

# Cats on Norfolk Island

## Background

It is clear that the issue of wild/feral cats on the island is causing increasing impact on the island's wildlife. Many visitors and locals expressed distress at the large number of beheaded seabirds at 100 Acres and Kingston over the 2016/17 summer, while bird destruction was also reported from other areas. Visitors are amazed at being able to observe nesting seabirds at close hand and a number return year after year to experience that as a part of the natural beauty of the island. Unique plant and bird species, and a safe and peaceful environment make Norfolk Island seem Eden-like for visitors and many locals. They may not be declared bird- or nature -lovers, but enjoy the benefits of walking in our peaceful forests, and along our waterfront and clifftops.

For over 25 years the Cat Welfare and Wildlife Protection Association of Norfolk Island (CW&WPA of NI ) has provided funding for cat desexing, trapping assistance for problem feral cats and consciousness-raising publicity and encouragement for the community to encourage cats be kept in a more responsible manner.

While acknowledging and respecting the fact that a cat might be the only family member for people living alone, and is their only company and source of affection, it has also been stressed that cats interacting with wildlife rarely leave the wildlife in a better position. A small number of households have built cat runs and are keeping their cats in a responsible way, preventing impact on wildlife, while still providing company and rodent control in their homes.

After 25 years, the CW&WPA of NI is in the process of closing down. Those we have reached are doing a good job of protecting wildlife, and other cat owners are demonstrating that they have no interest in protecting wildlife, and furthermore are not protecting their cat from attack by dogs, feral cats and motor vehicle impacts. Free-roaming cats are exposed to baited rats as well, and can die from eating a poisoned rodent.

It is time for the onus of domestic cat protection to be on the owner, clearing the way for stronger actions to remove feral cats from the island. A cat that is a loved family member should be treated as such.

With a range of possibilities for feral cat control now available, the time is ripe for the actions relating to feral cats to be a proper reflection of the words spoken about our beautiful natural assets. We have talked the talk long enough, and now need to walk the walk.

Of the 15 landbird species originally found here we now have less than half remaining. A further endemic bird, the White-breasted White-eye, was declared 'Presumed Extinct' only 3 years ago. This should not still be happening. Extinction is forever, and for ongoing extinctions to be occurring on the island when other possibilities exist, is a blot on our plan to be The Best Small Island in the World.

I have prepared the attached draft Options Paper for discussion and consideration by the Reserves Advisory Committee regarding future actions to protect the island's wildlife from ongoing predation.

# CATS ON NORFOLK ISLAND

## OPTION 1 Do nothing

Actions

None

Cost

Nil

Consequences ~ Positive

None

Consequences ~ Negative

1. Cat numbers continue to increase;
2. Wildlife continues to be destroyed;
3. tourism in general suffers;
4. the island's economy loses a strongly growing eco-tourism sector;
5. locals and visitors have reduced pleasure through lost experiences with close encounters with birds, whether nesting seabirds, or forest species;
6. domestic cats continue to experience attacks from feral cats;
7. domestic cats continue to be exposed to feline AIDS, (spread by contact or bowl sharing with feral cats, resulting in a slow death with organ failure);
8. investment by Parks Australia is compromised;
9. investment by philanthropic groups supporting the restoration of the island's ecology is wasted, and eventually withdrawn;
10. journalists, bloggers and other media platforms spread the word that the Norfolk Island community doesn't care about wildlife, lowering the 'good vibe' stressed by our own tourism advertising.
11. Island residents become increasingly upset when encountering dead birds, and realising the possibility of potential new extinctions
12. The island continues to fail in meeting its international obligations under JAMBA (Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement) and CAMBA agreements with China and Japan, to which Australia (and previously the Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly) is a signatory.

## **OPTION 2 Ban cats from Norfolk Island**

### **Actions**

#### **Legislation**

- 1. Require mandatory desexing and microchipping**
- 2. Ban future imports**
- 3. Create cat controller position to remove roaming cats**

### **Cost**

- 1. Administrative cost in writing legislation**
- 2. One staff position /contract until ferals are removed**
- 3. Owners pay for desexing and microchipping**
- 4. Possible need for increased rodent control (community and Council to meet costs in their areas of responsibility)**

### **Consequences ~ Positive**

- 1. Reduced/removed cats have less, and eventually no impact on birds**
- 2. Bird numbers increase across the island**
- 3. Huge potential for media to announce and monitor the increase in wildlife and report on the even more amazing natural experiences possible on the island = Massive free advertising**
- 4. Council goes some way to supporting Australia's (and previously Norfolk Island Assembly's) international obligations under JAMBA and CAMBA.**
- 5. With clearly stated Council support there would exist an increased likelihood of being able to engage external stakeholders and source external funding to deliver on long-term cat management solutions.**

### **Consequences ~ Negative**

- 1. Cat lovers unhappy**
- 2. Possible increase in rodents**

## **OPTION 3 Allow continued cat ownership under controlled conditions**

### **ACTIONS**

1. Legislate for cats to be contained within properties;
2. Appointment of animal control officer to control cats outside private properties, and inspect secure areas;
3. All cats to be microchipped, registered and desexed;
4. Undesexed cats to be allowed only in registered breeding facilities with very tight security, and with increased registration cost reflecting the potential commercial business of producing kittens;
5. every kitten accounted for, with large fines for unregistered, uncontained animals;
6. establish animal pound, with robust records in place for animals taken there, and meaningful fines paid by owners before animals are released;
7. Limit number of cats at each property.

### **COSTS**

1. Administrative costs in writing legislation, including regulations, fines etc
2. Employment/contracting of animal control /inspection officer
3. Cost of establishing and managing pound
4. Microchipping, registration and desexing costs met by owners

### **CONSEQUENCES ~ Positive**

1. Feral cats easily identified and controlled
2. Domestic cats better cared for, and with fewer injuries and infections
3. Bird numbers across the island increase
4. Tourists no longer horrified by scores of dead bodies in picturesque beauty spots
5. Media opportunity to promote a further positive aspect of the island and its ethos
6. Increase in eco-tourism
7. Cat owners can still have their pet.
8. Some costs defrayed by registration and fines.