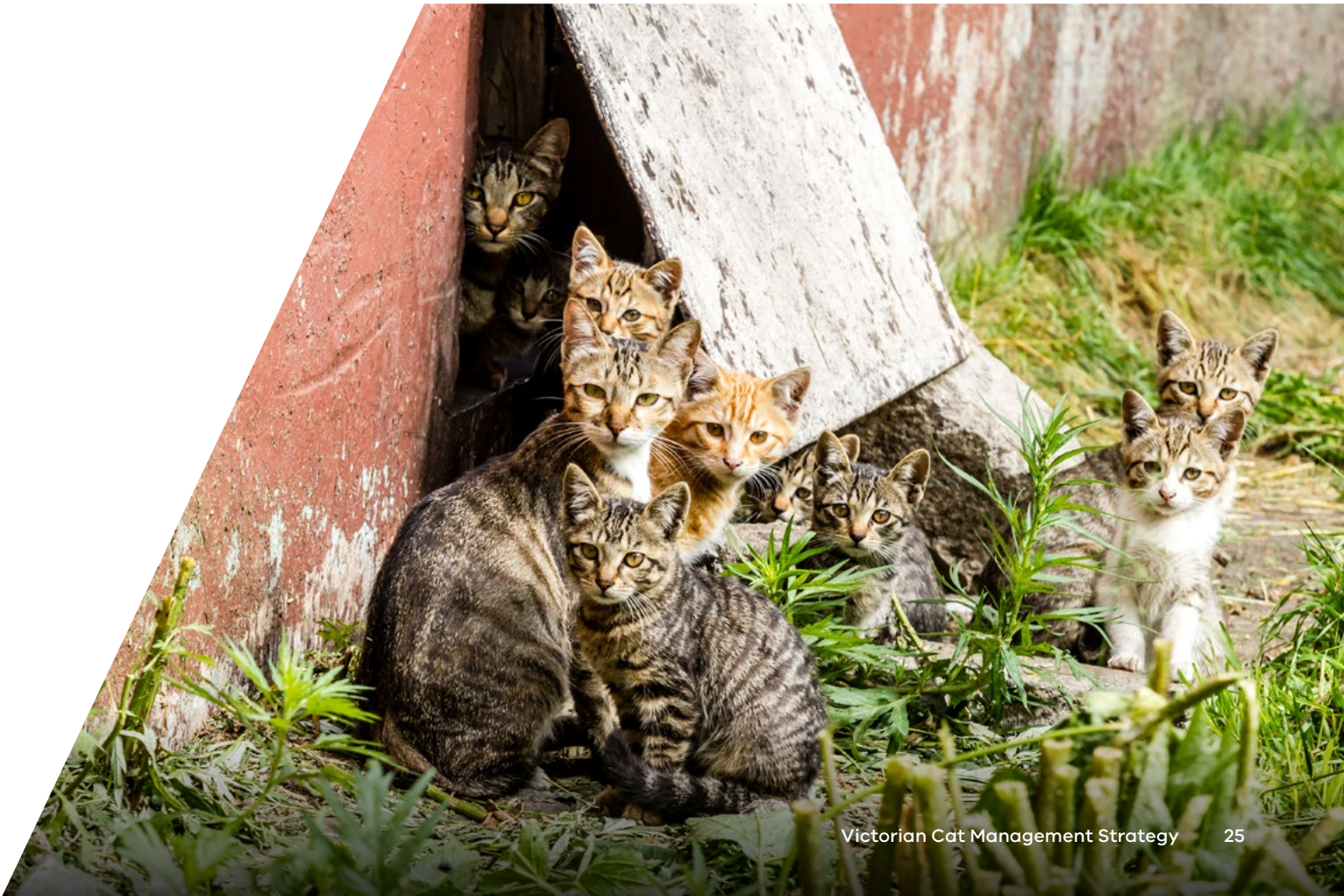
Develop guidelines to support the cat behaviour assessment process for adoption suitability.

### Action 12

Promote targeted Capture, Desex Adopt programs in 'hot spots' with high unowned and semi-owned cat populations and need.

### Action 13

Explore and facilitate options for improved cat management on private land.



