

Wet Tropics Biosecurity Futures

Cat Management Workshop

Outcomes Report

November 11, 2024



Wet Tropics Biosecurity Futures

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of where we live and work throughout Far North Queensland.

We pay respects to Elder's past, present and emerging, and to First Nations enduring connections to land, sea, sky and Country and culture.

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Corresponding author: t.sydes@fnqroc.qld.gov.au



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Workshop overview

Cat management is a unique issue which occurs across a wide range of cultural, social and environmental contexts. The full nexus of cats in the Wet Tropic ranges from domestic and companion animals through to feral animals. They are managed or considered under multiple legislation including the Commonwealth EPBC Act, State Nature Conservation Act, State Biosecurity Act, State Animal Management Act, Commonwealth Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the State Animal Care and Protection Act.

The two primary purposes of cat management identified in this workshop are;

- Keeping domestic and companion animals and people safe and;
- Protecting our unique biodiversity and wild places from the multiple impacts presented by cats.

Nationally, the unique challenge presented by cat management requires an integrated and multi-actor approach. At a Wet Tropics scale this has the further complexity of taking place in a unique environmental context with few parallels; a lack of regionally relevant knowledge and data; and challenges in transferability of established management options.

The outcomes and recommendations from the workshop were proposed to be mapped out using the framework below.

Proposed cat management framework

Wet Tropics Biosecurity Futures - Cat management framework		Cat management realms		
		Domestic cats	Semi-owned and unowned cats	Feral cats
Focus areas	Collaboration and partnerships			
	Communication and engagement			
	Knowledge/research			
	Operations and on ground			
	Planning and policy influence and alignment			

Throughout the workshop the proposed framework was tested. In practice, it was determined that a more direct classification of cats should be adopted to match the relevant definitions from legislation. It was agreed that this was more aligned with both a Queensland State and a Far North Queensland region perspective.

Cat definitions

Proposed definition	Owned cat	Semi-owned	Unowned cats	Feral Cats
Adopted definition	Owned		Unowned cats	
Supporting legislation	Animal Management (Cats and Dogs Act)		Biosecurity Act	

Workshop format

The workshop was comprised of three information and workshop sessions followed by a final synthesis session.

In the information sessions presenters shared expertise and case studies of impact and management approaches. At the end of the session participants workshoped practical ideas, options and observations from a Wet Tropics perspective. The outcomes of the conversations were shared collectively and collated into a wall-sized layout of the proposed cat management framework.



In the final synthesis session participants focused on recapping key take home messages from the day prior to being asked to identify;

- 5-year success indicators
- Key research questions



The summarised research questions will be utilised in the development of a research proposal for the Land Protection Fund (a co- founded program between Queensland DAF and Local Government).

Speakers and themes

Session one: The Big picture – setting the scene

National feral cat management overview

Gillian Bassnet

Gillian is the National Feral Cat and Fox Management Coordinator. She is working with local communities and stakeholders to raise awareness of feral cats and foxes to improve best practice control methods and their outcomes. The project aims to protect our native wildlife and agricultural industry from the impacts that these two species pose.

Cat management in Brisbane City Council

Dan Franks - BCC

Dan Franks is the Senior Invasive Species Management Officer for Brisbane City Council. He has been working in the animal management, invasive species (both plants and animals) and natural environment restoration and compliance field for the last 20 years. Dan maintains a strong operational focus managing field and compliance officers to deliver positive environmental, social and safe outcomes for Brisbane's residents.

Session two: Spotlight on social and community impacts and management

Cat Management in Rural and Remote Communities

Dr. Jessica Hoopes - AMRRIC

Jessica is a veterinarian who is currently the One Health Research Coordinator for Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC). Her current role focuses on addressing knowledge gaps in our understanding of the relationships between the health of people and animals living in remote communities by supporting collaboration between researchers and communities to undertake research projects that address community-identified priorities. Before this, Jessica spent five years working in veterinary and shelter medicine and companion animal population management in both Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Keeping Cats Safe at Home: a holistic approach to domestic cat management

Dr Gemma Ma, BVSc, PhD - RSPCA

Gemma is a veterinarian with over 10 years' experience in general small animal practice and shelter medicine. She is currently Project Manager – Keeping Cats Safe at Home and Community Veterinarian at RSPCA NSW. She graduated with a PhD from the University of Sydney School of Veterinary Science in 2021. Her thesis explored the role of companion animals in human and environmental health. As a Research Affiliate with the Sydney School of Veterinary Science Dr Ma undertakes research into the human-animal bond, dog and cat population management, human behaviour change and cat ecology.

