# FUTURE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES: INSIGHTS FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

Bruny Cat Management Plan

Report prepared by

**Dr Lynette McLeod** 

Post-Doctoral Fellow University of New England Imcleod7@une.edu.au

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## **Summary**

This report builds on the initial findings of the 2018 report 'Community Engagement - Bruny Island Cat Management Project', documenting the findings of research to address the knowledge gaps identified in that initial report, and further explore the barriers towards proposed cat management activities on the island. These results are then used to refine the recommendations for future community engagement activities to build long term commitment and ownership by the community for the management of cats on their island.

A mixture of Bruny Island residents and non-resident ratepayers were approached to participate in a mixed method questionnaire that had been developed to investigate the identified knowledge gaps in community attitudes and barriers towards feral and domestic cat management on the island. In particular, participants who had previously indicated they did not fully support either proposed feral and domestic cat management initiatives were targeted. The aim of this questionnaire was not necessarily to collect a large representative sample to be able to make generalisations about the community (as with previous surveys), but to use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative survey methods to provide a deeper understanding of the identified issues and provide a more detailed picture of the communities' feelings about the proposed management actions. These types of results will allow the development of more targeted, and effective, engagement strategies.

The identified gaps explored in this report cover a range of issues around the control of feral cats, the proposed Bruny By-law for domestic cats, the proposed employment of a community Ranger and the best ways to keep the community involved and informed.

Future strategies to enhance community engagement in both the domestic cat By-law and feral cat management plans include:

- continued awareness and education campaigns to target the identified weaknesses in current knowledge
- further consultation around new planned control methods and sources of funding before implementation
- use of communication messages that move away from anti-cat sentiments towards a more positive wildlife benefits as well as pet happiness and safety
- opportunities for the community to be involved e.g. employing local people, citizen science style monitoring or trapping programs
- working with individual cat owners and offering assistance and incentives for compliance where required
- feedback of program achievements across a range of communication channels and including both feral cat management outcomes and cat owners 'good news' stories
- development of a system so the public can report cat sightings or impacts directly to Council
- community ranger position that is promoted as someone to assist rather than just enforce compliance
- a 'visible' presence on the island including appropriate signage and an office / shop front

## Introduction

The Bruny Island Cat Management Program is an ongoing program that aims to minimise the impacts of cats (domestic, stray and feral) on the island's biodiversity, economic (agriculture, tourism) and social values.

To inform the social science component of this program and assist with the development of a Cat Management Strategy for the island, the report 'Community Engagement - Bruny Island Cat Management Project' was released in May 2018 containing:

- a brief discussion on the form of community engagement required to achieve the project's outcomes
- a literature review of similar cat management programs conducted on inhabited islands
- a review of the actions already undertaken on Bruny Island
- documentation of known community attitudes and barriers towards the major components of cat management on the island (i.e. responsible pet cat ownership and control of stray and feral cat populations
- identification of knowledge gaps to be addressed, and
- preliminary recommendations for future engagement strategies.

This report builds on this initial findings to:

- document the results from research that has taken place since May 2018 to address the identified knowledge gaps in community attitudes and barriers towards cat management on the island, and
- make recommendations for future strategies that will address these key barriers and build long term community engagement and ownership of the Bruny Island Cat Management Program.

## Methodology

The contact details of 96 people who were interested in being consulted about cat management issues on Bruny were collected as part of the Bruny Life community survey which was implemented between February and April 2018.

Between December 2018 and February 2019, two interviewers were employed to contact these people to encourage their participation in a mixed method questionnaire that had been developed to investigate the identified knowledge gaps in community attitudes and barriers towards feral and domestic cat management on the island. The participants were initially contacted by either phone, email or through Facebook (depending on their specified preferred contact method). Each person was followed up at least once more to encourage their participation. Respondents had the option to complete the questionnaire either online in their own time, over the phone, or face-to-face.

In addition the online survey was promoted in local media and at local events to increase the number of responses.

