

# RSPCA Australia Submission

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## Pre-Budget Submission 2026-27

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January 2026

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The RSPCA is an independent, community-based charity dedicated to advancing animal welfare for the humane treatment of animals. Guided by our vision that all animals have a good life, we work tirelessly to prevent cruelty by actively promoting the care and protection of animals Australia-wide.

Our activities span all states and territories and include operating animal rehoming shelters, investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty complaints and educating the community on responsible pet ownership. Informed by contemporary values and the latest scientific knowledge, we work with governments and industries to address critical animal welfare issues.

This submission reflects our ongoing commitment to the development of policies and practices that uphold the welfare of animals across all sectors. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission process, with the objective of working collaboratively towards meaningful progress in animal welfare.

30 January 2026

The Hon Dr Daniel Mulino MP  
Assistant Treasurer of Australia  
Minister for Financial Services

Dear Minister

The RSPCA welcomes the opportunity to present our 2026–27 Federal Budget submission for consideration. While we commend the Australian Government’s leadership on animal welfare to date, there is more work to do to improve animal welfare within industry and the community, ensuring community expectations are met and Australia’s international reputation is improved. Continued Australian Government funding and leadership are crucial to achieving this. To this end, the RSPCA recommends investment in the four key proposals on page 5.

These proposals present an opportunity for the Government to take action in areas that are important to Australians, including setting minimum national standards for animal welfare in Australia’s agricultural industries, establishing a national cat management program and supporting Australians to keep their companion animals in times of crisis. The Australian Government has a key role to play in providing national leadership to drive consistent and continuous improvements in animal welfare. Such advances are essential for international market access and trade reputation, sustainability of food and fibre production, social license to operate and community wellbeing. Good animal welfare extends beyond preventing pain, suffering or distress and minimising negative experiences to ensuring animals can express their natural behaviour in an enriching environment, feel safe, have positive experiences and a good quality of life.

Australians care about animals and expect public policy to protect animal welfare. Independent research on consumer sentiment demonstrates that a very high proportion (98%) of Australians consider animal welfare to be important<sup>1</sup>. Most Australians (80%) also support more government action to improve the lives of animals<sup>2</sup> and see the Australian Government as ‘highly responsible’ for animal welfare<sup>3</sup>.

The RSPCA is one of Australia’s best known and most trusted charities and the nation’s undisputed leader in animal welfare and protection. We are an independent, community-based charity dedicated to advancing animal welfare for the humane treatment of animals. Guided by our vision towards a world where animals and people live together in dignity, respect and compassion, we work tirelessly to improve the lives of animals through care and evidence-based welfare advancements that change attitudes, behaviours, practices and laws.

The RSPCA is committed to working with the Government to achieve ongoing improvements in animal welfare and recommends targeted investment in the 2026-27 Budget to realise this objective. For more information, please contact Chief Science Officer Dr Suzie Fowler at [sfowler@rspca.org.au](mailto:sfowler@rspca.org.au).

RSPCA Australia

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Yours faithfully



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<sup>1</sup> McCrindle, 2022. *RSPCA Perception Report, 2022*.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Morgan Research (2022). *Attitudes to Animal Welfare*.

<sup>3</sup> Futureye (2018). *Commodity or Sentient Being? Australia’s Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare*.



**Table of Contents**

Summary of recommendations ..... 5

Increase Australian Animal Welfare Strategy funding..... 6

Create a robust, nationwide approach to cat management and wildlife protection ..... 7

Support Australians to keep their companion animals in times of crisis ..... 10

Improve animal welfare through Australian trade arrangements ..... 11

## Summary of recommendations

Priority	Budget recommendations
<b>Increase Australian Animal Welfare Strategy funding</b>	1. Increase funding to \$8 million over the next four years for implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.
<b>Create a robust, nationwide approach to cat management and wildlife protection</b>	2. Invest \$500,000 per annum for the next three years in a National Domestic Cat Management Taskforce to effectively consider a best approach to cat management and wildlife conservation.  3. Fund the RSPCA to deliver a Keeping Cats Safe at Home program – a coordinated, evidence-based national program to encourage behavioural change in cat owners and establish a desexing program to manage cat populations at a cost of \$35.4 million over four years.
<b>Support Australians to keep their companion animals in times of crisis</b>	4. Establish a national grant program that is open to both human and animal welfare organisations to deliver an expansion of community programs for companion animals of people facing crisis situations, as well as an early risk identification education program to support domestic violence victim-survivors to leave harmful situations earlier at a cost of \$54.5 million over four years.
<b>Improve animal welfare through Australian trade arrangements</b>	5. Establish an Animal Welfare Trade Policy to foster continuous improvements in welfare standards through trade arrangements that involve animals, animal products and animal by-products to enhance Australia's trade opportunities and align with the National Statement on Animal Welfare to build our trade credentials and ensure ongoing market access.

# Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

## Increase Australian Animal Welfare Strategy funding

The first Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) was operational between 2005–2013 and was successful in raising the profile of animal welfare and providing a forum for collaboration between stakeholders. It delivered true animal welfare improvements, including the development and promotion of the Iki Jime guidance to improve fish welfare at killing and the development of a model for assessing the relative humaneness of pest animal control methods. Given the ongoing delays and inconsistent application of livestock standards and guidelines, the re-established AAWS also presents a significant opportunity to deliver on the need for greater national leadership when it comes to setting minimum national standards for animal welfare.

The RSPCA has welcomed the Albanese Labor Government's re-establishment of the AAWS and the current planning steps which look to identify how it can enhance animal welfare in Australia, respond to community concerns and improve our reputation in international trade.

Initial work on the AAWS is a step in the right direction. The RSPCA can see great promise in many of the initiatives and objectives intended under the AAWS including education, research, leadership and coordination. To ensure the work done to date is capitalised on, providing funding to ensure implementation of the AAWS from 2026 onwards will make a meaningful contribution towards the goals of the National Statement on Animal Welfare, as endorsed by Agriculture Ministers in 2024.

The AAWS can create a forum for bringing together subject matter experts from a variety of disciplines. The RSPCA is supportive of all chapters being implemented, including Livestock and Production, Aquaculture, Companion Animals, and Animals in Research and Teaching. Commonwealth-led cross-discipline collaboration will help identify ways to solve common challenges in companion animal care and create significant improvements for Australians and their pets<sup>1</sup>, including streamlining responses to current cost of living, housing insecurity and mental health and community wellbeing issues.

A coordinated effort, coupled with a focus on continual improvement in animal welfare as defined by the National Statement, can also ensure consistency in areas of animals in sport and recreation, and managing welfare for wild animals and animals used in research and teaching.

The RSPCA recommends the Government bolster funding for the AAWS in FY2026–27 to \$8 million over the next four years to 2030 to enable its implementation. This comprises resourcing for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to manage the strategy as well as implement the chapters, including collaboration and round tables, research on best implementation methodologies and provision of advice from subject matter experts.

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**Recommendation 1: Increase funding to \$8 million over the next four years for implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.**

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<sup>1</sup> Oosthuizen K, Haase B, Ravulo J, Lomax S, Ma G (2023), The Role of Human-Animal Bonds for People Experiencing Crisis Situations, *Animals*: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13050941>

# Create a robust, nationwide approach to cat management and wildlife protection

## Establish a National Domestic Cat Management Taskforce

The RSPCA is Australia's largest operator of animal shelters and has significant experience and expertise in domestic cat management. We support the humane and effective management of unowned<sup>2</sup> and semi-owned<sup>3</sup> cat populations in Australia and are committed to working with all levels of government and the community to humanely manage cat populations and protect wildlife. We recommend that dedicated funding for a National Domestic Cat Management Taskforce is needed to deliver the Australian Government's commitment to effectively address cat management and wildlife conservation as outlined in the revised Feral cat threat abatement plan 2024<sup>4</sup> (TAP).

Currently, there are multiple independent bodies working in a disjointed manner on the management of domestic cats. Released by the Australian Government in 2024, the TAP explicitly identified the importance of managing these populations of semi-owned, unowned and owned cats in and around the human population in an effective manner as crucial to protecting Australia's wildlife. While the efforts of these multiple groups are significant, by bringing together subject matter expertise and relying on contemporary evidence of best practice with the specific goal of uniting and coordinating efforts to manage domestic cats, there is an opportunity to design more cohesive strategies with greater emphasis on effectiveness and monitoring.

Cat management is a complex issue. A National Domestic Management Cat Taskforce is vital to provide national leadership and coordination to develop a Domestic Cat Management Plan, given the prominence that the TAP places on the development of such a plan to coordinate cat management Australia-wide, help achieve best practice management, enable collaboration, agree on key metrics for monitoring and program evaluation, and mitigate the unintended consequences of poor policy implementation. A holistic and collaborative approach that recognises and addresses the complexity and nuance of the relationships that tens of thousands of Australians share with cats is vital to maintain the social licence for certain management activities and to the effectiveness and sustainability of cat management.

There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to support more effective cat management, in line with its goal of preventing new extinctions and protecting and managing threatened species<sup>5</sup>. A national strategy can deliver:

- Evidence-based solutions that will reduce roaming cat populations in urban and peri-urban areas identified as high priority.
- Improved cat welfare and public perception of cats by promoting positive cat management techniques, including voluntary containment of cats to an owner's property.
- Reduced costs to local and state and territory governments through more effective and meaningful cat management strategies.
- Improved compliance and buy-in from cat lovers to be part of the solution.

