

Submission on the Review of the *Cat Act 2011*

May 2026

About WALGA

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, member-based, not-for-profit organisation representing and supporting the WA Local Government sector. Our membership includes all 139 Local Governments in the State.

WALGA uses its influence, support and expertise to deliver better outcomes for WA Local Governments and their communities. We advocate to all levels of Government on behalf of our Members, and provide expert advice, services and support to Local Governments.

WALGA's vision is for agile and inclusive Local Governments enhancing community wellbeing and enabling economic prosperity.

Acknowledgement of Country

WALGA acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal people to Country, culture and community. We embrace the vast Aboriginal cultural diversity throughout Western Australia, including Boorloo (Perth), on the land of the Whadjuk Nyoongar People, where WALGA is located and we acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Introduction

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the review of the *Cat Act 2011* (Cat Act) being undertaken by the Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (LGIRS).

The Cat Act intends to:

1. Provide for the control and management of cats
2. Promote and encourage the responsible ownership of cats, and for related matters.

As articulated in the Second Reading Speech, the Cat Act was introduced with the aim to reduce the number of stray cats being euthanised each year, encourage responsible cat ownership and provide for better management of the unwanted impacts of cats on the community and environment.

The Cat Act requires all cats that have reached six months of age to be sterilised, microchipped and registered with the Local Government in which the cat is ordinarily kept. Cats must be wearing registration tags when in public places to enable identification. Cat control notices, seizing cats, cat management facilities and breeding of cats are also matters covered in the Act. The Cat Act gives Local Governments the power to administer and enforce the legislation and make Local Laws under the Act.

All elements of the Cat Act are under review, including registration, enforcement/compliance, sterilisation, microchipping, breeding and limits on the number of cats. LGIRS is further seeking

insights on related cat management approaches that have been successful in other Australian States and Territories.

In this submission WALGA has identified several areas where reform to the legislation is required, including:

- Consolidation of the Cat Act and *Dog Act 1976*
- Stronger provisions for consistent non-compliance
- Clear definitions for owned and unowned cats
- Development of a Model Cat Local Law
- A limit on the number of cats
- Lowering the age of sterilisation.

This submission has been developed based on [WALGA Advocacy Positions](#) (2.12.1 Review of the *Cat Act 2011* and *Dog Act 1976* and 2.12.2 Dog and Cat Management), previous submissions and positions on the legislation (see [Attachment 1](#) for WALGA State Council's resolution on the Proposal for Domestic Cat Control Legislation) and with input from Local Governments via a webinar held on Thursday, 26 March 2026. The submission provides recommendations on provisions in the Cat Act and identifies some of the issues Local Governments experience with implementing the legislation.

Cat containment is out of scope of this submission, as the State Government is progressing the [Cat Amendment \(Local Laws\) Bill 2026](#) to enable Local Governments to make cat containment Local Laws.

Review - Legislation

Consolidation of the Cat Act and Dog Act 1976

Many requirements in the Cat Act replicate Dog Act provisions, including registration, microchipping and some enforcement provisions. WALGA is supportive of combining the Cat Act and *Dog Act 1976* to form a Companion Animals Act. A combined Act would reduce and simplify administrative burden, provide a consistent approach to the administration and enforcement of the legislation, and reflect the actions of most other Australian States and Territories. It would also have the advantage of allowing much-needed amendments to the *Dog Act 1976* to be progressed.

Stronger provisions for consistent non-compliance

Local Governments raised concerns about cat owners who demonstrate consistent non-compliance with provisions in the Cat Act. The sector considers that provisions should be included in the Cat Act that allow stronger action to be taken by Local Governments where cat owners repeatedly fail to comply with cat control notices and where infringements are not a sufficient deterrent. Local Governments also support the strengthening of the powers of seizure, cancelling registrations and penalties for failing to comply with cat control notices.

Clear definitions for owned and unowned cats

In contrast with other cat management policies at the Australian and State Government levels, the Cat Act does not provide clear definitions for the different categories of cats. The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats 2024 uses 'feral cat' terminology to describe cats that are not formally owned (sometimes referred to as 'stray cats') and 'pet cat' terminology to describe cats that are owned. Similarly, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development uses 'feral cat', 'stray cat' and 'domestic cat' terminology in its Feral Cat Policy, with only domestic cats being classified as owned and subject to the Cat Act.

