



## **Draft Tasmanian Cat Management Plan**

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## **Introduction**

The Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) is the representative body of Local Government in Tasmania. Established in 1911, the LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* with membership comprising the 29 Tasmanian councils.

The functions of the Association are as follows:

- (a) to protect and represent the interests and rights of councils in Tasmania;
- (b) to promote an efficient and effective system of local government in Tasmania;  
and
- (c) to provide services to member councils, councillors and employees of councils

## **General Comments**

LGAT welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Draft Tasmania Cat Management Plan ('draft plan').

LGAT provided the paper to our member councils for comment. I understand that a number of councils have provided individual responses to the Department on the draft plan. LGAT's submission will concentrate on broad issues common to the majority of councils. This does not mean that we do not agree with other specific issues raised by councils, simply they are best raised within the local context.

Local Government supports the initiative to develop a state-wide approach to cat management; however we have a number of concerns, which are outlined in more detail below.

Councils consistently raised the issue of funding and the unresolved issue of roles and responsibilities in their comments on the plan and identified that in the first instance a financial and risk assessment should be undertaken to inform implementation and the development of a sustainable funding approach. Local Government's position on cat management continues to be that the effective management and control of cats is beyond the capacity of most councils in Tasmania.

There is also concern that the cost impact of the plan is likely to be greater in relation to the management of domestic cats than for the management of feral cats. This seems at odds with the intent of the plan to reduce the impact of cats on the environment, agricultural assets and human health.

It is recommended that the objectives and actions in the plan be prioritised given the likelihood of limited resources to implement the plan. Timelines for each of the actions should also be included, as well as an annual review process to monitor the implementation

## **Specific Areas of Concern**

### **Funding and defining the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders**

In order to effectively implement the actions outlined in the plan a significant amount of funding would be required.

Many of the draft actions identify Local Government as a key stakeholder responsible for implementation. This suggests that councils are to take a much greater role in cat management.

It should be noted that when the *Cat Management Act 2009* was introduced it was acknowledged that there was clear intention not to impose new obligations on councils; rather a regime of voluntary action was favoured, with the ability to make by-laws in relation to cat management and declare council-controlled land as prohibited areas. A number of councils support the continuation of such an approach.

Significant resources would be required if Local Government were to become responsible for implementation and enforcement of the proposed actions and/or legislative provisions. Any transfer of responsibility from the State to Councils needs to be accompanied by ongoing financial assistance to ensure councils can increase their resources to meet the increase in responsibility. This is essential if the objectives of the Act and the draft Plan are to be effectively implemented.

In addition to financial assistance, other forms of assistance will need to be provided to councils undertaking compliance and monitoring programs for effective implementation. For example, technical expertise, streamlined assessment processes for establishing prohibited/cat management areas, etc

A few councils raised the option of requiring compulsory registration of cats. However, historically local councils have been opposed to this due to the fact that the administrative cost of managing registration does not cover the revenue provided through registration.

### **Increasing community awareness**

Local Government agrees education is a vital component of successful cat management, however it is important that the education programs are ongoing and properly resourced. Education programs also need to be based on evidence that support the outcomes that are trying to be achieved.

Specific communication plans and information materials need to be developed at the State level and resources need to be provided to assist councils in distributing this material to their local communities. It is essential that this material is targeted and accessible to all sectors of the community to ensure the greatest impact. Anecdotally, many cat issues arise in lower socioeconomic areas where there is low functional literacy. Therefore it is essential that material developed is in plain English and accessible to people with low functional literacy.

### **Proposed changes to the Act**

There was varying views from councils in relation to the proposed changes to the Act, with some suggesting that there should be no changes and others accepting that the proposed changes are likely to result in improved levels of responsible cat ownership. However, overwhelmingly councils were concerned with the potential regulatory burden that the proposed changes may have on councils- particularly in relation to the requirement to contain cats and to limit the amount of cats on a premise without a permit.

Significant consideration needs to be given to the practical implementation of the changes and an appreciation that cats do not behave and cannot be contained and detained in the same way as dogs. The cost of confining a cat may impact on people in the community who cannot afford materials to accommodate this change and suitable cat enclosures are also likely to have implications for development planning approval in suburban/urban areas.

Implementation of the suggested amendments must allow sufficient time to become accepted and embedded. An immediate proclamation and enforcement of rules is likely to result in resistance and may be counterproductive to long term success.

In order for councils to better assess the merits of the proposed changes it is important that a regulatory impact assessment is carried out to ensure that the benefit outweighs the cost.

### **Holding of Cats**

LGAT is concerned that there are currently insufficient cat management facilities across the State. This will be a key aspect of implementation and is likely to carry a cost which the State Government will have to fund. Local Government does not see a role here and would anticipate that, as with dogs, this is primarily provided by private organisations and not for profits such as the RSPCA and the Hobart Cat Centre. Many animal centres may need redesigning to cope with holding and/or euthanizing cats and require expansion to cope with the inevitable increase in abandoned cats following implementation of the legislation.

Funding and support for cat holding facilities will be essential if the proposed legislative changes are enacted.

## Summary

- In general Local Government supports the broad objectives of the plan. It notes that the key driver of the plan is to reduce the impact of cats on the environment, agricultural assets and human health. Given the goals of the plan, LGAT would suggest that the cost of implementing the plan is likely to be higher for the management of domestic cats and questions the cost benefits of this given the core outcome trying to be achieved by the plan.
- The State Government must undertake a financial and risk assessment of the plan before stakeholders can have meaningful discussions around implementation.
- The State must undertake a regulatory impact assessment on the proposed changes to the legislation to ensure that the regulatory costs do not exceed the benefits.
- The actions in the plan need to be prioritised based on the outcome trying to be achieved.
- The State Government will need to take a significant lead in the delivery of the plan and provide substantial financial support to stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the plan.
- LGAT will work with the sector, State Government and other stakeholders to further explore the roles and responsibilities of organisations in the implementation of the plan.