# Theme 5: Manage feral cat populations and impacts

The Strategy recognises the urgent need to address the significant threat that feral cats pose to Victoria's biodiversity. Feral cats, being unowned, unsocialised, and independent of human care present a formidable challenge to the survival of the state's native wildlife.

Feral cats have greatly impacted Australia's biodiversity, driving many native species to decline or even extinction. Evidence of this includes patterns of native species disappearing as cats spread, the survival of certain species on islands without cats, and successful recovery of wildlife in areas where cats are intensively controlled. Research shows that when cats are removed, native animals are more likely to thrive, but attempts to reintroduce species without cat control have largely failed. Predation studies also reveal that many vulnerable native species are targeted by cats, which have contributed to most of Australia's 33 mammal extinctions since European settlement, along with several bird and reptile losses.

To protect Victoria's vulnerable biodiversity and improve the survival chances of threatened species, feral cats have been declared an established pest animal on specified Crown (public) land under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*. Public land managers are responsible for controlling feral cats on this land through various methods, including cage trapping, ground shooting, fencing and baiting.

However, each approach has its own set of limitations including scalability, effectiveness, required effort, applicable locations, animal welfare outcomes, and impacts on non-target species.

Employing these methods using specific approvals, procedures, or codes of practice (COP) helps ensure ethical, humane and effective feral cat management. Victoria has a COP for feral cat control on Crown land, as well as standard operating procedures (SOPs) for cage trapping and ground shooting of feral cats. Additionally, there is a National Code of Practice for Humane Control of Feral Cats and associated SOPs that should be considered when determining the suitability of control methods.

Predation by feral cats is recognised as a potentially threatening process under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* with 43 species listed as threatened and at risk of extinction due to feral cat predation.

Although eradicating feral cats from the Australian mainland is currently unfeasible, there are specific locations where cat eradication may be achievable and desirable to protect threatened wildlife (see case study). Therefore, the focus will be on safeguarding

the most vulnerable native species. The French Island case study (included below) emphasises the importance of engaging the local community to coordinate feral cat eradication efforts while balancing the needs of responsible cat owners.

Beyond predation, feral cats also impact ecosystems through competition, behaviour changes in native species, and disease transmission to animals, including livestock and humans.

Effective feral cat management in Victoria requires well-planned, coordinated, monitored, and sustained efforts at a landscape scale. Poorly planned removal of feral cats may offer little benefit for sustained wildlife protection.

Furthermore, feral cats can impact the biocultural and cultural values that are valued by Traditional Owners in Victoria, including culturally significant species. The Strategy seeks to start conversations with Traditional Owners to understand the impacts of feral cats on biocultural and cultural values and identify the outcomes they seek from feral cat management. This approach supports healing of Country and recognises two ways of knowing—which blends Traditional Knowledge and Western science in decision-making.

The Strategy will also seek to support implementation of targeted, humane and effective feral cat control programs. Collaboration with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions will be pursued to improve feral cat management through knowledge sharing, as well as supporting the development and implementation of research and innovative methods for controlling feral cats.

Partners involved in delivering the actions in this Theme include, but are not limited to, Traditional Owners, public land managers like Parks Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities, councils, rural landholders and other stakeholders who can build regional networks to share information and improve collaboration on cat management.



## ACTIONS

### Action 14

Implement and monitor humane and effective feral cat control programs informed by decision tools that target and protect key biodiversity values.

### Action 15

Collaborate with local, interstate and national authorities to enhance feral cat management in Victoria through knowledge sharing and relevant programs.

### Action 16

Engage with Traditional Owners to understand the impact of feral cats on biocultural and cultural values and collaborate to recognise 'two ways of knowing' in feral cat management decision-making.

### Action 17

Support development and implementation of innovative, humane, and effective methods for feral cat control and address knowledge gaps in feral cat management through research and development.





## CASE STUDY

### A safe haven for wildlife: the French Island conservation journey

Nestled within the internationally significant Western Port Ramsar site, French Island is a sanctuary for Victoria's wildlife. What makes this island so special is not just its isolation but also the absence of a major predator: the European Red Fox. These factors combine to make French Island a unique haven for biodiversity.

