



CAT HAVEN
every cat matters

Local Government Act Review
Department of Local Government, Sport & Cultural Industries

To the Review Team

Review of the *Local Government Act 1995* – Phase Two

On behalf of the Cat Welfare Society (WA) Inc. trading as Cat Haven, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to the review of the *Local Government Act 1995 – Phase Two* (the Review).

Cat Haven is the leading cat rescue organisation in WA, taking in some 8,000 to 9,000 cats each year. As an open admission cat shelter of almost 60 years' operation, providing a range of services to the public and local governments, we are experts in cat management.

Local governments are an important stakeholder for Cat Haven in the context of cat management and the Cat Act 2011. Accordingly, we focus our comments on Reform Area 2: Smart – local laws, and use this opportunity to provide comment on the related topic of cat management by local governments.

Local laws regulating cat management

Part of the rationale for enacting the *Cat Act 2011* (the Act) was to overcome the confusing and unfair inconsistencies between local laws regulating cats, and to address the gap where a local government did not have a local law. Prior to the Act, cat management was an optional function for local governments, and the requirements of the few local laws in place varied widely.

However, in 2019, the situation is not greatly improved. All local governments are now charged with cat management functions, but many retain a local law on cats, still with varying content where they do exist. How should a member of the public (whether they are cat owner, a neighbour wishing to report a nuisance cat, a good Samaritan reporting a found stray, or in some other situation) know the correct thing to do in their situation when two levels of regulation are in place?

Local governments should be provided every assistance to enforce regulation and help the public understand it, so they can comply with it. That assistance includes recognising that local governments have a range of functions, are not cat management experts, simplifying cat regulation to remove local laws and retain only the *Cat Act 2011* would provide both clarity and expertise.

Local government approach to cat management

It is Cat Haven's experience that the issue of cat regulation is almost redundant given most councils badly disappoint their residents, and animal welfare organisations (including Cat Haven), by not complying with their cat management responsibilities under the Act. Largely, the

Cat Act is not enforced and the public are offered little to no assistance when requesting assistance with cats. Enforcement and resourcing are highly varied between local governments, despite their working from the same State-level law. It is unfair and unreasonable that ratepayers, and people seeking to do the right thing, should receive such variable service.

Cat Haven provides a fee-for-service pound facility for 13 metropolitan councils; a few others have contracted RSPCA WA, or a local cattery, to provide their pound facility; and a further handful operate their own pound facility. Nevertheless, the total of those with pound facilities is less than half of WA's 139 local government authorities, despite their all being equally required to manage cats in their jurisdiction.

Cat Haven also provides a self-funded ranger service, the demand for which has not reduced since the Cat Act's introduction as so few local governments provide cat management services. The format of our ranger service has changed considerably in recent years to include some fee-based services as a way to offset its operating costs. This means businesses and residents who've already paid rates to their local government are not receiving a service and must pay again to actually receive it.

Local governments are rarely proactive in cat management to the extent allowed by the Cat Act. They rarely address hoarding situations and do not appear to pursue the sale/transfer of unsterilised, un-microchipped, and/or unregistered cats. (Cat Haven operates a programme reviewing online and print advertisements, to identify the transfer of non-compliant cats, and offers services and information to the advertisers, to prevent unwanted litters and homeless cats.)

Perhaps most concerning is that the public is usually permitted, and in some cases instructed, by local governments to trap and transport cats themselves. There is evidence that little, if any, direction is given on how to do so effectively or humanely. Trapping by untrained, unsupervised persons is fraught with concern about the cat's welfare; can be ineffective; can be carried out by residents with a grievance against a neighbour, or cats in general; and gives complete freedom to persons seeking to procure an animal for malevolent purposes to do so. There is no substitute for fully trained and resourced rangers responding to reports of nuisance or straying cats.

Conclusion

For simplicity of administration, the *Cat Act 2011* should be the only instrument regulating cat management in WA. The current unclear regulatory environment is not helped by the fact local governments charged with responsibility for cat management rarely fully carry out this duty. Whether this is due to lack of will or lack of resources, it cannot be allowed to continue for reasons of fairness and animal welfare.

Cat Haven welcomes the opportunity to contribute further to this discussion. As an open admission cat shelter of almost 60 years' experience we have a wealth of practical knowledge and data to share.

Yours faithfully



Liddell Williams

on behalf of the Board of Management
Cat Welfare Society (WA) Inc. trading as Cat Haven

31 March 2019