Session three: Spotlight on Environmental impacts and management

Cat management research, understanding impacts, control tools and approaches

Dr Bronwyn Fancourt - QPWS

Bronwyn is wildlife ecologist with experience in threatened species conservation and management, vertebrate pest management, predator interactions and wildlife monitoring. She completed her Honours and PhD research in Tasmania, investigating the cause of decline of the endangered eastern quoll. Since 2016 she has been working with various state government agencies on improving feral cat management in Queensland, NSW and South Australia. She is currently a Principal Conservation Officer in Pest Management with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

Dr Matt Gentle - QDAF

Dr Matt Gentle is a Researcher at the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Since 2004 his work has focused on investigating the impacts, management and population dynamics of feral pigs, non-target implications of control practices, the ecology and management of peri-urban wild dogs and improving feral cat management strategies.

Summary outcomes

The workshop findings across each of the five themes are summarised below alongside 5-year success statements provided by participants.

	Collaboration	Community Awareness and Engagement	Knowledge and Science	Policy and Planning	On-ground Operations
Issues	There is no consistent and collective approach towards cat management across sectors and agencies, including in areas such as: - Education - Compliance - Resourcing - Coordinated action. There is also a lack of clear and consistent definitions and messaging which is clearly based on the current laws between councils, but also between all agencies and organisations working in cat management.	There is a lack of community awareness about: - the impact of cats on biodiversity in the WT – both scope and scale; - the distinction and relationship between “owned” and “unowned”; and - the laws governing cat ownership. This is compounded by the complexities of cat ownership, including limited understanding about the socio-economic context, including varying logistic and cost access to vet and other support services.	There is limited knowledge about the ecological aspects of cats in the WT including the population of unowned cats and the impacts they have on the WT biodiversity and other values. There is also insufficient understanding about the social aspects of cat ownership and management (including passive ownership, the importance of cats in Indigenous communities and the wide range of values and beliefs about cats and cat management. There is also very limited knowledge about the most effective and appropriate methods for managing cats in the WT, in particular within the landscapes of the WHA.	Cats are not widely recognised as a problem for the WT, and allocation of resources is therefore insufficient. There is also limited understanding of the roles different levels of government, NGOs and the business sector should play to be most effective. Most investment is in reactive rather than proactive strategies and there is no consistency across councils. There is no compelling business case for investing more – in particular in proactive management.	There are insufficient human and financial resources for effective cat management – both owned and unowned. Even within these resources, there is lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, with responsibility commonly falling to council animal management teams. There are insufficient effective control tools – particularly landscape-scale – and if population reduction thresholds are not reached, interventions may be making no difference to the impact. Too few organisations are active in cat management.
5-Year Success Statements	All partner organisations in the Wet Tropics, across all sectors, are working collaboratively under a consistent and collaborative Cat Management Program that is both proactive and reactive. The Program includes standardised methods and metrics to measure success wherever possible.	The community is aware of the issues of unowned cats in the WT, and the causal link between owned and unowned cat populations. Free (to the owner) registration and de-sexing programs result in an increase in proactive cat management within the community. Targeted and tailored programs are developed to support improved cat management in traditionally non-compliant communities.	The cat issue in the WT is quantified and understood across all sectors, including the social and ecological aspects (see below for priority research questions). Effective management tools have been identified, and where necessary tailored, for the WT, including novel and emerging technologies/ approaches.	A science-based business case (cost-benefit) for effective proactive cat management has been provided to all WT councils and other partners. Broad recognition of the impact of cats on WT values begins to attract the required investment in management from a range of sources. The WT's jurisdictions have consistent, effective, enforced and widely supported local laws with regard to cat ownership.	Councils and other key agencies and partner organisations have increased resourcing to implement coordinated control program. Councils and other key agencies and partners operate under clear guidelines on roles and responsibilities.