Home to over 230 bird species, including the magnificent White-Bellied Sea-Eagle, the secretive King Quail and the critically endangered Orange-Bellied Parrot, French Island boasts a rich ecosystem. It's also a refuge for iconic mammals like the Long-nosed Potoroo and Eastern Barred Bandicoot. However, feral cats are located on the island and many of these species are listed as threatened under state and / or federal legislation making them highly vulnerable to predation by feral cats.

From 2010 to 2020, a coordinated feral cat control program was undertaken on French Island, thanks to funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program. The success of these efforts, combined with a detailed feasibility study, laid the foundation for the current eradication program, which began in 2021.

The goal? To make French Island a feral cat free safe haven by June 2028. All available tools, including trapping and shooting, are being used to achieve this, and wildlife recovery is being carefully monitored throughout the program to ensure the island's precious species can thrive once again.

This initiative is made possible through a strong partnership, supported by funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust and Saving Native Species Program. Melbourne Water is leading "The French Island Priority Place – creating a wildlife safe haven" project in collaboration with several key partners, including the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, the Victorian Government Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Parks Victoria, Zoos Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Parks, French Island Landcare, Bass Coast Landcare Network, and the local French Island community.

Together, they are creating a brighter future for wildlife on French Island, demonstrating what can be achieved through persistence and strong collaboration.



Credit: Gillian Basnett

# Theme 6: Improve collaboration and information sharing

Improving collaboration and information sharing is essential for achieving the Strategy's objectives. By promoting a partnership-driven approach, the Strategy aims to create a flexible framework to support implementation of its vision and actions.

A key first step is the formation of a working group to drive and monitor the Strategy's progress. This group will serve as a central point to review the Strategy as needed, and facilitate the exchange of insights, challenges, and successful cat management practices. The goal is to harness the collective expertise of key stakeholders, ensuring that actions stay relevant and adaptable to the changing landscape of cat management.

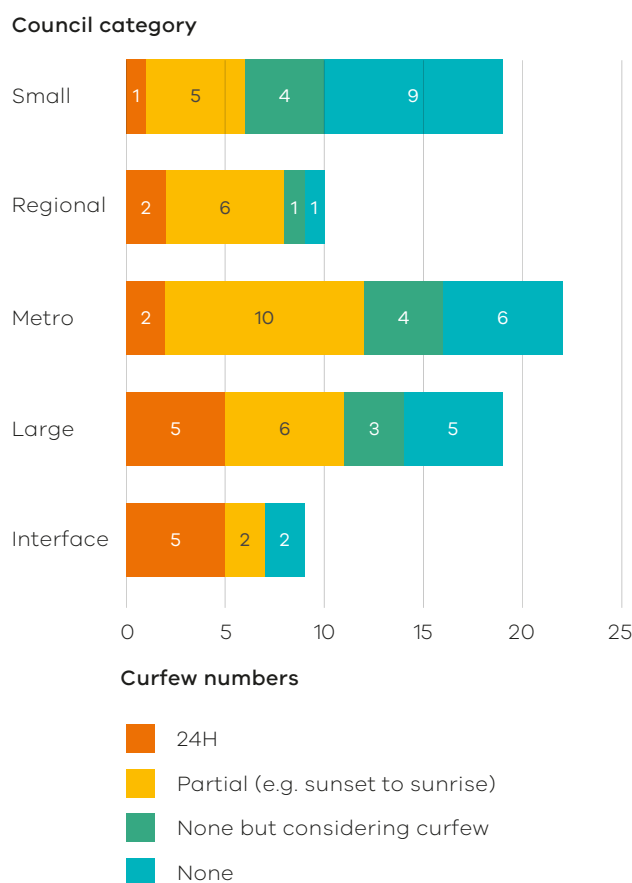
In addition, the strategy seeks to enhance access to important data — such as registration and curfew statistics— by using centralised platforms like Data Victoria. Given that cat management involves a range of stakeholders, including land managers, shelters, and welfare organisations across the state, improving data access will be crucial. This data-sharing initiative will support innovation, address gaps in the evidence base, and help decision-makers better understand the challenges they face. It will also enable a clearer public understanding of cat management's scope and complexity.

Streamlined data sharing will foster collaborative learning, allowing agencies to exchange strategies and insights that drive continuous improvement. Action 20 focuses on expanding opportunities for councils, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), and land managers to share ideas and experiences in cat management. By working closely with these groups, the Strategy aims to gather feedback on how to improve collaboration and enhance current tools or develop new ones.