The sector considers that definitions should be included in the Cat Act to distinguish between cats that are owned (registered and microchipped) and unowned (not registered and not microchipped). A clear definition of cats that are unowned, would enable Local Governments to

begin the process of re-homing an impounded cat faster and provide clarity on the appropriate course of action if a person attempts to collect a cat without proof of ownership. WALGA identified this issue and proposed the resolution, cats either being owned or unowned, in its submission on the Proposal for Domestic Cat Control Legislation in August 2010.

Importantly, the implementation of these definitions would require a transition period and education campaign for owners to register and microchip their cats to limit any unintended consequences (e.g. ownership not being able to be confirmed).

Development of a Model Cat Local Law

The sector is supportive of State Government developing a Model Cat Local Law for Local Governments to adopt and/or tailor to meet local community needs. This Model Local Law would address the scope of matters for which a Local Law may be made under the Cat Act.

Currently, matters under section 79(3) of the Cat Act are included in a number of different Local Laws made by Local Governments, illustrated in this [map](#) created by WALGA. In summary:

- 39% of Local Governments have adopted or sought to progress a Cat Local Law
- 4% of Local Governments have included cats in an Animals Local Law
- 9% of Local Governments have included cats in an Animals, Environment and Nuisance Local Law
- 2% of Local Governments have included cats in a Consolidated Local Law
- 28% of Local Governments have included cats in a Health Local Law
- 18% of Local Governments have no mention of cats in any Local Law.

Adoption of a Model Cat Local Law would support a consistent approach to implementing the Cat Act across Local Governments and further support cat owner compliance when moving between Local Government districts.

Where cat containment is concerned, the Model Cat Local Law should incorporate transitional arrangements to ensure consistency, equity and animal welfare outcomes.

Including a limit on the number of cats

The Cat Act prescribes a Local Law may be made to limit the numbers of cats that can be kept at premises. This means that the number of cats allowed can vary between Local Governments. The sector supports a maximum number of cats that can be kept at premises being included in the Cat Act to ensure consistency across Local Governments. This provision would align with the *Dog Act 1976*, which sets a maximum number of dogs that can be kept in, or at, premises to six.

Lowering the age of sterilisation

The Cat Act requires the owner of a cat that has reached six months of age to ensure the cat is sterilised by a veterinarian, unless the cat is exempt. The sector strongly supports lowering the age of cat sterilisation on the basis that cats can reach sexual maturity much earlier than six months of age. In New South Wales, cats are required to be sterilised by four months of age, unless their owner is granted an exemption/permit.

Review - Implementation

Low registration rates

The Cat Act requires the owner of a cat that has reached six months of age to ensure the cat is microchipped and registered with the Local Government in the district in which the cat is ordinarily kept. Despite this being a requirement, feedback from Local Government indicates the registration of cats remains low across the State.

Limited compliance with this provision in the Cat Act, in combination with the absence of an 'owned cat' definition, causes issues when cats are impounded. Cats that are not registered and microchipped have very low collection rates across the State, with many Local Governments reporting less than 20% of impounded cats being reclaimed by owners. Holding an unregistered cat and attempting to find the owner requires significant Local Government resources and the owner may never be identified.

In its submission on the Proposal for Domestic Cat Control Legislation (2010), WALGA advocated for registration fees being set at full cost recovery (see Attachment 1). Additionally, in its [Dog and Cat Management Advocacy Position](#), WALGA advocates for Local Governments to achieve full cost recovery in ensuring compliance with the Cat Act through a combination of appropriate fees and State funding that encourages cat owner compliance and serves the interests of all Western Australians regardless of where they live. Access to State funding that could be used as an incentive to increase cat registration rates may prevent some of the issues Local Governments currently face as a result of the low registration of cats.

