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| Declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal on public land in Victoria |
| Information Sheet |

Feral or wild populations of the cat (*Felis catus*) (feral cats) are being declared an established pest animal on public land to help protect Victoria’s at-risk biodiversity and give threatened species the best chance of survival.

## Background to the feral cat declaration

The Victorian Government announced its intention to declare the feral cat as an established pest animal under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* in December 2017 in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the management of pest animals on Crown land.

The declaration is part of a national commitment to feral cat management and a very important milestone in the protection of Victoria’s biodiversity.

## Objective of the feral cat declaration

Feral cats have a major impact on Victoria’s biodiversity and are one of the most significant threats to the survival of the state’s threatened wildlife.

The purpose of the feral cat declaration is to require public land managers to control feral cats on specified public land to protect biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

**What is an ‘established pest animal’?**

Introduced invasive plants and animals in Victoria may be declared as pests under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act). Under the CaLP Act, an animal may be declared an established pest animal if it is established in the wild and is a serious threat to primary production, Crown land (public land), the environment or community health in Victoria.

## How will declaring the feral cat as an established pest animal help protect Victoria’s biodiversity?

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has undertaken a review into the legislative arrangements for cats in Victoria. This included an assessment of how feral cat control on public land is enabled for the protection of Victoria’s biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

The review indicated opportunity exists to simplify the current legislative framework regulating cats in Victoria. The declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal on public land under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* has been identified as the most straightforward option to require public land managers to control feral cats on specified public land to protect biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

* 1. **What is the scope of the feral cat declaration?**
* Feral or wild populations of the cat (*Felis catus*) (feral cats) will be declared as an established pest animal under the CaLP Act.
* The feral cat will be declared on specified public land managed by DELWP and Parks Victoria.
* Only departmental and agency staff (and their agents) will be permitted to destroy a feral cat.
* Feral cats will not be declared as a pest animal on private land and farmers and other private landholders will not be required to control feral cats.
* Once the feral cat declaration is published in the Victorian Government Gazette, it will come into immediate effect.

**Who developed the scope of the feral cat declaration, and what did they consider?**

DELWP, Parks Victoria and the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) worked collaboratively to identify and agree on the key elements (scope) of the proposed feral cat declaration.

An important consideration was the need to target the feral cat declaration to areas of public land where feral cat management is of high priority for the protection of key biodiversity values. This way, reducing the risk of imposing undue obligations on all public land managers or any sector of the public.

Other important considerations were the need to account for the potential presence of free-roaming domestic cats and to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are upheld in the management of feral cats.

## Why will only departmental and agency staff (and their agents) will be permitted to destroy a feral cat under the declaration?

Defining who is permitted to destroy a feral cat on public land is in line with the purpose of the feral cat declaration which is to require public land managers to control feral cats on specified public land to protect biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

In the context of the feral cat declaration, ‘agents’ are third-parties (such as contractors, professional shooters and professional pest controllers) who have been engaged by and partner with the government to deliver specific pest control objectives. ‘Agents’ may also be accredited volunteer shooters participating in strategic, targeted invasive animal control operations on public land that are coordinated by DELWP and Parks Victoria.

When implemented by departmental and agency staff (and their agents), feral cat control can be carefully planned and managed to avoid and help address any potential animal welfare issues and help safeguard the safety of free-roaming domestic cats.

By limiting who is permitted to destroy feral cats the government can make sure that it delivers adaptable, integrated management approaches and has the highest standards of operational procedures and practices in place, including the highest level of skill and experience from those delivering feral cat control.

* 1. **What about land that falls outside of the feral cat declaration?**

The existing arrangements for cats will continue to operate in areas where the feral cat declaration does not apply.

**How will feral cats be controlled once they have been declared pest animals?**

The control of feral cats on public land will be implemented in accordance with the CaLP Act and will comply with the requirements of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 2008* and other regulatory frameworks that guide the control of pest animals in Victoria.

Work will continue once the declaration comes into effect to develop operational standards, a Code of Practice and guidelines that all government pest controllers and their agents must abide by. These standards and guidelines will guide the ongoing implementation of feral cat control on public land to minimise any poor animal welfare outcomes and prioritise the safety of domestic cats.

## How will you ensure the highest standards of animal welfare when undertaking feral cat control activities?

Animal welfare is a high priority for the Victorian Government. The implementation of the feral cat declaration will be designed to minimise poor animal welfare outcomes. Animal welfare will be prioritised through a Code of Practice that will include operational standards and guidelines that all government pest controllers and their agents must abide by.

The Government will work closely with animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA (Victoria) and consult and seek input from the Victorian community to inform the design of feral cat management approaches. This consultation will help ensure that any adverse animal welfare issues are minimised.

## How does the declaration relate to domestic cats?

Animals that are widely kept as a domestic animal cannot be declared as a pest animal under the CaLP Act.

The Victorian Government recognises that domestic cats are important companion animals for many Victorians and that responsible cat ownership brings many benefits. Ownership of domestic cats is unaffected by the feral cat declaration.

It is highly unlikely that pet cats will be affected by feral cat control activities on public land, however, the community can optimise their pet’s welfare by practicing responsible pet ownership. Responsible pet ownership includes caring for a pet's welfare needs, registering and, microchipping the pet and complying with any applicable local requirements for keeping cats on a person’s own property. Further information on the needs of a pet cat and how to ensure they are safely confined can be found here:

[agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/cats](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/cats)

Zoos Victoria and the RSPCA Victoria’s ‘*Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife’* campaign provides pet owners with advice and support to keep their cat in the home environment. Further information about the *Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife* campaign, can be found here:

[www.safecat.org.au](http://www.safecat.org.au)

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## When will the feral cat declaration come into effect?

It is proposed that the feral cat will be declared as an established pest animal in Victoria in mid to late 2018. The declaration will come into immediate effect.

## Community consultation on the proposed feral cat declaration

DELWP is consulting with key stakeholders and seeking input from the community as part of the feral cat declaration process.

The department is keen to receive feedback, to understand community and stakeholder views on the proposed feral cat declaration, and what the declaration may mean to people or the organisations they represent.

Community consultation opens on **Monday, 30 April** **2018.**

Visit the [DELWP website](https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/invasive-plants-and-animals/feral-cats) for more information.

Please email biodiversity.regulation@delwp.vic.gov.au to provide input into the feral cat declaration process with any comments or feedback.

Feedback can also be provided via a short [survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SG9VFLB) on the consultation website.

Community consultation will close at **midnight AEST on Sunday 20 May 2018**.

Feedback will help DELWP bring together the final declaration and help ensure the protection of Victoria’s precious biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

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