



31 August 2026

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Cat Act Review 2026
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SUBMISSION – STATUTORY REVIEW OF THE CAT ACT 2011 (WA)

Domestic cat containment – a strong, effective and properly funded Western Australian model

LGEMA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the statutory review of the Cat Act 2011 (WA).

LGEMA's existing Policy Position supports clear legislative authority for local governments to regulate domestic cats, including containment, and recognises that Councils are well placed to respond to local environmental, animal welfare, public health and amenity circumstances.[1]

Experience since that Policy Position was adopted, together with subsequent legislative and policy developments, demonstrates that legislative clarity alone is no longer sufficient.

LGEMA now recommends a stronger model:

State-wide minimum 24-hour containment + strong local-government powers to go further + a defined transition + State-funded implementation and enforcement + practical incentives to assist owners to comply.

1. WA should lead Australia

Domestic cat containment should no longer be treated solely as a local animal-management issue.

The south-west of Western Australia is one of the world's recognised biodiversity hotspots, with exceptionally high levels of endemic species and significant biodiversity values. Roaming domestic cats can therefore have consequences extending beyond individual properties and local amenity.

WA should not merely adopt the weakest common denominator available elsewhere in Australia. It should establish the strongest practicable domestic cat-containment framework in Australia.

The ACT provides a strong example of permanent containment, while Victoria demonstrates the value of substantial local-government discretion. WA can combine those strengths: a State-wide minimum standard, with Councils empowered to impose stronger or more geographically targeted requirements.

This approach would also be consistent with LGEMA's existing position that Councils are closest to their communities and are best placed to identify local environmental, public health and amenity circumstances.[2]



2. The existing system has not worked

The existing legislative framework has produced prolonged uncertainty.

Western Australian local governments have repeatedly attempted to introduce domestic cat containment measures. Parliamentary material records repeated scrutiny and disallowance of local laws on the basis that the *Cat Act 2011* did not authorise the relevant containment provisions.[3]

The problem is therefore not a lack of interest by local government or the communities they represent.

A 2026 peer-reviewed study surveyed 74.1% of the 139 WA local governments covered by the Cat Act. It found that almost half had a cat local law, but only 3 of 26 had successfully implemented permanent containment. Importantly, 78% of responding local governments said that they would include permanent containment in a local law if there were a clear pathway to implementation.[4]

That evidence is particularly significant.

It demonstrates both:

- (a) substantial local-government support for permanent containment; and
- (b) the inadequacy of requiring each Council to develop and defend its own containment regime within an uncertain legislative framework.

The current *Cat Amendment (Local Laws) Bill 2026* is therefore welcome. It would expressly enable local governments to make local laws restricting cats to premises, prohibiting cats from public areas, imposing conditions or curfews and requiring effective control.[5]

However, LGEMA submits that Parliament should use the current Bill to do more than merely make local containment possible.

3. A State-wide minimum standard of 24-hour containment

LGEMA recommends that the Cat Act be amended to establish 24-hour containment as the State-wide minimum standard for domestic cats, subject to clearly defined exceptions.

A curfew is a useful management measure, but it is not equivalent to permanent containment. It continues to permit roaming for substantial periods and does not address all of the environmental, welfare and amenity risks associated with roaming.

The Commonwealth's response to its inquiry into feral and domestic cats recognised containment programs as more effective than curfews.[6]

The State's own current reform proposal recognises full containment as one of the available local-government measures.[7]

LGEMA therefore considers that a State-wide minimum of 24-hour containment is the strongest and most coherent model.

The State-wide standard should be a floor, not a ceiling.



4. Local governments must be able to go further

The State-wide minimum should not remove local-government discretion.

A local government should have express statutory power to:

- (a) impose stronger containment requirements;
- (b) commence requirements earlier;
- (c) designate biodiversity-sensitive areas;
- (d) impose additional requirements around reserves, bushland, ecological corridors and other areas of environmental significance;
- (e) prohibit cats from specified public areas;
- (f) apply stronger requirements to existing cats where justified; and
- (g) impose other evidence-based local requirements concerning containment and responsible ownership.

This gives effect to the Government's stated position that cat-management responses should reflect local conditions, while avoiding a system in which minimum biodiversity protection depends entirely on whether an individual Council is willing and able to make a local law.[8]

Local discretion should determine whether and how a Council goes further; it should not determine whether effective minimum biodiversity protection exists at all.

