

ITEM 10 NOTICE OF MOTION - COUNCILLOR DEIDRE STUART - COMPANION ANIMALS AMENDMENT (CONTROL OF CATS) BILL 2025

Councillor Deidre Stuart has submitted the following Notice of Motion –

“I formally move that Wollongong City Council –

- 1 Expresses its support for the Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025 (the Bill).
- 2 Notes the objective of the Bill is to provide for measures to prevent owned cats in NSW from -
 - a Escaping from the property where the cat is kept, or
 - b Leaving the property without being under the control of a person.
- 3 Notes the Bill -
 - a Creates a general duty for cat owners to keep their pets contained to their property.
 - b Empowers councils to make and enforce reasonable orders to prevent cats from escaping.
 - c Protects vulnerable people through fair and compassionate enforcement.
 - d Helps stop the flow of lost and abandoned pets into the feral cat population.
- 4 Acknowledges that effective cat containment -
 - a Protects native wildlife and local biodiversity by reducing injury and death from domestic roaming cat predation.
 - b Improves the wellbeing of owned cats by reducing their risk of injury or death from vehicle strikes, dog attacks, ticks, snakebite, poisoning, wounds and infections from cat fights or contracting diseases.
 - c Limits the rate of spread of cat-borne diseases that affect human health, such as toxoplasmosis.
- 5 Writes to the NSW Minister for Local Government, the NSW Minister for the Environment, the NSW Premier and Local Members of Parliament for Heathcote, Keira, Wollongong, Shellharbour, and Kiama -
 - a Expressing Wollongong City Council’s support for the Bill.
 - b Urging the Ministers and MPs to support the Bill.
 - c Requesting State funding for councils to support education, compliance and animal shelter capacity.”¹

Background provided by Councillor Deidre Stuart:

Wollongong LGA has many owned pet cats. In February 2025, according to council records, approximately 30,000 cats were currently identified or registered in Wollongong LGA.² More specifically, at 10 Feb 2026, there are approximately 22,000 microchipped cats identified in the Wollongong LGA.³ Not all cat-owners microchip and register their pet cats. Some microchipped cats change owners without records being updated. These pet cat numbers in Wollongong LGA are believed to be conservative.

Relevant NSW laws (*Companion Animal Act 1998*⁴ and *Local Government Act 1993*⁵) require pet cats in Wollongong:

- To be desexed, microchipped and registered
- If they are not desexed, to hold an annual permit
- To wear a collar and tag.

¹ This motion is adapted from that passed by Hornsby Shire Council 8/10/2025 meeting-
https://businesspapers.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/Open/2025/11/GM_12112025_MIN_WEB.htm

² Email (03/02/2025) WCC Compliance Manager response to a citizen concerned about impacts of roaming cats on biodiversity.

³ Email (10/02/2026) WCC Compliance Manager to Cr Stuart.

⁴ <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1998-087>

⁵ <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1993-030>

The laws ban pet cats from some public places such as food shops and wildlife protection areas. They also provide for penalties if cats damage property or cause nuisance.

Notably, however, the *Companion Animals Act 1998* does not create an offence for roaming pet cats, rather, offences are for damage caused by such cats. So, currently, pet cats in Wollongong, if their owners allow them, can roam rather freely. Compliance action related to a reported offence involving a pet cat, is quite onerous, as officers need sufficient evidence which usually includes a witness statement, statement from the cat owner, video or other evidence. Council staff recently approached the NSW Office of Local Government, requesting that the powers of authorised officers be expanded in the next review of the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, and specifically, proposed amendments to allow authorised officers to declare a cat a nuisance if it habitually roams onto someone else's property.⁶

The precise consequences of roaming pet cats in Wollongong are not known, but there is growing awareness that roaming pet cats:

Injure and kill native wildlife

Across Australia, pet cats are estimated to kill many native animals each year, including an estimated 53 million reptiles, 61 million birds, and 67 million mammals.⁷ Based on the Australia Threatened Species Hub numbers,⁸ Wollongong's pet cats likely kill about 5 million animals every year (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians) – with most of those killed being native animals. Moreover, cumulatively, about one half of the Wollongong LGA has high environmental value, high conservation value designations including as: state conservation areas, national parks or legislated special areas of the Greater Sydney Drinking Water Catchment. Uncontained pet cats that live in residences near these areas are likely to prey on wildlife in these areas, thereby undermining their biodiversity conservation capacity. This matters because Australia's unique biodiversity is in rapid decline and cats contribute to that decline.⁹

Contribute to the human disease burden

Diseases transmitted by cats that affect humans are estimated to cost Australia more than \$6 billion each year.¹⁰ This is equivalent to about \$200 per person per year – and some of that disease burden no doubt occurs in Wollongong. A rough pro rata estimate of medical care costs, other direct costs and lost income due to cat diseases affecting Wollongong residents is about \$44 million per year.¹¹ This is frankly an astonishing amount – but the human suffering aspect to this is also confronting. Just one cat-parasite disease, toxoplasmosis, is well known for its impacts on unborn babies leading to miscarriages and congenital defects, but toxoplasmosis is also implicated in traffic accidents, suicide and other mental health conditions. Experts estimate that somewhere between 23% and 66% of the Australian human population is infected.¹² Cat containment would reduce human exposure to cats and help break transmission cycles of pathogens carried by cats.