Furthermore, the Strategy recognises the valuable knowledge found within council Domestic Animal Management Plans (DAMPs) and commits to compiling a summary report of key findings from all 79 plans. This report will highlight innovations and successes, helping councils and stakeholders learn from one another and improve their own cat management initiatives.

The information exchange promoted by these actions will not only encourage direct knowledge sharing but also lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration among land managers and other stakeholders. This collaboration will help refine cat management practices based on shared experiences and initiatives that work.

## Cat curfew across Victoria: 2024 snapshot



## ACTIONS

### Action 18

Establish a working group with key stakeholders to drive and monitor Strategy implementation.

### Action 19

Share cat management data on centralised platforms.

### Action 20

Expand opportunities for councils, land managers and other stakeholders to share information and successful cat management practices.

### Action 21

Distribute key findings summary report of all council Domestic Animal Management Plans.

# Theme 7: Improve laws and processes

The Strategy acknowledges the importance of improving Victoria's laws and policies to effectively address the complex challenges associated with cat management.

Action 22 involves conducting a comprehensive review of the current cat management framework to explore additional reform options that could be implemented to improve cat management outcomes. This includes considering sustainable funding models to support effective management.

Action 23 responds to key stakeholder feedback, proposing the alignment of council cat registration with puberty (around four months of age) to promote early desexing, a critical element for cat welfare and population control.

Aligning cat registration with early desexing reinforces the strategy's educational message and establishes an ideal timeframe for encouraging cat owners to take action on desexing.

Currently, all cats over three months of age must be registered with the local council. This requirement often precedes desexing, leading to higher registration fees for non-desexed cats, which can discourage registration compliance. Increasing the registration age to four months would align with several key benefits. It allows time to incentivise desexing prior to registration, helping to prevent breeding and reduce overpopulation. This timing also coincides with the primary vaccination schedule, encouraging greater veterinary engagement and improving overall health management for cats.

Action 24 focuses on providing councils with more flexible registration options. By offering incentives, councils can promote desexing, adoption, containment, and cat registration. For instance, councils might offer free first-year registration for cats that are desexed and registered by a certain age (e.g., 4 months) or reduced/once-off fees for cats adopted from shelters or kept indoors or in enclosures. Maintaining higher fees for non-desexed cats while incentivising desirable behaviors can foster responsible ownership and improve registration compliance.

This flexible approach empowers councils to shape responsible cat management behaviour through more strategic and innovative fee and registration structures. Councils and shelters have both identified the importance of more flexible legislation to drive cat registration and adoption rates. By empowering councils to innovate, this action enhances registration, adoption, desexing, and containment efforts, contributing to the strategy's overall vision.

## ACTIONS

### Action 22

Review the cat management framework to identify further options for reform, including funding models.

