

CAT MANAGEMENT IN THE ACT

With about a quarter of Canberra households owning cats, cats are a significant part of our society. Cats provide love, companionship and important health and wellbeing benefits to their owners. In return, it is essential that we provide safe and happy homes for them.

In 2019, the ACT Government released the draft ACT Cat Plan, which aimed to engage the community on how we can work together to better manage cats for the health, welfare and safety of both cats and native animals. The draft plan covered a broad range of issues including responsible pet ownership, cat containment, cat desexing, protecting wildlife, compliance and enforcement of laws and more.

The draft plan's vision is: All cats will be owned, wanted and cared for by responsible cat owners.

This is supported by the draft plan's objectives:

- Caring for pet cats through responsible pet ownership.
- Protecting wildlife from cat predation.

THE CONVERSATION

Community consultation took place on the draft plan from 6 April 2019 until 3 July 2019.

The conversation took place through an online survey on YourSay, the ACT Government's engagement website. Written submissions were also invited.

Face-to-face conversations were held with key stakeholders to discuss the draft plan and cat management in the ACT more broadly. Community events were held in order to promote consultation on the draft plan and to provide information and practical advice surrounding cat containment.

WHO ENGAGED

In total 4,087 people completed the survey, both online and by filling out surveys in local libraries.

Survey responses were collected from a broad range of Canberra regions, age groups, living situations and genders. About half the survey respondents owned at least one cat (55%). This is estimated to be more than double the realistic representation of cat owners in the ACT, which is about 24%.





Written submissions were received from 17 organisations and community groups representing cat breeders, animal rescue and animal welfare organisations and nature conservation community groups among others. Submissions were also received from more than 100 individuals and families representing both cat owners and non-cat owners from across the ACT.

Key insights from the community survey

Cat containment practices

Just over half of cat owners responded that they kept their cats contained, restrained or supervised at all times, including in containment structures, or outside only if supervised or on a leash. The most common reason indicated for this was concern for the welfare of the cat. The remainder indicated they allowed their cats to have some sort of unsupervised access to outside, including any time and only during the day time (contained at night). The most common reasons for not containing cats were also to do with concern for the cat's welfare; for example, containment would be stressful for the cat.

Semi owned, unowned and roaming cats

One quarter of cat owners (25%) and around half of non-cat owners indicated they are aware of unowned or semi-owned cats in their suburb, with most indicating that they have experienced some nuisance from roaming cats (50% of cat owners and 82% non-owners).

Support for cat containment

Cat containment measures were supported by 90% of non-owners and 51% of cat owners. Cat containment was found to be more strongly supported by cat owners who already live in containment suburbs; 76% of these owners indicated support, compared to 50% in other suburbs.

Expansion of cat containment

The survey provided three options for cat containment and asked respondents to indicate their preference.

1. Blanket approach—non-cat owners were most likely to indicate a preference for this approach (62%).
2. Grandfathered approach—cat owners most commonly preferred this approach (46%).
3. Phasing in approach—this was the second most preferred approach for both owners (34%) and non-owners (24%).

Support for cat management measures

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their support for a range of cat management measures including cat registration, greater enforcement, more fines and penalties, cat containment and financial assistance for low-income cat owners.

Cat registration had the highest level of support amongst both cat owners and non-owners, more fines and penalties had the lowest level of support among cat-owners. Financial support for low-income owners was most strongly supported by people who own cats, with less support from people who do not own cats. Around half of cat owners indicated a support for containment, with higher levels of support from non-owners.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Submissions and survey responses will be considered in the finalisation of an ACT Cat Plan that will guide cat management in the ACT over the next decade. A full consultation report and publication of the final plan is anticipated by the end of 2019.

You can register to receive project updates at epsddcomms@act.gov.au

To find out more about the Draft ACT Cat Plan and other initiatives, policies and projects in Canberra, visit www.yoursay.act.gov.au or follow us on Facebook (@ACTParks, @EnvironPlan, @ACTGov)

Key Timings

6 April 2019 – Consultation opened on Draft ACT Cat Plan 2019-29

3 July 2019 – Consultation closed

October 2019 – Listening report released

Early 2020 – Final plan and consultation report

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

7,813 People reached via YourSay	6 pop up events and workshops	4,087 Surveys completed	6 businesses and community groups visited
23 emails sent to organisations, community groups and businesses	40,000 reached on social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube)	120 Written submissions	100,000 Promotional postcards sent to residents