5. Biodiversity-sensitive areas

The legislation should expressly enable enhanced containment requirements in areas where biodiversity values warrant additional protection.

This should include areas adjoining or containing:

- Bush Forever areas;
- significant bushland;
- threatened species habitat;
- threatened ecological communities;
- wildlife corridors;
- nature reserves and conservation areas; and
- other areas identified through State or local biodiversity planning.



This is consistent with State Planning Policy 2.0, which requires environmental and natural-resource management to be integrated with broader land-use planning and decision-making and seeks protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.[9]

It is particularly consistent with State Planning Policy 2.8, which treats protection and management of significant bushland in the Perth Metropolitan Region as a fundamental planning consideration and identifies conservation as a collective and shared responsibility of government, landowners and the community.[10]

Domestic cat containment should be regarded as a complementary measure at the interface between residential development and native habitat.

6. Existing cats – transition, not grandfathering

LGEMA supports a reasonable transition period for existing outdoor cats.

Owners should have time to:

- understand the new requirements;
- obtain advice;
- construct or modify suitable containment;
- obtain financial assistance; and
- transition their cats to contained living.

However, transition should not become permanent grandfathering.

An indefinite exemption for existing outdoor cats would substantially delay the environmental benefits of the reform and create two classes of cat owners indefinitely.

The legislation should therefore establish a defined transition period, with the State able to provide longer or different transition arrangements in exceptional circumstances where justified.

Biodiversity-sensitive areas should be capable of receiving earlier and stronger protection.

7. State sustainability and biodiversity policy support a State–local government partnership

The proposed model is consistent with WA's longstanding sustainability framework.

Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy contemplated a State–Local Government Common Sustainability Framework involving alignment of State and local-government policy directions, shared responsibilities, common methodologies and resources, and joint programs.[11]

The Strategy recognised that regional sustainability requires consideration of both local circumstances and the resources available to achieve identified objectives.[12]

The State's current biodiversity policy provides a contemporary application of those principles.



The *Western Australian Feral Cat Strategy 2023–2028* is backed by \$7.6 million in State funding and is directed to protecting native wildlife and biodiversity from feral-cat predation.[13] The State's Natural Resource Management Program also recognises biodiversity conservation as a State investment priority and supports partnership projects involving local governments and communities.[14]

The distinction between feral and domestic cats must be maintained. However, the policy principle is relevant: where cat management is undertaken to protect WA biodiversity, State Government leadership, coordination and funding are appropriate.

8. Public health and community health

Roaming domestic cats also present public-health and community-health considerations that support effective containment. Cats can carry and shed pathogens and parasites capable of affecting humans, including *Toxoplasma gondii*, the causative agent of toxoplasmosis. In Australia, the domestic cat is the principal definitive host for *T. gondii*, and infection can occur through contact with environments contaminated by cat faeces, including soil and sandpits. Toxoplasmosis is generally mild or asymptomatic in healthy people, but infection during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth or serious congenital complications, and infection can also cause serious disease in people with impaired immunity.

LGEMA's Policy Position also identifies other potential public-health and community-health concerns associated with roaming cats, including cat-scratch disease, toxocariasis, parasites such as fleas, ticks, worms and mites, and allergic reactions to cat allergens. These risks do not mean that every roaming cat presents a significant disease risk, nor that containment is a substitute for appropriate hygiene and veterinary care. They do, however, provide an additional public-interest reason for reducing uncontrolled roaming, particularly where cats enter public playgrounds, sandpits, parks and other areas used by children and the community. The Government itself has recognised that cat containment may reduce public-health concerns, including contamination of public playgrounds. A State-wide containment standard would therefore deliver benefits extending beyond biodiversity and animal welfare to community health and amenity, while reducing the need for individual local governments to address these risks through fragmented local measures.

9. The State should fund the incremental costs

The new regime must not become another unfunded State regulatory mandate.

The State would determine the State-wide regulatory standard and the biodiversity objective. Local governments would then undertake substantial additional work in education, administration, compliance, investigation, enforcement, data collection and community engagement.

The reasonable incremental costs created by the new State-wide containment requirements should therefore be funded by the State.

This should include, as appropriate:

- (a) additional ranger and compliance resources;
- (b) education and transition programs;
- (c) enforcement and prosecution;



- (d) administration and information systems;
- (e) community communications;
- (f) biodiversity mapping and local implementation planning;
- (g) approved containment assistance;
- (h) free owner advice and consultation;
- (i) monitoring and evaluation; and
- (j) development and maintenance of common data systems.