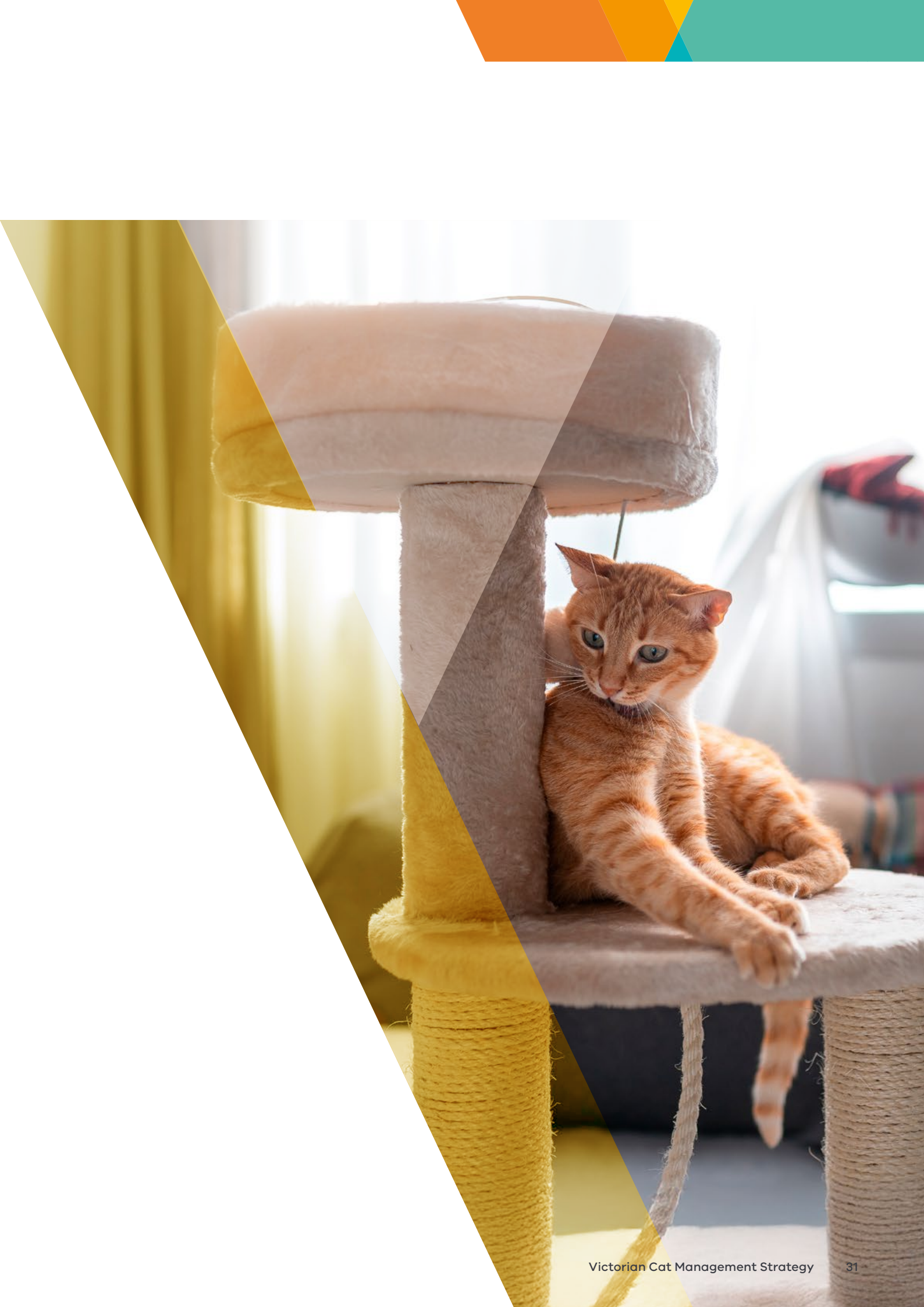
### Action 23

Investigate aligning cat registration with puberty (4 months) to encourage early desexing.

### Action 24

Provide more flexible registration options to encourage desexing, containment, adoption, and cat registration.