Summarised Research Questions

The research questions collated during the final workshop synthesis session are summarised below. The relevant research questions and queries from this synthesis will be used to inform new research proposals projects and provide advice to work plans for workplans for existing resources/initiatives.

1. Understanding the Wet Tropics cat population (owned and unowned)

1. What is the distribution, density and abundance of cats in the Wet Tropics? (with consideration given to variation according to features such as vegetation types and land use).
2. What is the relationship between owned and unowned cats in the Wet Tropics?
3. How do the different categories of cat's manifest in the Wet Tropics? What are the characteristics, values and barriers to management unique to this region, and what are those the same as elsewhere in Australia?

2. Understanding cat impact on Wet Tropics values

1. What research methods are available for assessing the impact of feral cats in the Wet Tropics?
2. What are the quantified/approximated impacts of feral cats on the biodiversity values of the Wet Tropics?
3. (once that is determined...)
4. What are the highest priority values (including endemic and threatened species) in the Wet Tropics and the impacts of cats on these?

3. Understanding management options/approaches

1. Which control methods/tools (or mix of tools) are most effective and appropriate (limited or no non-target impacts) within different Wet Tropics landscapes (rainforest, wet sclerophyll, savanna, rocky hills, townships)?
2. What are the most effective approaches to incentivising improved owned cat management within traditionally non-compliant or unengaged parts of the community?
3. What reduction in numbers is required to reduce the population of cats in the major land use categories of the Wet Tropics?

Priority Recommendations

The initial outcomes of the inaugural Wet Tropics Cat Management Workshop informed the following priority recommendations for action.

1. Engage a representative group of cat management expertise across owned and unowned cats as a working group to inform an ongoing regional response.
2. Collate the outcomes of this report into a cat management action plan for the Wet Tropics (working group).
3. Reconvene a cat management workshop in 2 years-time (2026) to revisit the progress toward the delivery of the key success indicators from the 2024 workshop.
4. Develop research proposal/s to address the key research questions and queries raised in this workshop.
5. Continue to lead or inform the key animal management and biosecurity outcomes for cat management under the FNQROC Animal Management Technical Committee (AMTC) and Natural Asset Management Technical Committee (NAMAC).

Workshop participants

Speakers

Gillian Bassnet	National Feral Cat and Fox Management Coordinator
Dan Franks	Brisbane City Council
Dr Gemma Ma	RSPCA
Dr Jessica Hoopes	AMRRIC
Dr Bronwyn Fancourt	QPWS
Dr Matthew Gentle	DAF

Attendees

Belinda Bogart	
Christine Mauger	Bush Heritage
Zoe Burt	Cairns Regional Council
Tina Martin	Cairns Regional Council
Lewis Defranciscis	Cairns Regional Council
Tom Crumpton	Cairns Regional Council
Damon Sydes	Cassowary Coast
Michael Anderson	Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Ingrid Marker	Cassowary Keystone Conservation
Darryn Higgins	Cook Shire Council
Tahn Lawson	DESI
Michelle Ibbett	DESI
Chris Roach	DESI
Dan Mead	DESI
Jess Conroy	Douglas Shire Council
Brad Everett	Douglas Shire Council
Marcus Mulholland	Gulf Savannah NRM
Matt Buckman	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Michael Nash	Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Svargo Freitag	Landholder
Graham Wienert	Mareeba Shire
Susannah Mosby	Queensland Health
Stacey Bambrick	Queensland Health
Shellina McKellar	Tablelands Regional Council
Michell Taylor	Tablelands Regional Council
Ken Goleby	Tablelands Regional Council
Karen Bettink	Terrain NRM
Amy Shima	Tree Kangaroo & Mammal Group
Terry Carmichael	Wet Tropics Management Authority
Sean McNamara	Wet Tropics Management Authority
Bruce Jennison	Wet Tropics Management Authority
James Donaldson	Wet Tropics Waterways
Kelly Dean (tech support)	FNQROC
Travis Sydes (convenor)	FNQROC
Penny Scott (facilitator)	Penny Scott Consulting

Online observers

Dian Rayment	Pet Rescue
Ajay Niranjane	DAFF
Uttara Kennedy	RSPCA

