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Kings Park push for cat laws

by STEVE GRANT

PERTH council will be asked to look at how it can prevent cats from straying into Kings Park from its residential areas when its electors meet for their annual gathering this coming Tuesday.

Fremantle councillor Adin Lang had plans to make his city's cat controls some of the toughest in the state by banning them from all council-owned land including footpaths, but the laws were knocked back by the McGowan government in November last year.

Local government minister John Carey's office told Cr Lang a better approach would be through the state's Cat Act, but he says the best they could offer him was a "future review" of the legislation and he can't even score a meeting.

So Cr Lang is hoping to co-opt the capital city into increasing pressure on the state government to act, by dint of being a ratepayer himself.

He motion will ask the council to look at ways of prohibiting cats from "certain natural areas, parks and [the] Swan River foreshore".

Because Kings Park is state-owned the city has no jurisdiction



• Jewel of the city or a cat hunting ground; Bruce Webber and Adin Lang want strong cat laws in Perth to protect bushland like Kings Park.
Photo by Steve Grant

and would have to find other ways to keep domestic cats out, while he's hoping the public's love of its giant mountain top garden will attract some community support for the issue.

"While I acknowledge there's less wildlife and less cats in the CBD, Kings Park has no mechanism to stop cats entering and killing the wildlife - turning the jewel of our city into a hunting ground," Cr Lang said.

Heading back to work after a photo shoot for the Voice, Cr Lang said he spotted a roaming cat directly across from the park in Crawley.

"They're definitely going in there.

"Prohibited areas have kickstarted the conversation around responsible ownership, revealing widespread support for change.

Clear message

"WA local government has done the consultation and the message is clear - our communities want more action."

Cr Lang says Mr Carey could be responsible for "one of the biggest environmental policy reforms in the history of WA, saying a

change to the act could protect the hundreds of reserves dotted around the state.

"We (local government) want to work with him on that, however the current timeline will see meaningful change happening toward the end of the decade.

"In the meantime, pet cats are killing 390 million animals each year.

"Our lord mayor can also show environmental leadership by supporting Cat Prohibited Areas across Perth parks and the Swan River foreshore."

WA Feral Cat Working Group spokesperson Bruce Webber has

backed Cr Lang's plan, saying the state's cat control legislation is a "dinosaur".

Dr Webber says pet cats are covered by the Cat Act, feral cats out in the bush by the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act, but stray cats slipped under the radar.

"More challenging are stray cats, which no one really owns; they might have a few houses where people look after them occasionally and everyone thinks they belong to someone else and they might do a tour every week or so."

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• Moggies like this do a lot more damage in the environment than their owners would sometimes like to admit.



Push to keep cats out of Kings Park

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Dr Webber says WAFCWG is lobbying to have the terminology changed so there'd be just two definitions; cats that are owned and cats that are not owned, with the latter to be removed from the environment.

He says although the death toll from feral cats has been estimated at over a billion kills a year, pets and strays operating in cities put morer pressure on wildlife because of their greater numbers - around 50 times more kills per hectare.

"In terms of hunting effectiveness, all cats are amazing killers," Dr Webber said.

"People say 'my cat doesn't kill' and that's simply not true; even well-fed cats will hunt."

He says research also shows that pet cats only bring about 15 per cent of their kills home, meaning owners are often not appreciating the effect their moggies are having.

He's also pushing the point that contained moggies actually live four years longer than their wandering mates, as they don't face dogs, cars, snakes - or another grumpy feline. It's also better for human health, as studies show stray cats are more likely to suffer from toxoplasmosis, which can be harmful to people, and particularly pregnant mothers.

"Toxo is more prevalent than we are aware of and has not been well studied; but a mother could lose her baby," Dr Webber said.

He also points out that the only other

domesticated animals whose footlose ways are tolerated are honeybees and some homing pigeons.

"For everything else, there is a clear expectation that those animals will be contained."

Dr Webber says over the last three to five years, scientists have been producing important data on the effect of cats on native wildlife, which has fundamentally changed the debate. Where once politicians feared electoral backlash for acting on cats, inertia was the bigger culprit these days.

Established suburbs

He says WA should look to the ACT which now has whole suburbs where cats are banned, others where they have to be contained, and a third tier amongst the more established suburbs where owners of older cats who've always roamed can apply to continue.