This is not a request for general financial assistance to local government.

The State *must not* transfer the cost of implementing a State-wide environmental and regulatory policy to local governments and local ratepayers.

That principle is particularly important in light of the current Commonwealth House of Representatives inquiry into local-government funding and fiscal sustainability and its consideration of cost shifting and unfunded responsibilities imposed on local government.

10. GST revenue and the scale of the public benefit

Western Australia should use its fiscal capacity to fund this program.

LGEMA does not suggest that Commonwealth GST revenue is legally earmarked for biodiversity or cat management.

The point is different.

Commonwealth GST revenue contributes to the State's fiscal capacity. The State should use that capacity to implement a State-wide policy that produces benefits extending far beyond individual local-government boundaries.

WA is Australia's largest State by area. A State-wide containment program delivered locally through Councils would protect native biodiversity across a very substantial part of the Australian continent.

It would provide a practical use of State fiscal capacity for:

- protection of threatened and endemic species;
- reduction of domestic-cat predation;
- protection of urban and peri-urban biodiversity;
- improved animal welfare;
- responsible pet ownership;



- reduced roaming-related injury and mortality; and
- more consistent environmental protection across WA.

The State should not establish the objective and then require local ratepayers to fund its implementation.

11. Incentives should make compliance easier and more attractive

Regulation alone will not produce the best outcome.

During the transition period, the State should establish a State-funded Cat Containment Support Program designed to make it easier, cheaper and more attractive for owners to contain their cats.

There is already evidence that relatively modest financial assistance and practical education can produce real-world results in WA.

The GeoCatch catio program has used State NRM funding to provide rebates and workshops. It has reportedly assisted in the installation of 110 catios, with the project estimating significant wildlife benefits.[15]

The Town of Claremont has also established a Catio Grant Program providing residents with up to \$500 towards installation of a catio.[16]

These initiatives provide a practical foundation for a State-wide program.

LGEMA recommends that the State fund:

- (a) a standard rebate of up to \$500 per household for an approved escape-proof cat enclosure;
- (b) a higher rebate, for example up to \$1,000, for properties adjoining identified high-biodiversity areas or where additional containment measures are necessary to achieve the State's biodiversity objective;
- (c) additional means-tested assistance for low-income households;
- (d) assistance available to renters with landlord consent, so that the program is not confined to property owners;
- (e) free basic advice and design assistance for owners seeking to establish containment;
- (f) free community workshops demonstrating low-cost DIY containment options;
- (g) standard plans and specifications for safe and enriching cat enclosures;
- (h) partnerships with Cat Haven, veterinarians, cat behaviour specialists, local governments, community groups and appropriately qualified enclosure providers; and
- (i) a State-approved list of minimum containment and enrichment standards.

The State should also investigate whether local governments could offer a one-off rates concession of up to \$500 for verified compliant cat containment, with the State reimbursing the Council for the



concession. The *Local Government Act 1995* (WA) s. 6.47 presently permits a local government, subject to the applicable legislation concerning rates rebates and deferments, to grant concessions in relation to rates.[17]

A direct State grant is preferable because it can also assist renters. However, a State-funded rates concession could provide a highly visible local incentive for ratepayers and would allow Councils to participate directly without absorbing the cost.

12. A free cat-containment consultation service

LGEMA recommends a free State-funded cat-containment consultation service during the transition period. Owners should be able to obtain practical advice about:

- whether their existing yard can be adapted;
- suitable fencing and enclosure systems;
- escape-proof design;
- cat access from the house;
- enrichment and vertical space;
- shade, weather protection and ventilation;
- safe plants and materials;
- low-cost DIY alternatives;
- rental and strata situations; and
- how to transition an outdoor cat to contained living.

This should be delivered through a combination of online resources, telephone/video advice, community workshops and targeted local services perhaps using a partnership with the Cat Haven.

Cat Haven's published position expressly supports cats being kept indoors or in escape-proof outdoor enclosures and recognises the importance of physical and psychological enrichment.[18]

A State-funded advice program would therefore address one of the most obvious practical objections to containment: not whether owners accept the objective, but whether they know how to achieve it safely and affordably.

13. A WA Catio Design Challenge

LGEMA also recommends an annual State-funded WA Catio Design Challenge to make containment visible, attractive and aspirational.