Centralised database

The sector also experiences difficulties with finding the owners of impounded cats even when they are microchipped. Such circumstances include when registration details are not updated when a cat is transferred to a new owner (e.g. from a breeder or rescue organisation) or when an owner moves to a different Local Government district.

The sector strongly supports the establishment of a centralised cat and dog registration system. A centralised registration system would help ensure the identification and history of each cat is provided, including details of the Local Government district(s) in which it has been registered, and the compliance and enforcement history of owners and cats. The Local Government sector is keen to ensure that a centralised system is reliable, usable and has adequate funding and technical support. To ensure this, there needs to be strong Local Government consultation in development and a staged and well managed implementation process. A centralised cat and dog registration and management system, with these characteristics, would support improved control and reduce the enforcement and resource challenges Local Governments currently face.

It is noted that the State Government has not progressed the implementation of a centralised dog and cat registration system, PetsWA, which would replace registers managed by individual Local Governments with a single platform. The PetsWA initiative aimed to make it easier for owners to update their animal registration when moving to another Local Government district and to help identify potential cases of puppy farming across the State in line with the Stop Puppy Farming reforms.

The sector has already contributed substantial time and resources in supporting the State Government's development of the PetsWA initiative and is calling for State Government to implement a centralised registration system.

Resourcing

In its submission on the Proposal for Domestic Cat Control Legislation (2010), WALGA highlighted the need for rangers and authorised persons to be trained in the appropriate handling of cats. The sector has since highlighted there are limited options for practical training for cat handling at TAFE institutions, with the focus being largely on dangerous dogs. WALGA recommends that the State Government funds the development and provision of specific cat handling and housing training opportunities for Local Government officers.

The sector considers that cat registration fees and increased State funding to support the implementation and enforcement of the Cat Act, including financial support of community capacity to implement cat containment outcomes as included in draft legislative amendments to enable Local Governments to make Local Laws on cat containment, are essential.

In New South Wales, the State Government and Environmental Trust recently invested \$6 million to expand the Keeping Cats Safe at Home Project, aimed to encourage and empower cat carers to keep their cats indoors. Using research, education and targeted desexing, the first phase of the project (2021-2024) saw a 25-50% reduction in roaming cats in three Local Government districts and an increase in desexed, microchipped and registered cats across 11 participating Local Governments.

Regional WA Local Governments have a lower capacity for resourcing enforcement and generally rely on hiring contract rangers that service multiple Local Government districts. These resourcing constraints would be exacerbated by the enforcement of cat containment, with funding needed to hire additional rangers to undertake the work.

State Government funding for cat management facilities is also critical. Many cat management facilities, including Cat Haven and RSPCA WA, are already at capacity. WALGA is supportive of State funding to upgrade and develop more fit-for-purpose shelter facilities as needed by the sector.

Conclusion

WALGA appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission on the review of the Cat Act on behalf of the Local Government sector. As highlighted in this submission, Local Governments face challenges in implementing the legislation when there are limited resources and low levels of compliance. The sector is supportive of the development of a Model Cat Local Law and for the Cat Act to be amended to lower the age of sterilisation and provide a maximum number of cats permitted.

WALGA looks forward to working with the State Government to provide proactive, positive solutions to the challenges faced by the sector, including cat containment.

Attachment 1: 8 August 2010 State Council resolution

That the Department of Local Government be advised that the introduction of cat control legislation is supported on condition that:

1. The cost to Local Governments to implement and administer the proposed legislation is minimised by:
 - a. the State Government training rangers and authorised officers and providing funding for the acquisition of specialised cat control equipment;
 - b. the State Government fully funding any public education and awareness campaign; and
 - c. registration fees being set at full cost recovery.
2. The Department of Local Government form a working partnership with WALGA during the drafting process of the legislation to ensure:
 - a. the legislation is as simple as possible to administer and enforce;
 - b. sufficient notice is given before the enactment of proposed legislation to allow Local Governments time to budget and prepare for cat control legislation and to update infrastructure, equipment and procedures; and
 - c. consideration is given to:
 - i. National Parks;
 - ii. A Class reserves;
 - iii. unallocated Crown Land; and
 - iv. local planning schemes.