The questionnaire contained a mixture of multiple choice and open-ended questions to gain further insights into the identified knowledge gaps around:

- support for a range of proposed feral cat control methods
- willingness to participate in feral cat control activities
- support for an annual community contribution towards feral control activities
- implementation and willingness to assist with compliance issues associated with the proposed Bruny Island Domestic Cat By-law
- support for proposed registration and permit costs for domestic cats
- support for a proposed Community Ranger position, and
- the best ways to communicate about the project to the community.

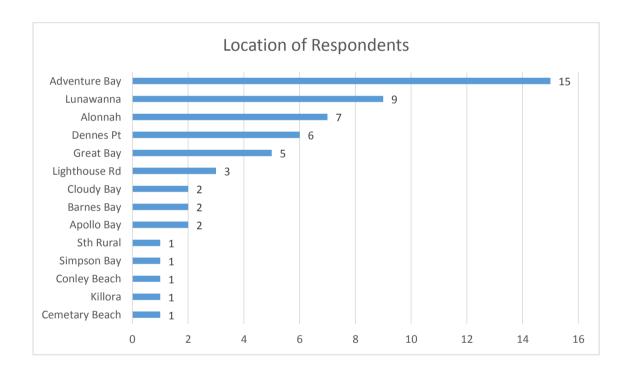
In addition, the participants were asked to provide feedback about other community initiatives and program features they would like to be included in the cat management project.

## Demographic profile of respondents

#### There were 56 respondents

- 42 were residents
- 14 were non-resident ratepayers
- 12 were cat owners
- 44 did not own a cat
- 1 non-owner sometimes fed stray cats
- 16 were located on the North Island
- 40 were located on the South Island

The largest number (27%) came from Adventure Bay, followed by Lunawanna (16%).



37 of these respondents had previously taken part in the 2018 Bruny Life Survey where:

- 28 supported the cat management initiative
- 28 supported feral cat eradication
- 26 supported the Bruny Domestic Cat By-laws

## Feral Cat Management

#### Willingness to participate in feral cat management activities

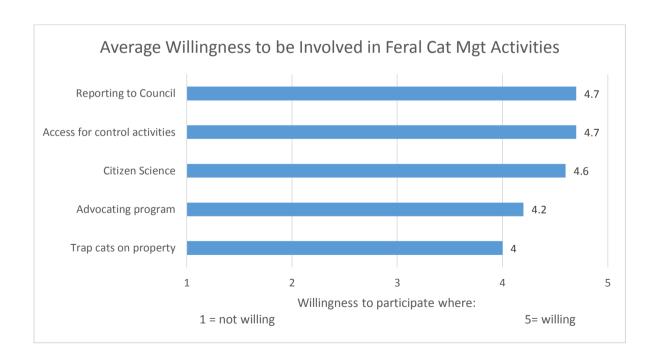
## Respondents were asked about their willingness to participate in a range of feral cat management activities:

- Allow access to their property for feral cat control activities
- Report feral / stray cats to Council
- Advocate for the program to others
- Participate in citizen science programs (e.g. monitoring)
- Trap cats on their property and take to Alonnah facility

Respondents were willing to be involved in all suggested activities, with reporting feral / stray cats to Council and allowing access to their properties for cat control activities the highest ranked activities (86% of respondents said they were willing to report cats to Council, 82% were willing to allow access to their properties – both had average rating 4.7 on a scale where 1 = not willing and 5 = willing).

73% of respondents were willing to participate in citizen science projects (average rating 4.6) and 61% were willing to advocate for the program to others (average rating 4.2).

Trapping cats was the lowest ranked activity (only 52% were willing to participate – average rating 4), with several respondents commenting that they were willing to have traps on their property but not willing to conduct the trapping themselves.



Respondents were also asked if there were any other activities they would be willing to conduct.