# APPENDIX

# Overview of Victorian cat management framework

Regulatory element	Description
<i>Domestic Animals Act 1994 (DA Act)</i>	<p>In Victoria, cats are primarily managed under the DA Act, with councils as the primary regulators. While the DA Act provides certain powers for feral cat control, public land managers, like DEECA and Parks Victoria, manage feral cats on Crown land (e.g. National Parks, State Forest and Nature Conservation Reserves) under the <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i>.</p> <p>The DA Act also requires Victorian councils to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan every four years. This plan outlines council programs, services and strategies that look to promote responsible pet ownership and address overpopulation and high euthanasia rates for dogs and cats within their municipality.</p> <p>Dependent on resources and objectives, councils can provide a variety of measures to assist in cat management (e.g. targeted desexing or rehoming programs). Councils are also involved in managing lost, unowned or unwanted cats through pound and shelter facilities.</p>
Council registration	Every cat over three months of age must be registered with its local council (section 10 DA Act).
Microchipping	All cats are required to be microchipped prior to being sold or given away (section 12A DA Act), and before being registered with local council (section 10C).
Identification marker	All registered cats outside the owner's premises must wear their council issued identification marker (section 20 DA Act).
Cat containment	Unlike dogs, the DA Act does not specifically require pet cats to be confined to their owner's premises, unless an order by resolution is made by council under section 25 of the DA Act. Councils can make orders that require cats to be confined to their owner's premises, or prohibit cats in a specified part of the council during specified times (section 25). Out of Victoria's 79 councils, around 56% of councils (44) have a cat curfew and another 15% (12) are considering introducing one.
Trespass and nuisance	If a cat is found on private property on more than one occasion without the permission of the property owner, the cat can be seized and its owner fined. The process involves a notice of objection and graduated fines up to a maximum of three penalty units (section 23 DA Act).
Mandatory desexing	Councils can make a resolution to refuse to register cats unless they are desexed (section 10A DA Act). Around 27 (34%) councils have compulsory desexing for cats.
Holding period	Once a cat enters a pound or shelter it must be scanned for a microchip within 3 days (section 63J). The owner of the cat must collect the cat within 8 days (section 84M). Cats not collected within the 8-day holding period can be rehomed or euthanised (section 84O(3)). Cats without identification that are wild, uncontrollable or diseased can be euthanised without a holding period (section 84O(1)).
Pet limits	Councils can make local laws limiting the number of cats that can be kept on a premises (section 42 DA Act).
Pet bans	Councils can make local laws that prohibit the keeping of cats in specified areas of the municipality where threatened native fauna are at risk (section 42 DA Act). This can include cat-free zones or suburbs.
Pets in rental accommodation	Landlords cannot unreasonably refuse consent for tenants to keep pets (section 71C <i>Residential Tenancies Act 1997</i> )

Regulatory element	Description
Pet Exchange Register (PER)	<p>The (PER) is an online database that helps to improve the traceability of dogs and cats being sold in Victoria.</p> <p>The PER requires all individuals, organisations and businesses that advertise to sell, rehome or give away a dog or cat in Victoria to obtain a source number. This source number must be displayed on all advertisements along with each animal's microchip number. The PER helps to improve traceability by linking a dog or cat's microchip number to their source number. This information can be used to track down the breeder or seller of a dog or cat if it is lost or stolen.</p>
<i>Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA ACT) and POCTA Regulations 2019</i>	<p>The POCTA Act looks to prevent, and where necessary respond to, acts of animal cruelty.</p> <p>In addition to imposing penalties for animal cruelty offences, section 9 of the POCTA Act makes it an offence for a person to abandon an animal usually kept in a state of confinement or for a domestic purpose, including domestic cats.</p> <p>The Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats is made under the POCTA Act. It provides recommended minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of owned cats.</p> <p>The POCTA Regulations 2019 also contain provisions relevant to cats relating to the use of traps, containment collars and transportation of animals.</p>
<i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)</i>	<p>The CaLP Act governs the management of declared invasive plants and animals in Victoria. Cats (feral or wild) are a declared established pest animal on specified Crown land (public) in Victoria under the CaLP Act. The declaration only applies to areas of Crown land managed by public land managers.</p> <p>These public land managers (and their agents) are responsible for implementing feral cat control on public land, ensuring feral cat control can be carefully planned and managed to minimise potential adverse animal welfare issues, help safeguard the safety of free-roaming domestic cats and ensure efforts are targeted to help protect the threatened wildlife most at risk from predation by feral cats. The management of feral cats in Victoria is done in accordance with the <i>Code of Practice for feral cat control on Crown land in Victoria</i> and related Standard Operating Procedures (see below).</p> <p>Feral cats have not been declared an established pest on private land, meaning farmers and other private landholders are not required to control feral cats. Private landholders can manage cats on their property in accordance with the DA Act.</p>
<i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act)</i>	<p>Predation of native wildlife by cats is listed as a potentially threatening process under the FFG Act.</p>
<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)</i>	<p>Predation by feral cats is listed as a key threatening process under the Commonwealth <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (EPBC Act). The threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats (2015) sets out a national framework to guide and coordinate Australia's response to the impacts of feral cats on biodiversity. It aims to guide the responsible use of public resources and achieve the best conservation outcome for native species threatened by predation by feral cats, given the opportunities and limitations that exist. An updated draft of this plan was released for public comment in September 2023.</p>
Code of Practice (CoP)	<p>Codes of practice set out recommended minimum standards and practices for the keeping of a wide range of species and animal related activities. They are read in conjunction with other relevant legislation such as the DA Act and POCTA Acts.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has developed a <i>Code of Practice for feral cat control on Crown land in Victoria</i><sup>9</sup> (the Code). It details the policy and legislative obligations that must be met by public land managers and their agents, and specifies what techniques can be used to control feral cats on public land where the feral cat declaration applies. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) have also been developed to support the Code. These include SOPs for ground shooting and cage trapping. All public land managers undertaking feral cat control are required to abide by the Code and SOPs.</p> <p>The requirements of all DA Act codes are mandatory. Examples of CoP include, CoP for the: management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds; operation of breeding and rearing businesses; operation of boarding establishments; private keeping of cats etc.</p>
Animal Welfare Fund Grants	<p>The DA Act established the <a href="#">Animal Welfare Fund</a> to support eligible organisations that rehome pets, provide low-cost veterinary services or free or low-cost desexing programs. Many successful applicants use the grant funding to assist with cat welfare, desexing and rehoming needs.</p>

