



# CASE STUDY: By-laws for management of cats on Kangaroo Island, South Australia

A case study demonstrating effective management of domestic and feral cats on Kangaroo Island

## Introduction

Covering about 4350 km<sup>2</sup>, Kangaroo Island (KI) is the third-largest offshore island in Australia and lies 15 km off the South Australian coastline. This isolation has enabled many native wildlife species that are either not found or are in very low numbers in other parts of Australia, to thrive. With nearly half of the native vegetation still remaining, KI is nationally important for biodiversity conservation, primary production and tourism. The island is free of notorious pests, such as foxes and rabbits, but has other feral pests including pigs, goats, deer and cats.

The domestic cat is a major feral species on KI, which preys on native fauna and spreads diseases among livestock. Of particular concern is predation on the endangered southern brown bandicoot and Kangaroo Island dunnart<sup>1</sup>. Such ecological threats from cats may also have negative implications for the Island's tourism industry, which relies on the availability and accessibility of native fauna.

Transmission of diseases to livestock by cats can also have significant economic impacts. There is a high incidence of cat-borne diseases transferred to sheep on KI such as *sarcocystis* (causing macro cysts in the meat) and *toxoplasmosis* (which causes abortion in sheep). The cost to the Island's sheep graziers is estimated between \$2–4 million annually due to lost meat production from *sarcocystis*<sup>2</sup>.

In 1993 and 2005, two major surveys investigated the KI community's attitudes toward domestic cat management and

control of feral cats. In 1993, more than 80% of the residents surveyed supported compulsory de-sexing, identification and confinement (at night) of domestic or 'owned' cats. The level of community support increased further in 2005, with around 95% of the residents surveyed being in favour of compulsory de-sexing and identification of cats as well as controlling of 'un-owned' cats by trapping and humane disposal. Support for confinement within the owners' properties was high for night (92%), but slightly lower for daytime (80%).

The high level of community support for cat management resulted in the introduction of a by-law by the Kangaroo Island Council in 2005, which entails one of Australia's most stringent management actions against 'un-owned' cats. In South Australia, the responsibilities for cat management are prescribed in the [Dog and Cat Management Act 1995](#), but Councils are empowered to make by-laws and to administer and enforce the provisions.

As per the Island's new by-laws<sup>3</sup>, all cats must be registered and microchipped at the age of 3 months or within 14 days of taking up ownership of the cat. For cats to be registered, it is mandatory that they are de-sexed unless a permit by way of 'Breeder Registration' is obtained for the keeping of an 'intact' cat for breeding. The number of cats owned is also limited: an owner can have a maximum of one dog and one cat in a small dwelling and up to two dogs and two cats in a property other than a small dwelling.



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Confinement to owners' properties, or 24 hour cat curfews, was also introduced (except where cats are in a carry box or on a leash). Penalties apply for non-compliance. Any proven acts of harbouring, keeping, or supporting of any un-registered cat without undertaking formal ownership shall also incur penalty as though that person were the owner. This clause is considered important because many farmers do not remove feral cats from their farms as they believe that cats address the rodent population.

Under the SA [Dog and Cat Management Act 1995](#), any unidentified cat (ie feral cat) can be seized, detained, destroyed or otherwise disposed of, if found straying in areas where cat management officers have authority to exercise their powers. The mandatory identification, therefore, has created a clear delineation between owned and un-owned cats and provided structured protection for the owned cat while facilitating feral cat control on the Island.

In 2011, an intensive two-week trapping project was implemented to control 'un-owned' cats in Pelican Lagoon Conservation Park and neighbouring private properties to reduce cat predation pressure on southern brown bandicoots and Rosenberg's goanna. This trapping project took a 'cross-tenure' approach, in which control was conducted across public and private land boundaries. The majority of the trapping was done by the KI Cat Control Committee (KICCC), volunteers and residents of the area. All trapped cats were scanned for a microchip or other identification and put down if un-owned, however no owned cats were caught during the trapping program. KI NRM Board staff monitored the population change of cats from before trapping to after the trapping to show a decline in the cat population from 1.42 cats per km<sup>2</sup> to 0.76 following the trapping.

Management of feral cats is ongoing and Natural Resources Kangaroo Island works in partnership with the KICCC to provide the Island community with cat traps and

instructions on how to trap a cat if it is causing problems on their property. As part of awareness campaigns, Natural Resources Kangaroo Island staff have also developed and delivered a program for middle school students with KI Community Education relating to cat management and biosecurity issues.

The management of domestic and feral cats on KI is a blueprint for strategic feral cat control programs in other regions. It highlights that successful cat control requires a great community support base, strict legislative frameworks and coordinated control activities across different tenures.

### Further information

1. Masters P (2006). *Cats on Kangaroo Island: Ecological Characteristics and Community Management*. Unpublished report to the Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Management Board.
2. Reddin J (2011). *Abattoir condemnations and meat trimmings of Kangaroo Island sheep*. Personal communication. Kangaroo Island Cat Control Committee.
3. Kangaroo Island Council (2005). *Dog & Cat Management Plan 2005: A Planned Response to the Dog and Cat Management Act 1995*.
4. Kangaroo Island Council (2011). *Kangaroo Island Council Animal Management Plan*.
5. [Feral cat spray tunnel trials on Kangaroo Island](#) (2013). PestSmart Case Study FCCS2, Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, Canberra.



Feral cat trapping is an integral part of efforts to conserve southern brown bandicoots and Rosenberg's goanna in the Pelican Lagoon Conservation Park. Images: Craig McMillan (top), Andrew

### For more info

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PestSmart Toolkit for Feral Cats:  
<http://www.pestsmart.org.au/pestsmart/feral-cats/>

Cover image: Alison Towerton

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