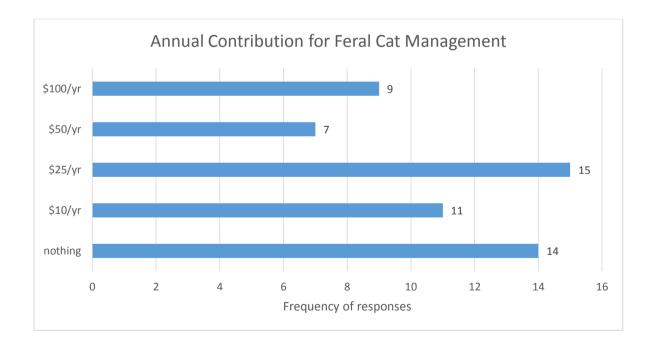
Suggestions included:

- Setting and monitoring traps in other areas (if traps were provided)
- Assisting with holiday trapping campaigns
- Volunteering to shoot cats when required
- Volunteering at the holding facility in Alonnah
- Communication
- Managing social pages / post
- One off help (nothing regular) such as delivery of equipment, recording etc

#### Annual contribution towards feral cat management

Respondents were asked if they would be prepared to pay an annual contribution towards feral cat management – similar to that paid in other States by landholders for key feral pests.

25% of the respondents did not want to pay any annual contribution. The most popular amount (27%) was \$25 per year. 16% of respondents said they would be happy to pay \$100 per year.



#### Feral cat control methods

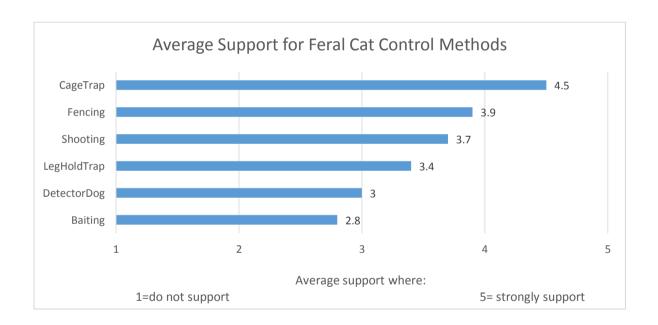
#### Respondents were asked to rate their support for a range of feral cats control methods:

- Live cage trapping
- Spotlight shooting
- Live soft-jaw leg-hold trapping
- Barrier fencing
- Detector dogs

Cage trapping was the most supported option (86% supported or strongly supported, average rating 4.5 on a scale 1=do not support and 5= strongly support).

Fencing (63% supported or strongly supported, average rating 3.9), shooting (66% supported or strongly supported, average rating 3.7) and leg-hold trapping (57% supported or strongly supported, average rating 3.4) each had a small number of people who did not support them.

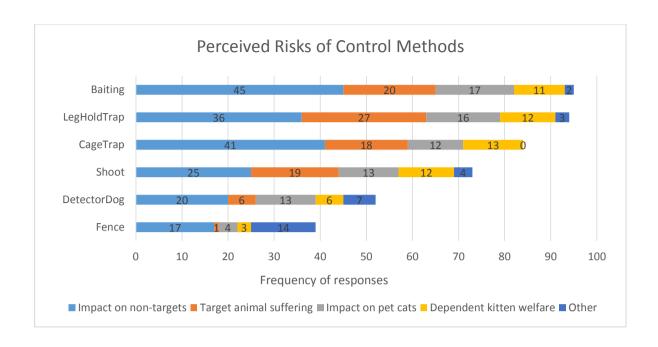
The least favoured options were detector dogs (39% supported or strongly supported, average rating 3) and baiting (45% supported or strongly supported, average rating 2.8).



#### Respondents were then asked about the perceived risks of each of these methods.

Baiting and leg-hold trapping were perceived to have the greatest risks, followed by cage trapping, shooting and detector dogs. Fencing was perceived to have the least risk.