9 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (unpublished), Code of practice for feral cat control on Crown land in Victoria. Victorian Inter-Agency Invasive Species Committee, 2019.



# Resources

## General guides

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RSPCA Australia (n.d.) [Keeping your cat safe and happy at home](#), RSPCA Australia, accessed 22 October 2024.

## Codes of practice and guidelines

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (n.d.) [Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats](#), Animal Welfare Victoria website.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (2022) [Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds](#) (Revision 1), Animal Welfare Victoria website.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (n.d.) [Humane cage trapping of cats](#), Animal Welfare Victoria website.

## Legislation

[Domestic Animals Act 1994](#)

[Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#)

[Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994](#)

## Websites

Animal Welfare Victoria (n.d.) [Cats](#), AWV website, accessed 23 October 2024.

Animal Welfare Victoria (n.d.) [Choosing a pet](#), AWV website, accessed 23 October 2024.

Animal Welfare Victoria (n.d.) [Animal Welfare Fund Grants Program](#), AWV website, accessed 23 October 2024.

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Zoos Victoria and RSPCA Victoria (2018) [Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife](#), Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife website, accessed 23 October 2024.

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [Keeping Cats Safe at Home](#), RSPCA NSW website, accessed 23 October 2024.

## Fact sheets

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [How to keep your cat safe at home](#) [PDF 472 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [Settling your new cat into the family](#) [PDF 762 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

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RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [What your cat needs at home](#) [465 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [Enrichment: help your cat live their best life at home](#) [PDF 586 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [Introducing your new cat to your dog](#) [355 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

RSPCA New South Wales (n.d.) [Introducing your new cat to your existing feline family](#) [492 KB], RSPCA NSW, accessed 23 October 2024.

The Biodiversity Council, The Invasives Species Council and Birdlife Australia (June 2023) [The impact of roaming pet cats on Australian wildlife](#) [442 KB], Invasives Species Council, accessed 23 October 2024.

## Videos

RSPCA NSW (21 November 2022) '[The story of Tanya and Tom \[video\]](#)', RSPCA NSW, Vimeo, accessed 22 October 2024.

RSPCA NSW (25 July 2022) '[The story of Penny and Bella \[video\]](#)', RSPCA NSW, Vimeo, accessed 22 October 2024.

RSPCA NSW (5 June 2022) '[Keeping cats safe...indoor life \[video\]](#)', RSPCA NSW, Vimeo, accessed 22 October 2024.

RSPCA NSW (5 June 2023) '[Cats and wildlife \[video\]](#)', RSPCA NSW, Vimeo, accessed 22 October 2024.

RSPCA NSW (1 June 2023), '[Five pillars of a healthy feline environment \[video\]](#)', RSPCA NSW, Vimeo, accessed 22 October 2024.

Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities and the Threatened Species Recovery Hub (9 November 2021), '[Caring for Country: Managing cats \[video\]](#)', *Threatened Species Recovery Hub*, YouTube, accessed 22 October 2024.

Threatened Species Recovery Hub (27 July 2020) '[Impact of roaming pet cats on Australian wildlife \[video\]](#)', *Threatened Species Recovery Hub*, YouTube, accessed 22 October 2024.

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## Documents of interest

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy (2020) [Inquiry into the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia](#), Parliament of Australia website, accessed 23 October 2024.

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