



On 26 July 2018, the feral cat was declared an established pest animal on specified Crown land in Victoria to help protect the state's at-risk biodiversity and give threatened species the best chance of survival.

Background to the feral cat declaration

The feral or wild population of the cat (*Felis catus*) (feral cat) has been declared an established pest animal on specified Crown land in Victoria under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act).

Feral cats have not been declared as a pest animal on private land, meaning farmers and other private landholders will not be required to control feral cats.

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 declaration of the feral cat as an established pest was recommended by the 2017 Parliamentary inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown Land. It's part of a national commitment to managing feral cats, and is a very important milestone in the protection of Victoria's biodiversity.

What did the community say?

A consultation process on the proposed feral cat declaration was conducted from 30 April 2018 through to 20 May 2018.

The purpose of the consultation was to understand community and stakeholder views on the proposed feral cat declaration, and what the declaration may mean to individuals or the organisations they represent. Over 1,000 submissions were received, with more than 75% of survey respondents supporting the declaration of feral cats as established pest animals.

Objective of the feral cat declaration

The objective of the feral cat declaration is to enable Crown land managers to more effectively control feral cats on specified Crown land to protect biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

What is an 'established pest animal'?

Under the CaLP Act, an introduced 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, and it should be eradicated or controlled or its spread in the wild should be prevented.

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

DELWP has undertaken a review into the legislative arrangements for cats in Victoria. This included an assessment of how feral cat control on Crown land is enabled for the protection of Victoria's biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

The review indicated that an opportunity existed to simplify the current legislative framework regulating cats in Victoria. The declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal on Crown land under the CaLP Act was identified as the most straightforward option to enable Crown land managers to better control feral cats on specified Crown land to protect biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

The declaration of the feral cat has helped remove unnecessary legal barriers to undertaking humane, effective and efficient strategic feral cat control on specified Crown land for the protection of biodiversity.

What are the details of the feral cat declaration?

- The feral or wild population of the cat (*Felis catus*) (feral cat) has been declared an established pest animal on specified Crown land under the CaLP Act.
- The declaration applies to areas of Crown land managed by DELWP, Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Park and Victoria's four Alpine Resort Management Boards.
- The declaration came into effect on 26 July 2018.

What other information should I note?

Feral cats have not been declared as a pest animal on private land, meaning farmers and other private landholders will not be required to control feral cats.

Feral cat control will be implemented by department and agency staff (and their agents), ensuring efforts are targeted to protecting the threatened wildlife most at risk from predation by feral cats.

Feral cat control will be implemented according to a Victorian Feral Cat Management Code of Practice to guide and develop best practice, humane, efficient and effective feral cat management.

Permission to hunt on Crown land does not extend to feral cats, unless conducted by accredited volunteer shooters engaged to participate in control programs managed by DELWP or Parks Victoria.

What does 'specified Crown land' mean?

In the context of the feral cat declaration, specified Crown land is Crown land managed by DELWP, Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Park and Victoria's four Alpine Resort Management Boards.

Why does the feral cat declaration not apply to private land?

The feral cat declaration does not apply to private land largely due to the increased likelihood of encountering domestic and stray or semi-owned cats on private land. It is impossible in most instances to visually differentiate between a domestic, stray, semi-owned or feral cat.

Why will feral cat control be delivered only by departmental and agency staff (and their agents)?

This is in line with the objective of the feral cat declaration which is to enable Crown land managers to control feral cats on specified Crown 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 Crown 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 minimise potential adverse animal welfare issues and help safeguard the safety of free-roaming domestic cats.

How will the highest standards of animal welfare be ensured when undertaking feral cat control activities?

Animal welfare is a high priority for the Victorian Government and the community. Best practice feral cat management approaches that maximise animal welfare will be described in a Victorian Feral Cat Management Code of Practice that will include operational standards that all government pest controllers and their agents must abide by.

The Code of Practice will prioritise animal welfare and recognise free-roaming domestic cats, ensuring any risk to domestic cats is minimised. The welfare of non-target native species, that is reducing the impact on non-target

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wildlife from the control of feral cats, will also be prioritised in the Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice will be developed in consultation with animal welfare organisations, including Animal Welfare Victoria and the RSPCA (Victoria).

How does the declaration relate to domestic cats?

The declaration does not apply to domestic cats and ownership of domestic cats is unaffected by the feral cat declaration.

Animals that are widely kept as a domestic animal cannot be declared as a pest animal under the CaLP Act. It is an offence to destroy a domestic cat, except in very limited circumstances.

The Victorian Government recognises that domestic cats are important companion animals for many Victorians and that responsible cat ownership brings many benefits.

It is highly unlikely that pet cats will be affected by feral cat control activities on Crown 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, microchipping and de-sexing 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

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

When did the feral cat declaration come into effect?

The declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal on specified Crown land in Victoria came into effect on 26 July 2018.

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