The impact on non-target animals was generally the main concern for most of these methods, followed by suffering of the target cat and the impacts on pet cats. The restriction of non-target movements was highlighted as a particular concern for fencing (included in the 'other' category in the graph on next page)



#### Comments about these methods included:

- Baiting "don't like it but it has to be done"
- Leg-hold trapping "even soft-jawed traps cause extreme distress, pain and injury",
   "tough luck for the cat"
- Shooting "depends on shooters skill", "need to be only professional shooters", "benefits of shooting outweigh other considerations", "I would have no objection to this in more remote areas with few or no nearby houses"
- Detector dogs "well-trained dogs under the control of a well-trained and accredited shooter would be one of the best methods of feral cat control", "sounds expensive", "on the Neck, yes", "as long as they don't interfere with cattle"
- Fencing "failure of fencing is the main risk", "disconnecting wildlife from their familiar territory", "prefer funds to go towards education", "fencing restricts free movement of all ground dwelling animals and may have serious ecological problems", "may be ineffective", "risk of fencing being washed away by the sea", "may be an issue with blue tongue territory", "isolation of non-target animals", "cleanest option", "cost", "the free movement of other wildlife as it is a wildlife reserve"

# Respondents were also asked if they thought they had adequate information about each of these control methods to answer the previous questions.

- 43 said Yes
- 13 said No "don't know what soft leg traps are", "My opinions (and presumably most others) are speculation, and presumably would benefit from some unbiased evidence"

#### Respondents were asked if they had any ideas how their concerns could be addressed.

Responses could be categorised around four main aspects:

#### • Development and implementation of a sound management plan:

- that incorporates "sensibly managed domestic cats" and "ethical and moral aspects as well as the potential ecological changes e.g. increase in rats, rabbits etc of all versions of cat control"
- o that can be enforced "if a domestic cat is caught owners face a heavy penalty"
- o and has long-term vision "need to work towards a cat free island", "zero tolerance within Bruny Island Reserves"

#### Further education:

- o about proposed control methods and their risks "more info on what's involved after the catch etc and what each type involves", "information on previous success/failure rates of removal of feral cats in other locations using these methods. How these methods impact pet cats and non-target animals"
- about obligations for particular groups "tourists should be told not to leave food at camp sites that could attract any animals"
- using "community meeting or online webinar"

#### • Refinement of the proposed methods:

- including training "ensure cat management operators and dogs are adequately trained", "detector dogs with adequate training should not be a threat to nontargeted species"
- regular surveillance "staff on ground or volunteers regularly checking traps",
   "check at minimum every 2 days if not daily when using traps or barrier fences"
- reducing non-target impacts "volunteer team to ensure non targeted animals are found and cared for appropriately", "I'm concerned that the most likely non-target victims will be the numerous Quolls ... I hope that special attention to this species will reduce the risk to them", "I worry about poison and spotlighting for obvious reasons - danger to others"
- humaneness "definitely in favour of the humane culling of feral cats", "suggest you combine trained sniffer dogs with trained and skilled shooters - the dogs should be able to track down kittens so they can be humanely despatched"

#### Acknowledgement of responsible pet owners and protection of pet cats

- "it seems to date that the focus on control is all cats and not just feral cats. It is frustrating that being a legitimate and responsible cat owner, we are being targeted for control"
- "feral cats real problem but must equally protect domestic cats as pets"

One respondent was very opposed to baiting "I am opposed to baits because other predators may eat them or eat the dead cat; quolls, eagles, hawks, etc... Arguments about amount needed to kill being too great for other predators to be harmed assumes only a binary outcome; death or no death, and ignores other potential cumulative harms from ingested poison to the non-target animal ... I find no comfort in their (AVPMA) assurances. I won't be able to support the program at all if baits are on the table.

## Bruny Island Domestic Cat By-laws

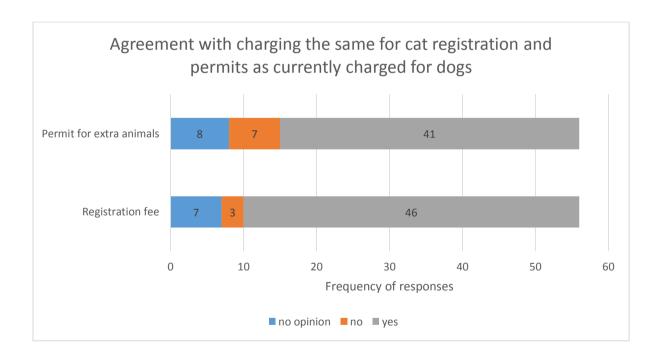
#### Registration and Permit fees

Respondents were asked if the cat registration fee should be the same as for a pet dog (i.e. \$31/year/cat).