This could be developed with Cat Haven and appropriately qualified veterinary, animal-behaviour, design and biodiversity representatives.



Possible categories could include:

- Best low-cost DIY enclosure – under \$500;
- Best small-space or urban enclosure;
- Best rental or strata solution;
- Best biodiversity-sensitive property solution;
- Best enrichment and animal-welfare design;
- Best sustainable or recycled-material design; and
- Best overall WA cat-containment design.

The competition should include practical prizes and public recognition, with winning designs made freely available as model designs for other owners.

The purpose would not be cosmetic.

Well-designed containment can demonstrate that responsible ownership does not mean depriving a cat of outdoor stimulation. It can provide safe outdoor access while protecting wildlife and reducing risks to the cat.

This is precisely the type of community-led sustainability initiative contemplated by WA's broader sustainability and natural-resource-management frameworks.

14. Incentives and disincentives during the transition

The transition should be designed so that the economic and practical incentives increasingly favour compliance. LGEMA recommends a graduated approach:

Stage 1 – preparation:

- free education and advice;
- free or subsidised design assistance;
- enclosure rebates;
- workshops;
- voluntary registration of containment arrangements.

Stage 2 – early compliance:

- priority access to rebates;
- recognition or certification of compliant properties;
- reduced or waived discretionary local-government fees where lawful;
- consideration of a State-funded rates concession;
- promotional recognition for compliant owners.

Stage 3 – commencement of mandatory containment:

- education and warnings as the initial response to inadvertent non-compliance;
- reasonable compliance directions;
- targeted assistance for owners who demonstrate genuine difficulty complying.



Stage 4 – persistent non-compliance:

- proportionate infringement or other enforcement action;
- recovery of relevant enforcement costs where authorised;
- stronger enforcement for repeated breaches.

The system should not create an economic incentive to remain uncontained.

Conversely, it should not punish owners who are actively attempting to comply but need reasonable time or assistance.

The strongest model is therefore ***reward early compliance → assist transition → warn and educate → enforce persistent non-compliance.***

15. Registration and compliance incentives

The State should also investigate whether the cat-registration system can be used to recognise responsible containment.

Registration fees are State-set statutory fees. Accordingly, any permanent fee differentiation would need to be addressed through the statutory or regulatory framework rather than left to individual Councils.[19]

During the transition, consideration should therefore be given to:

- a temporary registration-fee rebate for verified contained cats;
- free registration for cats newly brought into a compliant containment arrangement during an initial transition period; or
- a registration incentive linked to completion of approved containment education.

The financial value of such a measure would be modest compared with an enclosure rebate, but the behavioural signal would be useful.

The principal financial incentive should nevertheless remain the enclosure and containment assistance program.

16. State-wide systems should reduce the burden on Councils

The State should provide the infrastructure necessary to make the regime workable.

This should include:

- a State model local law or standard statutory provisions;
- standard definitions;
- standard containment specifications;
- standard compliance and enforcement guidance;



- standard educational material;
- a centralised or interoperable cat-registration and containment database;
- consistent data collection and reporting;
- biodiversity mapping and priority-area guidance; and
- evaluation of outcomes.

The Department's existing *Cat Local Law Guidelines* recognise that local governments have different needs and resources and provide guidance concerning prohibited areas, containment and local-law development.[20]

The next step should be to move from guidance alone to a coordinated State implementation package.

This would reduce duplication and avoid each Council independently developing the same materials, systems and education programs.

17. The State should not repeat the previous legislative cycle

LGEMA does not recommend delaying reform while a completely new regulatory framework is developed.

The current *Cat Amendment (Local Laws) Bill 2026* provides the immediate legislative vehicle. It remains at second reading in the Legislative Assembly.[21]

The Bill should therefore be amended now to establish:

- (a) the State-wide minimum standard;
- (b) the power of Councils to go further;
- (c) biodiversity-sensitive area powers;
- (d) transition arrangements;
- (e) clear enforcement authority; and
- (f) the framework for State-funded implementation.

The objective should be to move directly from legislative uncertainty to practical implementation.

