

## Strategies to reduce conflict: managing feral and stray cats

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A major source of conflict in the management of cats arises from the fact that, in Australia and elsewhere, they are viewed simultaneously as troublesome feral pests and as valued companion animals. A further source of conflict arises from the methods that are used to manage cats. On the one hand, populations of feral cats are controlled usually by lethal methods (e.g. shooting) or by expensive exclusion fencing. On the other, management of domestic cats tends to focus on local government legislation that encourages owners to look after their pets responsibly. Despite the expense and controversy that attends these methods of management, they are applied patchily in most areas and there is little indication of how effective they are in achieving their objectives. We argue here that much of the conflict in cat management is due to misperceptions about what cats are and what they do, and outline a series of steps that should help to guide the management of cats in future. The steps include recognising differences in value between owned domestic and feral cats; recognising the impacts of cats on native fauna, communities and ecological processes; and understanding the effects of management procedures on individuals and populations of cats. We conclude by suggesting strategic means of cat management that may be acceptable to both sides of the debate about this pet/pest species.