<sup>2</sup> Cats that have no identifiable owner that may depend opportunistically on some resources indirectly and unintentionally from people. These cats may been previously owned or become lost.

<sup>3</sup> Cats that are under the direct and intentional care of people but are not formally identified or owned by them.

<sup>4</sup> Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

<sup>5</sup> [Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032: Towards Zero Extinctions](#), Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

The RSPCA has undertaken extensive research<sup>6</sup> and program delivery in this space that we can bring to bear in a partnership with the Australian Government to achieve meaningful change in cat management.

The funding request is for:

- Secretariat support for the taskforce.
- Travel costs to bring subject matter experts together to form the taskforce.
- Research and development of reports and recommendations as a result of taskforce discussions.

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**Recommendation 2: Invest \$500,000 per annum for the next three years in a National Domestic Cat Management Task Force to effectively consider a best approach to cat management and wildlife conservation.**

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## **Establish a national Keeping Cats Safe at Home program**

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Around 33 per cent of households in Australia care for cats<sup>7</sup> and research shows that people can experience better physical and mental health as a result of cat ownership.

The Australian Government's Feral cat threat abatement plan (TAP)<sup>8</sup> identified the negative impact that cats can have on native wildlife in Australia, and the need to manage cats in and around the human population in an effective manner as crucial to protecting Australia's wildlife<sup>9</sup>.

Due to a high reproduction rate, and in the absence of adequate desexing rates, cat populations have grown rapidly. In addition, roaming cats are at risk of injury and death from road accidents, fighting and disease. For example, two in three cat owners have lost a pet to a roaming-related incident, with a third of these involving cars<sup>10</sup>.

Humanely and effectively managing cat populations is essential to alleviate their impact on biodiversity and increase cat safety and wellbeing. A national approach would help achieve the Australian Government's goals of no new extinctions and protecting and managing threatened species<sup>11</sup>. The RSPCA NSW Keeping Cats Safe at Home program<sup>12</sup> has been successful in significantly reducing free-roaming cat populations during a four-year pilot program by increasing rates of desexing and microchipping while encouraging the uptake of voluntary containment of pet cats. It aims to reduce the risks cats face when roaming, such as injury, disease or getting lost, and to lessen the impact of cat predation on native wildlife.

Across the 11 local government areas (LGAs) that took part in the pilot, 17,464 new cats were registered over the four-year project period, more than 2700 cats were desexed and 1700 were

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<sup>6</sup> Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia, RSPCA Australia, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people, Animal Medicines Australia, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

<sup>9</sup> While there is no indication that domestic cats in urban areas are responsible for the decline of any threatened species, further research is required to better quantify cats' predation on wildlife.

<sup>10</sup> Keeping Cats Safe at Home - RSPCA New South Wales

<sup>11</sup> Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032: Towards Zero Extinctions

<sup>12</sup> Ma, G.C.; Gates, M.C.; Littlewood, K.E.; Zito, S.; Kennedy, B.P.A. Keeping Cats Safe at Home (KCSAH): Lessons Learned from a Human Behaviour Change Campaign to Reduce the Impacts of Free-Roaming Domestic Cats. *Animals* 2025, *15*, 3554. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15243554>



microchipped. Ecological monitoring indicated reductions in free-roaming cat densities in three council areas, with many also recording declines in nuisance complaints and impoundments. In October 2025, the program was extended to another 19 NSW LGAs with funding from the NSW Environmental Trust. To have a real impact across Australia, and in recognition of the TAP's inclusion of semi-owned<sup>13</sup> and unowned<sup>14</sup> cats in and around our communities, there is an opportunity for the Australian Government to take progressive and effective action to deliver on a nationwide cat management program in collaboration with the RSPCA.

This program complements the Australian Government's feral cat management initiatives under the TAP by addressing unowned and semi-owned cats in and around human populations, protecting wildlife while improving cat safety and welfare.

The RSPCA seeks funding of \$35.4 million over four years to deliver a coordinated, evidence-based national program that builds on the success of RSPCA NSW's Keeping Cats Safe at Home program. The expansion will include targeted desexing initiatives, microchipping programs and a national education campaign aimed at providing resources for all members of the public promoting cat safety, enrichment and supporting owners to explore voluntary cat containment. The program will also build partnerships that tailor intervention to local needs and deliver school and community-based education initiatives. The expansion will provide flexibility for the RSPCA to tailor the initiatives according to need and capabilities in each state or territory.

Expanding the program, or similar successful programs, both in location and capacity would help meet increasing need in communities across Australia in urban, regional and remote areas.

Specifically, the program includes:

- A national, evidence-based behaviour change campaign delivered through advertising, and school and community-based education initiatives to encourage cat caregivers to keep their cats contained in a way that meets their welfare needs.
- National desexing and microchipping programs to reduce cat populations and roaming across urban, regional and remote areas.
- Tailored interventions to be developed in conjunction with local councils, wildlife conservation groups and community organisations to ensure that areas with high biodiversity values receive targeted containment initiatives to protect native wildlife.
- Monitoring, evaluation and public reporting to track program success and adjust strategies as required.

