



# Proposed declaration of feral cats as pest animals on public land in Victoria

**Submission from the Australian Veterinary  
Association**

**May 2018**



## The AVA

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 10,000 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in conservation, welfare, industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We also have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

## Summary

The AVA, in principle, supports the proposed declaration of feral cats as established pest animals on public land in Victoria. We acknowledge that feral cats are over abundant and have adverse effects by threatening wildlife – risking the possible extinction of particular species of birds and possums.

We understand feral cats will not be declared on private land and farmers and other private land holders will not be required to control feral cats.

## Control Program

Although eradication of feral cats is unlikely, where low population densities of threatened species are concerned, it can be necessary to reduce predation to a very low level or attempt to eliminate it completely. A wide range of effective and humane controls options must be complemented with public education and oversighting legislation. Animal welfare for both the target and non-target species must be a high priority in all planned methods of control and a commitment to a long-term integrated plan is paramount.

Methods used to kill feral cats must be rapid and humane and participants in culling programs must be adequately trained and demonstrate competency in killing methods approved for the program. If biological agents are used, death should be as rapid and as free from pain, apprehension or disorientation as possible.

A carefully constructed program is necessary prior to culling and should be coupled with adequate monitoring of the prey population before and following culling. Monitoring of the intended outcome threatened species abatement is essential - not just the number of feral cats removed. This was recognised during the development of the *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats* (Australian Government, Department of the Environment) but ignored in the final draft.

Another consideration must be the possibility of rapid repopulation from adjacent land. Culling studies of both feral cats and foxes have reported that due to the removal of dominant cats and foxes, it released their territories for other cats and foxes and resulted in an influx of new individuals from surrounding areas. (Newsome et al, 2017)

The threatened species noted in the explanatory notes provided (Mountain Pigmy Possum, Helmeted Honeyeater, Orange-bellied Parrot and Plains Wanderer) shows that their perilous state is the function of a suite of issues of which predation by feral cats is only one. Issues like fire-management, habitat destruction and fragmentation, small population size, drought and disease are also factors. Only an integrated program that is multi-pronged is likely to be successful.

It is noted that a *Code of Practice for the Management of Feral Cats* will be developed that will outline all control methods which are likely to involve trapping, baiting and shooting. The AVA would be very interested in actively participating in this consultation.



## Public Education

Public education is an integral part of the control program and must occur before any active control techniques are activated.

It is important that a “feral cat” is clearly defined to the public. A feral cat is born outside human society and has no or minimal contact with people, thus receiving no veterinary care. It is non-reliant on humans for survival and obtains food by hunting and scavenging. It tends to be solitary or lives in small family groups of 3-4 guided by a matriarch.

This declaration provides a good opportunity to educate the public on cat ownership. The health and social benefits of cat ownership should be widely promoted to encourage the public to take full responsibility (ownership) of a stray cat that they may be feeding. This could include microchipping awareness campaigns so these cats are identifiable and not mistaken as feral.

## Concerns

The AVA does have concerns that we will advocate to be addressed in the consultation of the *Code of Practice for the Management of Feral Cats*. These include:

- Safety of owned domestic cats
- Impact on non-target species
- Pest animals controlled by feral cats increasing to undesirable levels

It is expected that these areas will form part of the consultation of the *Code of Practice for the Management of Feral Cats*.

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## References

[AVA Policy - Control of native and introduced animals causing damage to agriculture or habitat](#)

[Management of cats in Australia](#)

[Does Culling Work? – Thomas Newsome et al](#) (can supply as PDF if required)