- 82% agreed this was appropriate
- 3 people (all cat-owners) disagreed alternate suggestions were \$25 and free
- 7 people had no opinion (all did not own cats)

Respondents were asked if the fee for a permit to own more than 2 cats should be the same as for extra pet dogs (i.e. initial \$89 application fee and \$62/cat for annual renewal).

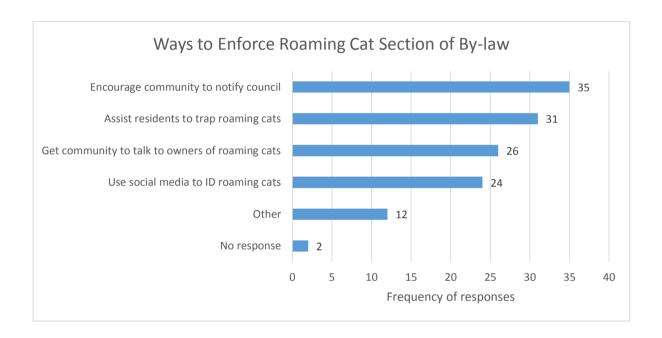
- 73% agreed this was appropriate
- 7 people disagreed with cat owners more likely to say it was too high, and 1 non owner saying it should be higher.
- 8 people had no opinion



#### Preventing pet cats from roaming

Respondents were asked how they thought Council could enforce owners of domestic cats to keep their cats within their property boundaries.

- 63% supported encouraging the community to report roaming cats to the Council
- 55% supported Council assisting them to trap cats that were roaming on their properties
- 46% supported encouraging residents in the first instance, to talk to cat owners who let their cats roam
- 43% supported using social media to help identify if a roaming cat was an owned cat



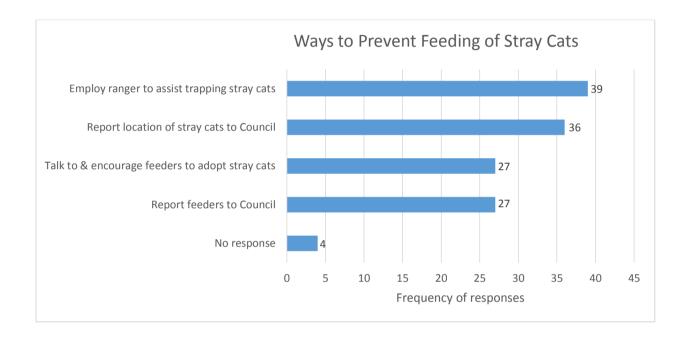
#### Other methods included:

- Encouraging cat owners to install caged cat-runs and / or keep their cats indoors
- Engage with cat owners and education of responsible cat ownership
- Permitting all stray cats to be shot on site

#### Preventing the feeding of stray cats

Respondents were asked how they thought Council could best enforce the section of the By-Law that prevented people feeding stray cats.

- 70% supported employing a community Ranger to assist with trapping stray cats
- 64% supported residents reporting stray cat locations to Council
- 48% supported encouraging residents to talk to people feeding stray cats to convince them to adopt the cat as a pet
- 48% supported residents reporting people who feed stray cats to Council



No other methods were suggested.

#### Willingness to assist with compliance issues

#### Respondents were asked their willingness to be involved in:

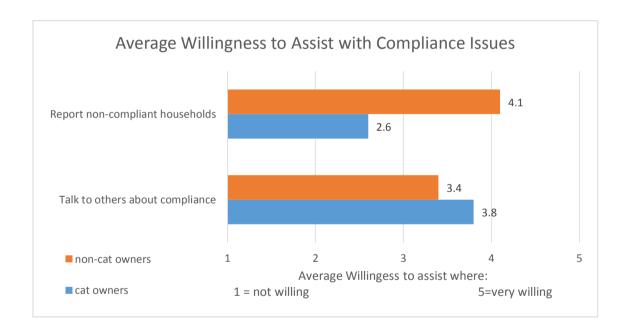
- Talking to others about the importance of compliance with the By-law
- Reporting non-compliant households to Council

On average respondents were somewhat willing to assist with these compliance issues.