Are less safe than contained pet cats

A recent NSW government ministerial release noted that two-in-three cat owners have lost pets to a roaming-related accidents.¹³ Cat containment would help keep pet cats safe.

Roaming pet cats also cost council and ratepayers. Council's Animal Care and Impounding Service provided care for a total of 938 companion animals (545 cats and 393 dogs) in the 2024-2025 financial

⁶ https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/202512/NF7-Minutes-25-July-2023.pdf

⁷ <https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/keeping-cats-at-home-and-wildlife-safe/>

⁸ <https://invasives.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Fact-sheet-The-impact-of-cats-in-Australia-Threatened-Species-Hub.pdf> Australia Threatened Species Hub (2020) estimate 186 vertebrate animal deaths per year per roaming pet cat. 30,000 pet cats x 186 deaths/pet cat/year = 5,580,000 vertebrate deaths.

⁹ <https://biodiversitycouncil.org.au/news/how-do-we-know-australia-is-in-a-biodiversity-crisis-a-summary-of-the-science-1> (2024); <https://theconversation.com/gut-wrenching-and-infuriating-why-australia-is-the-world-leader-in-mammal-extinctions-and-what-to-do-about-it-192173> (2022)

¹⁰ Jaana Dielenberg (2024) <https://theconversation.com/two-thirds-of-us-support-banning-pet-cats-from-roaming-a-ban-would-save-millions-of-native-animals-and-billions-of-dollars-229180> & https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/gatmsmla/7-4-cat-dependent-disease-findings-factsheet_v17.pdf

¹¹ Based on 2024 Wollongong population estimate of 221,894 ([Estimated Resident Population \(ERP\) | Wollongong City Council | Community profile](#)) and 2025 Australia total population estimate of 27,614,411 (<https://www.abs.gov.au/>)

¹² https://www.nespthreatenedspecies.edu.au/media/gatmsmla/7-4-cat-dependent-disease-findings-factsheet_v17.pdf

¹³ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/keeping-cats-home-and-wildlife-safe> (2025)

year and also engaged in a rehoming program.¹⁴ Some of these 545 cats were pet cats with owners. Council intends to support financially vulnerable resident cat-owners, by facilitating a number of free desexing and free microchipping clinics for cats utilizing animal welfare organisations (starting in the 2025–2026 financial year).¹⁵

There is an urgent need to strengthen domesticated cat management in NSW, to stem biodiversity losses, to improve cat welfare, to reduce health burdens on people, and to address pressures on council pounds. NSW's *Keeping cats home and wildlife safe*¹⁶ program which involved 11 councils in its original trial and in 2025 was extended to another 19 councils, does not involve Wollongong. Wollongong City Council applied to participate as a pilot council in the original trial but was not selected, and in the trial expansion last year, there was no opportunity for councils to apply to participate. This program is a step in the right direction, as it focusses on increasing rates of desexing, microchipping and lifetime registration while encouraging the uptake of voluntary containment of pet cats. But as a voluntary program it does not impose any containment duty on cat-owners, and it does not give enforcement powers to council rangers who are on the frontlines of controlling cats.

Laws requiring pet cats to be contained to their owner's property are already in place in some other states/territories of Australia:¹⁷

- In the ACT, all cats born after 1 July 2022 must be kept on their owners' properties at all times.¹⁸
- In Victoria, more than a third of councils now require cats to be contained overnight or 24 hours a day – and some are moving toward full 24-hour containment.¹⁹
- In parts of Queensland, local animal laws already require cat owners to prevent their cats from wandering off their property and disturbing neighbours or wildlife, with obligations to provide secure enclosures.²⁰
- Tasmania's *Cat Management Act 2009* focuses on responsible cat ownership including mandatory microchipping and desexing, and while there's no blanket statewide legal obligation to contain cats to a property, the legislation and local council powers actively encourage responsible containment to protect wildlife and reduce nuisance. Councils also have powers to control roaming cats on private land – including trapping and removal.²¹
- In Western Australia, the Government announced in September 2025 that it will amend the *Cat Act 2011* to give councils the power to adopt and enforce cat containment laws, with a Bill expected in 2026. Several WA councils are already updating local Cat Laws to better protect wildlife and promote responsible cat ownership.²²

The Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025²³ proposes an amendment to the NSW *Companion Animals Act 1998* such that cat owners will be legally required to take all reasonable precautions to prevent their cats from escaping from the property on which they are kept. Cat containment is supported by the RSPCA²⁴, WIRES²⁵, the Invasive Species Council²⁶, Local Government NSW²⁷, Australian Local Government Association²⁸ and the Australian Veterinarian Association²⁹.

