

Submission: Cat Management in Tasmania Discussion Paper

1. Overview

COTA Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to provide brief feedback on the Tasmanian Government's *Cat Management in Tasmania Discussion Paper*.

COTA Tasmania is the peak body for older Tasmanians. Our interest in this consultation is therefore focused on the potential impact of cat management reform on older people, particularly those who rely on companion animals for social connection, emotional wellbeing, and daily routine.

We recognise that cat management is a complex and sometimes emotive issue. The Discussion Paper appropriately acknowledges that cats are valued companion animals for many Tasmanians, while also identifying their potential impacts on public amenity, agriculture, human health, cat welfare, and Tasmania's natural environment.

COTA Tasmania does not seek to comment in detail on the broader policy design issues relating to containment, curfews, registration, breeding, sales, stray cats or feral cat management. We recognise that animal welfare, environmental, local government and biosecurity organisations are better placed to provide detailed advice on those matters.

COTA Tasmania encourages the Government to ensure that any future cat management reforms are developed with older Tasmanians, not simply applied to them. Reforms will be more effective, humane and sustainable if they recognise the important role companion animals play in the lives of many older people and provide practical support for responsible ownership.

2. Companion animals and older Tasmanians

For many older people, pets are part of the fabric of daily life. They are often a source of comfort, conversation, routine and unconditional affection, particularly for people who live alone or whose social networks have reduced over time.

Cats can be particularly important companion animals for older people because they may be more manageable than dogs for people with limited strength, mobility, transport, or capacity for daily outdoor exercise. For some older Tasmanians, a cat may be their primary day-to-day companion.

Available evidence suggests pet ownership is particularly significant in Tasmania. Earlier Roy Morgan research found Tasmania had the highest incidence of pet ownership in Australia, with 34% of Tasmanians living with at least one cat.

Nationally, Animal Medicines Australia's 2025 survey found that 73% of Australian households have a pet and 33.6% have a cat. The same survey found that companionship is the most common reason for acquiring a cat, and that 86% of pet owners report a positive impact on their lives.

This reinforces the need for cat management reforms to recognise the social, emotional and wellbeing role companion cats play, including for many older Tasmanians.

Policy reform should therefore avoid unintentionally making it harder for older people to keep and care for companion cats responsibly.

3. Practical supports for older and low-income cat owners

COTA Tasmania encourages the Government to ensure that any strengthened cat management framework is accompanied by practical support for older and low-income cat owners.

The Discussion Paper notes that costs associated with microchipping, desexing and registration can be financially burdensome for low-income households.

It also identifies practical barriers to containment, including the cost of cat enclosures or cat-proof fencing, rental restrictions, owner beliefs about containment, and the risk of cats escaping through doors, windows, or garages.

These issues are particularly relevant for older people on fixed incomes, older renters, people in social housing or retirement villages, and people living in rural or regional areas where access to services may be limited.

COTA Tasmania suggests that the next Cat Management Plan would be strengthened by practical measures that help older and low-income cat owners understand and meet their responsibilities.

These could include:

- Affordable access to desexing and microchipping, including targeted subsidies or low-cost programs for pensioners, concession card holders and low-income households.
- Concession-sensitive approaches to any future registration model, ensuring that fees do not become a barrier to responsible ownership.
- Practical support for containment where required or encouraged, including information on low-cost options, support for renters and older homeowners, and consideration of grants, rebates or community-based assistance for people unable to afford cat enclosures or property modifications.
- Clear, accessible public education, including plain English information about responsible cat ownership, indoor enrichment, safe outdoor enclosures, and how to transition cats gradually where changes are required. These materials should also be readily available in non-digital formats.
- A staged and humane implementation approach, avoiding sudden regulatory changes that could lead to increased surrender, abandonment, non-compliance, or distress for owners and animals.
- Recognition of rural, regional, and transport barriers, particularly given the limited number of cat management facilities in Tasmania and the access challenges identified in the Discussion Paper.

4. Avoiding unintended consequences

A successful cat management framework will work best when people are supported to understand, afford and comply with any new requirements.

Where reforms are unaffordable, difficult to understand, or impractical for some households, there is a risk of unintended consequences.

These could include people avoiding registration or microchipping, delaying veterinary care, surrendering cats to already stretched services, or disengaging from the regulatory system altogether.

A successful cat management framework will therefore need to combine regulation with education, affordability, transition time, and practical assistance.

5. Conclusion

COTA Tasmania supports a humane, practical and socially aware approach to cat management reform.

Our central recommendation is that the Tasmanian Government explicitly consider the needs and circumstances of older Tasmanians in developing the next Cat Management Plan. This includes older people who rely on companion cats for wellbeing, routine and connection, as well as those who may face financial, housing, mobility, digital access or transport barriers to compliance.

Cat management reform should protect cats, wildlife and the broader community. It should also support older Tasmanians to remain responsible, capable and caring pet owners.

In other words, any future cat management framework should recognise the important role companion cats play in real people's lives, including older people who love and rely on their cats.