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**Recommendation 3: Fund the RSPCA to deliver a Keeping Cats Safe at Home program – a coordinated, evidence-based national program to encourage behavioural change in cat owners and establish a desexing program to manage cat populations at a cost of \$35.4 million over four years.**

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<sup>13</sup> Cats that are under the direct and intentional care of people but are not formally identified or owned by them.

<sup>14</sup> Cats that have no identifiable owner that may depend opportunistically on some resources indirectly and unintentionally from people. These cats may be previously owned or become lost.

# Support Australians to keep their companion animals in times of crisis

## Establish a Keeping Australians and their Companion Animals Safe grant program

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Australians with companion animals who are experiencing vulnerability, including those facing domestic and family violence, homelessness, financial strain, or health challenges such as hospitalisation or ageing, are often forced to make impossible choices. Many delay leaving violent situations<sup>15</sup>, postpone medical treatment or struggle to maintain safe housing and their own well-being due to concerns for their pets' welfare.

As a result, many people who find themselves in crisis situations are at risk of harm, or may need to surrender, rehome or euthanase their pets.

Keeping companion animals and their owners together to preserve the human–animal bond has important health, social and economic benefits to individuals and the community. This approach reflects an integrated model of human and animal support, recognising that animal welfare is often a gateway to safety, stability and recovery for people accessing domestic violence, housing and health services.

RSPCA programs that provide emergency boarding, care and support services have been successful in keeping people and pets together following short-term crisis events. However, these shelters are often at capacity and limited in their ability to provide crisis support due to lack of funding.

A national grant program that is open to both human and animal welfare organisations will deliver an expansion of specialised community programs that provide safe emergency boarding, care and support services for companion animals of people facing crisis situations, including:

- More pet-friendly refuge accommodation for domestic violence victim-survivors that allows for people and their pets to stay together in times of crisis.
- An education program to help veterinarians, animal welfare inspectors, first responders and others to identify and respond to animal abuse in the domestic violence context, enabling earlier risk identification and supporting faster, safer pathways out of harm for victim-survivors.
- Temporary housing and care for the pets of homeless people, facilitating access to shelter and social services.
- Temporary and emergency pet care services for people undergoing unexpected medical treatment who cannot care for their pets.

A nationally-coordinated grant program would support consistent access to these services across jurisdictions, reducing postcode inequity and enabling scalable, community-embedded models of

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<sup>15</sup> Between 20-48 per cent of victim-survivors delay leaving a violent situation due to concerns for their pets' welfare. Source: Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., Thompson, T. M., Heath, J., Maruyama, M., & Hayashi, K. 2007. Battered pets and domestic violence: Animal abuse reported by women experiencing intimate violence and by non-abused women. *Violence Against Women*, 13(4), 354-373.

support. Expanding programs in both location and capacity would help meet increasing need in communities across Australia, particularly in rural and regional areas.

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**Recommendation 4: Establish a national grant program that is open to both human and animal welfare organisations to deliver an expansion of community programs for companion animals of people facing crisis situations, as well as an early risk identification education program to support victim-survivors to leave harmful situations earlier at a cost of \$54.5 million over four years.**

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## Improve animal welfare through Australian trade arrangements

### Establish an Animal Welfare Trade Policy

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Trade arrangements provide collaborative opportunities to foster sustainable development practices, increase market access for Australian industries, and improve animal welfare domestically and abroad. Building on the work that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has already commenced, the RSPCA recommends funding be allocated in the 2026–27 Federal Budget to develop an Animal Welfare Trade Policy. This would provide an informed framework to facilitate trade arrangements that involve animals, animal products and by-products. It would also foster more sustainable development practices, build Australia’s trade credentials and international reputation, better reflect community sentiment and support animal welfare improvements domestically and with trade partners.

While animal welfare provisions were included in the 2021 Free Trade Agreement with the United Kingdom and the 2024 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the United Arab Emirates, there is currently no specific policy to ensure consistent and comprehensive treatment of animal welfare in our trade arrangements.

The RSPCA asks the Australian Government to uphold the sixth pillar of the National Statement on Animal Welfare<sup>16</sup> by taking action to ensure that animal welfare is a standard consideration in every international trade negotiation.

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**Recommendation 5: Establish an Animal Welfare Trade Policy to foster continuous improvements in welfare standards via trade arrangements that involve animals, animal products and animal by-products to enhance Australia’s trade opportunities and align with the National Statement on Animal Welfare to build our trade credentials and ensure ongoing market access.**

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<sup>16</sup> National Statement on Animal Welfare, Commonwealth of Australia, 2024.