18. Recommended legislative and policy outcome

LGEMA recommends that the Review result in legislation and policy providing for:

1. 24-hour domestic cat containment as the State-wide minimum requirement, subject to clearly defined exceptions;
2. a defined transition period for existing outdoor cats, without permanent grandfathering;



3. express local-government power to impose stronger, earlier or geographically targeted requirements;
4. express power to impose enhanced containment requirements in biodiversity-sensitive areas;
5. clear statutory authority for containment, compliance and enforcement;
6. State-issued model provisions, guidance and education material;
7. a State-funded Cat Containment Support Program;
8. a standard enclosure rebate of up to \$500, with enhanced assistance in priority biodiversity areas and for households experiencing financial hardship;
9. free State-funded cat-containment advice and community workshops;
10. development of an annual WA Catio Design Challenge with Cat Haven and appropriately qualified experts;
11. investigation of a State-funded rates concession of up to \$500 for verified compliant containment, where a local government elects to provide it;
12. consideration of registration incentives during the transition;
13. State funding of the reasonable incremental costs incurred by local governments as a consequence of the new State-wide containment requirements;
14. a common State-wide data, registration and evaluation framework; and
15. commencement and implementation as soon as practicable.

Conclusion

LGEMA's existing Policy Position provides a sound foundation: domestic cat containment is a legitimate and proportionate component of responsible cat management; Councils are well placed to respond to local circumstances; and the State should provide legislative clarity and practical support.[22]

Experience has now demonstrated that those principles need to be strengthened.

The evidence shows substantial local-government support for permanent containment where there is a clear effective legislative pathway. The current Bill provides that pathway but, in LGEMA's view, does not yet go far enough.[23]

WA has an exceptional biodiversity responsibility.

The State already invests substantially in biodiversity protection and feral-cat management. Its sustainability and planning policies recognise environmental protection as an integrated and shared government responsibility. Its Natural Resource Management programs already support State-local government and community partnerships.

Domestic cat containment should be brought within that same framework.

The strongest and most practical model is therefore not State control instead of local government, nor fragmented local regulation instead of State leadership.

It is:

- 1. a strong State-wide minimum standard;**
- 2. local government power to go further;**
- 3. State-funded implementation;**
- 4. practical assistance for owners; and**
- 5. proportionate enforcement for persistent non-compliance.**



The State should make responsible domestic cat containment the easy, affordable and attractive choice during the transition, while ensuring that the final statutory standard is clear and enforceable.

Western Australia should lead Australia in domestic cat containment—not because containment is an end in itself, but because WA has an exceptional biodiversity responsibility and the legislative, policy and fiscal capacity to act.

Yours faithfully

Sandra Boulter
on behalf of the LGEMA Committee
Chair
Local Government Elected Members Association Inc.

Footnotes / authorities

[1] LGEMA, Policy Position, Domestic Cat Containment, pp 1–3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See the history of JSCDL consideration of domestic cat containment local laws in LGEMA's Policy Position, Annexure B.

[4] G L Bryant and B L Webber, *'Responsible cat ownership: the status quo on past attempts, current efforts and future aspirations of local governments in Western Australia'* (2026) 32(1) Pacific Conservation Biology PC25042.

[5] *Cat Amendment (Local Laws) Bill 2026* (WA), second reading speech, Legislative Assembly, 25 February 2026.

[6] *Australian Government, Australian Government response to the Inquiry into the Problem of Feral and Domestic Cats in Australia* (2022).

[7] *Cat Amendment (Local Laws) Bill 2026* (WA).

[8] Western Australian Government, *'Better protection on the way for Western Australia's wildlife'*, 20 February 2026.

[9] *State Planning Policy 2.0 – Environment and Natural Resources Policy* (WA).

[10] *State Planning Policy 2.8 – Bushland Policy for the Perth Metropolitan Region* (WA).

[11] *Government of Western Australia, Hope for the Future: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy* (2003), including the proposed State–Local Government Common Sustainability Framework.

[12] Ibid.

[13] *Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Western Australian Feral Cat Strategy 2023–2028*.



[14] Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, State Natural Resource Management Program.

[15] GeoCatch, Catio projects and rebate program.

[16] Town of Claremont, Catio Grant Program.

[17] *Local Government Act 1995* (WA) s 6.47; Rates and Charges (Rebates and Deferments) Act 1992 (WA).

[18] Cat Haven, Position on Cat Containment.

[19] *Cat Act 2011* (WA) and *Cat Regulations 2012* (WA), including the prescribed registration fees.

[20] Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety, Cat Local Law Guidelines (2026).

[21] Parliament of Western Australia, Progress of Bills, *Cat Amendment (Local Laws) Bill 2026*

[22] LGEMA Policy Position, Domestic Cat Containment.

[23] Bryant and Webber, above n 4.