38% of respondents were willing to talk to others about compliance (average rating 3.5 on a scale where 1=not willing and 5=willing), and 43% were willing to report non-compliant households (average rating 3.8).

Cat owners tended to be more willing to talk to others about compliance than non-cat owners although this was not statistically significant.

On the other hand, non-cat owners were significantly more willing to report non-compliant households to Council than cat owners.



#### Managing adverse effects

Respondents were asked if they could see any adverse effects of the proposed By-law, and if so, how might these be managed.

Responses feel into five broad categories:

#### • The perceived effectiveness of the By-law

 "they are so soft, being designed not to offend cat owners, that their effect will be limited"

#### Need for education about the By-law and why it has been implemented

- "misinformed objections continuous public messages re By-law and rationale behind it"
- o "divisiveness within the community by those not informed about the By-law"
- "just a money making exercise is how it will be seen. There has been insufficient communication on the costs for cat owners"
- o "question of re-educating people about cats, and problems"
- "All the naysayers who don't realise that the risk to native wildlife is just too great to ignore"
- There was some uncertainty about the purpose of registration highlighting the need for more education and consultation:
  - "I'm unsure about what actual the purpose of the registration cost is. Is it to pay for cat control? Is it for owner identification - if so, this is already done through microchipping"
- o "I also wonder what the situation would be if my cat is registered in another Council area; do I have to pay two registrations?"

#### The problems compliance may cause some cat owners

- "divisive and creates stress for cat owners"
- "excessive fees will cause hardship to pensioners. Give pensioners help to build cat runs e.g. reduced rates, community working bees to help build cat runs for those who can't manage it for themselves"
- "it worries me that un-microchipped domestic cats could be mistaken for feral or ownerless cats. You might consider some highly discounted microchipping for those on a low income"
- "organise community cat desexing days with a vet off-island with reduced price of transport cats and owners to vet via a community bus or even cats without their owners and a volunteer to accompany the cats of people who can't go themselves"
- "cost of registration could be prohibitive for many and making it too expensive will encourage people not to register their cats"
- "increased costs to responsible cat owners"

#### How the By-law will be implemented and the 'fairness' of penalties

- o "requires effective policing using local ranger whose job it is to police the by-law for the first few years is probably the best option. Once feral/stray cat free status is the norm, this pressure may drop"
- "I would be happy if common sense prevailed and our registered, microchipped, desexed cat was not harmed for straying 10m beyond our unfenced property boundary but happy to be destroyed if within the Bruny Island Neck Reserve or similar"
- o "it worries me that un-microchipped domestic cats could be mistaken for feral or ownerless cats. Also a three-strike system for cats found out after curfew. On the third strike you receive a fine"
- o "responsible cat owners will comply, those who don't give a rats will continue as before. Should not penalise people who act properly, Some people will defy a law that they believe unjust"
- "the By-laws will apply for land owner shackies but who takes responsibility for short term renters who bring cats?"

#### • The 'social norm' repercussions of the By-law

o "cat haters might take it upon themselves to take matters into their own hands -as they might feel that they're doing the right thing by the law"

#### Other community initiatives for Bruny Cat By-law

Respondents were asked if there were any other community initiatives that Council could consider in regards to the Bruny Cat By-law.