But he says research shows that older cats go through a transition, but most are then fine with being contained, while it's not much of an issue for younger cats who know no differently.

"When you are containing a cat, you have to think about its welfare," Dr Webber says.

"You have to consider their health and wellbeing, and it's very easy to create an interesting environment for them," he said, noting the growth of outdoor "catios".

Push for vax clinic return

by DAVID BELL

FORMER Bayswater mayor Dan Bull wants to bring back the infant immunisation service which was cut in 2022 as part of a hotly contested money-saving measure.

For more than 30 years the council funded free immunisation days for infants at local clinics covering diseases like whooping cough, polio, measles and diphtheria.

It immunised about 750 to 1000 children per year and cost the council \$120,000 to run.

A split council narrowly voted 6 to 5 to end the spending to save money during their 2022 budget discussions (*"Doctor slams kids vax clinic closure," Voice, July 30, 2022*).

Cr Bull, who remains as a councillor after serving as mayor from 2017- 2021, has penned a notice of motion for next week's meeting calling for the council CEO to include funding for the infant immunisation clinics in the draft 2023/24 budget due mid-year.

"This was a highly valued service in the community, that was utilised by residents from a diverse range of socio-economic



• Dan Bull

backgrounds (including those that are most vulnerable), and is worthy of further consideration by council as part of the 2023/24 business planning and budgeting process," Cr Bull wrote.

Council staff have prepared a report on the idea, and advised that if councillors do vote to restore the service there'll still be a delay between budget time and the services getting back up and running. This is mainly because the nurses and doctors who ran the program "have either been re-deployed or have left the city", and it'll take time to hire replacements.

Only Joondalup council runs its own immunisation clinics directly, while a few other councils fund

programs at arms-length.

Last year a GP involved in running the clinics, Leanne Hosking, said Bayswater's service was able to immunise a high proportion of people in the district who wouldn't otherwise get vaccinations.

"We would certainly get under-vaccinated children or clients from overseas, including refugees, who may not have access to Medicare which is needed to see a GP," Dr Hosking said.

Cr Bull says: "I think every local government has to provide services that reflect the needs of the local community that it represents," and the free clinics made sense given Bayswater's demographics.

"That's where the power of local government is really awesome, because you can actually provide those services to people who might not be able to access them either because of their socioeconomic position, or their ability to otherwise access bulk billing services or medicare.

"Particularly refugees here living in the City of Bayswater may not be able to afford immunising children [or] being able to get to a state-run clinic, and that's where these kinds of services are needed."

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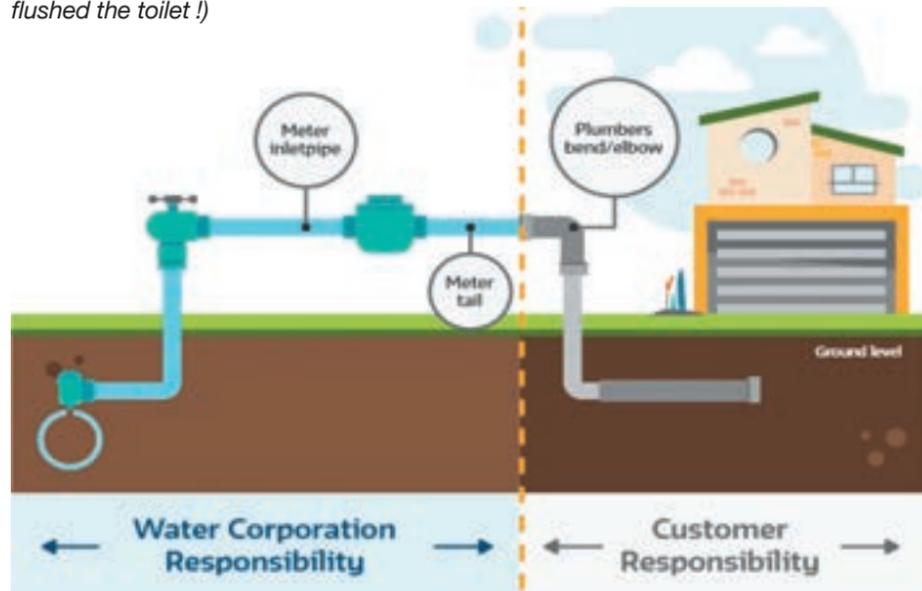
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