¹⁴ WCC Annual Report 2024–2025 – p 56. Moreover, in November 2025, WCC was awarded an Excellence in Innovation in Animal Management Award by the Australian Institute of Animal Management for its rehoming program.
<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/council/news/articles/2025/november-2025/cats-out-of-the-bag-wollongong-pet-connection-is-award-winning/>

¹⁵ WCC Annual Report 2024–2025 – p 148

¹⁶ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/keeping-cats-home-and-wildlife-safe> (2025)

¹⁷ <https://invasives.org.au/our-work/feral-animals/cats-in-australia/> (undated) provides a comparative map of regulations across Australia

¹⁸ <https://www.cityservices.act.gov.au/pets-and-wildlife/cats>

¹⁹ <https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/services/pets-animals/animal-registration-regulations/24-hour-cat-containment>

²⁰ <https://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/animals-and-pets/owning-a-pet-in-brisbane/owning-a-cat-in-brisbane>

²¹ <https://nre.tas.gov.au/invasive-species/responsible-cat-ownership>

²² <https://walqa.asn.au/media-and-resources/latest-news/a-win-for-local-governments-around-cat-containment>

²³ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/Pages/bill-details.aspx?pk=18825> Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025

²⁴ <https://kb.rspca.org.au/assets/Downloads/PP-A8-Cat-containment.pdf> (2023)

²⁵ <https://www.wires.org.au/domestic-pets-and-wildlife> (2026) WIRES specifically recommends pets be kept indoors at night.

²⁶ <https://invasives.org.au/our-work/feral-animals/cats-in-australia/pet-cats/> & <https://invasives.org.au/media-releases/pet-cat-containment/> (2023)

²⁷ <https://lgnsw.org.au/Public/Public/Media-Releases/2025/0821-cat-management.aspx> (2025)

²⁸ <https://alqa.com.au/stronger-state-laws-would-help-councils-reduce-cat-impacts/>

²⁹ <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-management-and-welfare/management-of-cats-in-australia/> (2022)

By way of summary, the Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025³⁰ does four key things:³¹

Creates a general duty of containment

The Bill introduces a new section 29A into the *Companion Animals Act 1998* that establishes a clear legal duty for cat owners to keep their animals under control. It requires owners to take all reasonable precautions to prevent their cats from escaping from the property on which they are kept. This duty reflects the principle that owning a cat carries a responsibility not only for the animal's welfare but also for the protection of wildlife and community amenity. The provision makes it an offence to intentionally release a cat from a property unless the animal is under the effective control of a competent person. By codifying this obligation, the Bill closes a long-standing gap in the companion-animal regulatory framework and brings expectations for cat ownership into line with those that already apply to dogs.

Establishes penalties that are fair and proportionate

The Bill sets out a graduated penalty structure that increases with repeated non-compliance. A first offence attracts a penalty of 0.1 penalty unit—about \$11 at current values – reflecting that initial enforcement will focus on education and awareness. A second offence attracts 3 penalty units, or roughly \$330, and a third or subsequent offence attracts 8 penalty units, or about \$880. This scaling provides a fair and proportionate response to repeated breaches while allowing time for owners to adjust their behaviour. The model is designed to prioritise education before punishment, supporting a culture of responsible ownership rather than relying on punitive enforcement alone.

Protects vulnerable people

The Bill includes statutory defences to ensure that the new offences do not unfairly penalise people who may be in crisis or experiencing disadvantage. It provides that a person is not guilty of an offence if, at the time of the alleged breach, they were experiencing homelessness or were subject to behaviour constituting domestic or family violence under the *Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007*. These provisions recognise that some people face circumstances that limit their ability to comply immediately with containment requirements and ensure that enforcement remains compassionate and proportionate.

Empowers councils

The Bill amends the *Local Government Act 1993* to give councils clear authority to issue and enforce orders that require the occupier of a property to take action to prevent a cat from escaping. If an order is ignored, the person may be prosecuted for failing to comply, with a maximum penalty of 8 penalty units. These provisions give local governments the practical tools they have long sought to respond to nuisance and predation complaints, manage risks to wildlife and public amenity, and support consistent standards for responsible cat ownership across the State.

The Bill also provides a staged commencement – 12 months after assent for most provisions, and six years for the full penalty regime – to allow time for education and for cultural change to occur.

The NSW Parliamentary Legislation Review Committee found no issues with the proposed Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025.³²

Our council should express our support for this Bill. It is time that cat companion animals were treated similarly to dog companion animals under NSW legislation and required to be contained to owners' properties and to be under the control of their owners at all times. This would protect wildlife, protect owned cats, and reduce spread of cat-vector human diseases.

³⁰ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bills/Pages/bill-details.aspx?pk=18825> Companion Animals Amendment (Control of Cats) Bill 2025

³¹ Summary provided by Office of MP Sue Higginson (28/01/2026).

³² <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/digests/725/Legislation%20Review%20Digest%20No.%2038%20of%2058%20-%2011%20November%202025.pdf> Legislation Review Digest No. 38 of 58. 11/11/2025.