#### **Suggestions included:**

#### Offering incentives / dis-incentives

- "annual rates reduction for ratepayers who build a cat/dog run, register and de-sex their cats/dogs and microchip their animals"
- o "provide cat traps at cost price"
- "continue providing traps to rural landowners to trap cats"
- "assisted building of cat containment areas", "run a workshop where Bruny cat owners can construct their own cat runs and Council funds the materials and tutor/s? Could be run through the Bruny Men's Shed"
- "finding more help to build enclosures for domestic cats, funding, cheap or free vaccinations on island, pensioner discounts"
- "rewards for handing in dead cats"
- "council impose hefty fines for wrong-doers"

#### Being seen to be active

- A visible presence
- Signage to advise visitors of special cat controls on the island and how to report sightings of feral/strays
- The ranger needs to be trained & equipped to work out which cats are feral and put these ones down in situ

#### Making it easier to report

o "a feral cat hotline"

#### Opportunities for community engagement / feedback

- o "community education, maybe a series of talks/lectures"
- "consider that not all persons use social media, other methods of communication should be used"
- "continual education and public information (media, social media, etc) about the benefits and success stories of reducing feral cat numbers"
- "raising community awareness is vital and neighbours should talk to neighbours, but people should not be encouraged to "dob-in" others - not the behaviour of a good and caring neighbour"
- "report back on how many feral cats killed per quarter. Communicate impact of toxoplasmosis on native wildlife including white wallaby"
- o "maybe the negative anti-cat message is sounding a bit shrill, and the positive prowildlife side of it is not being heard?"
- "provide information on how to target trap cats"
- "annual cat shooting competition to coincide with the ornithology event"
- o "popularise a cat sighting database"
- "provide information on the ecological impact of cats"
- "tourist information and information for anyone bringing their pet cats on the island"
- o "use the slow drip, constant mentions through all media"

#### Novel control methods

- o "baits with birth control medication in them for stray and feral cats"
- "pheromone spraying of male cat scents around known protected species habitats so that roving male feral cats will think that that territory is already occupied by another male"

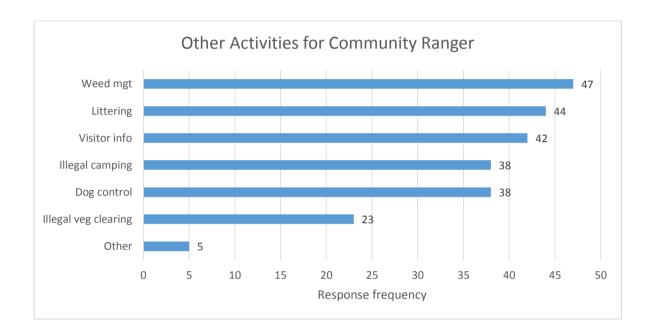
#### Other funding opportunities

Add \$5 to the proposed tourist levee to fund eradication

## Community Ranger

Besides assisting with compliance issues around the Bruny Cat By-law, respondents were asked what other responsibilities this person might help address on the island.

84% of respondents suggested the Community Ranger could assist with weed management issues, 79% suggested littering issues, 75% visitor information, 68% illegal camping and dog management issues.

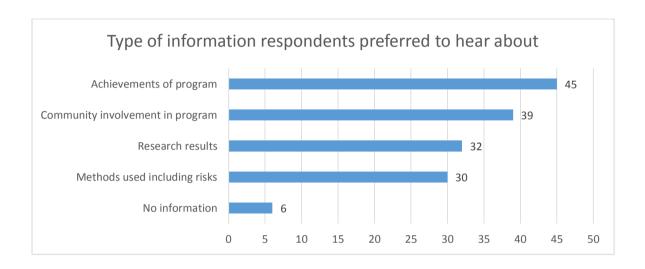


Other suggested issues were centred around the Neck and included keeping the penguin culverts clear, delivering environmental education about shearwaters, penguins and traditional owners, and ensuring tourists' behaviour appropriately (i.e. use red filter torches, staying on the paths, not interfering with penguin progress to their nests).

## Keeping the Community Informed

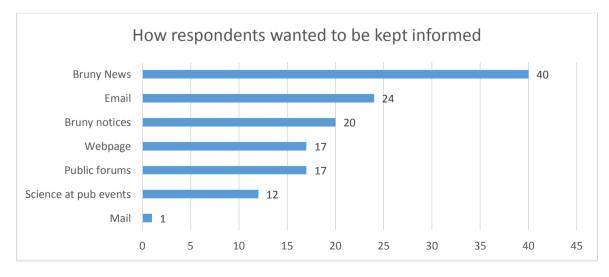
Respondents were asked what type of information, if any, would they like to hear about with respect to the cat management program.

The majority of people (80%) wanted to hear about the program's achievements, followed by how the community has been involved in the program (70%). Just over half of respondents wanted to hear about research results, as well as about methods that were being used. Six respondents did not want to hear about the program ("heard enough").



# Respondents were also asked how they would you like to be kept updated about the Bruny cat management program.

The Bruny News was the most popular source of information (71%), followed by Email (43%) and Bruny Notices on Facebook (36%). Other methods included webpage, public forums and 'Science at the pub' type events.

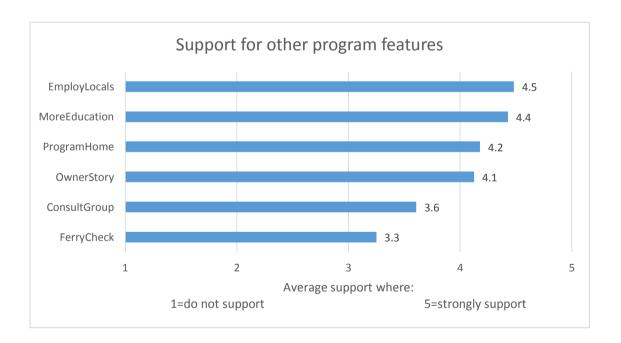


## Other Program Features

#### Respondents were asked about their support for some other suggested program features:

- Develop a community-based consultative group
- Employment of Bruny Island residents wherever possible
- Conduct further education activities about cats
- Establishing a permanent location on the island where people can find out about the program
- Spot checks for cats on the ferry
- Documenting cat owners' success stories in keeping their pets on their property to share with other owners

The two features with strong support were the employing local residents where possible and conducting more education about cats. Giving the program a permanent home on the island and documenting successful owner's stories were also supported by the respondents. There was less support for the establishment of a consultative group and spot checks on the ferry.



27 of the respondents were interested in being further involved in the Bruny cat management program and provided their contact details.

## Program Name

#### Respondents were asked if they had any suggestions for a Program name.

#### Suggestions included:

BI-Cat

Bruny - wildlife haven

Bruny Island cat catchers (BICC)

Bruny Island Cat Control

Bruny Island Environment Restoration

The Bruny Island Wildlife Sanctuary Project.

Cat free Bruny

Cat Free Island

Cats Matter on Bruny

Catsafe Bruny

CCCC or 4C's - chip, change and contain cats

Feral Cat Eradication - Number this week destroyed.

Feral cat free Bruny

Keep Your Cats at Home

Kittykat Chat (column in Bruny News)

Our Environment/Cat Management

Protect our birdlife

Responsible Ownership of domestic animals RODA

Our Wildlife Welfare

## **Future Recommendations**

A well-planned engagement strategy will build long term community support and ownership of the Bruny Island Cat Management Program. The community needs to be given the opportunity to be involved, and their attitudes and barriers towards the two major components of cat management on the island, i.e. responsible companion cat ownership and control of stray and feral cat populations, need to be understood and integrated so that a sound cat management plan can be developed.

#### Bruny Island Domestic Cat By-laws

The work that has been conducted to date has done much to understand and address local cat owner issues around responsible cat ownership and the introduction of the Bruny Island Domestic Cat By-laws. However our results have confirmed that more promotion and education is required, particularly around the registration of cats and the proposed fees for additional cats in a household. Council will also need to consider how they are going to implement the By-laws, and how, if any, ongoing assistance will be offered to cat owners for compliance. These decisions will also need to be communicated to the community as at present there is still some confusion and misunderstandings of cat owner obligations.

#### The initially recommended activities:

- extending the advisory and design/building assistance to individual households (with cats) requiring assistance
- developing and distributing a cat containment guide
- documenting new cat containment stories (& where appropriate video)
- printing and distributing the responsible pet stickers and magnets developed by the Bruny school students,

#### should be supplemented with:

- continued communication of the By-laws using concise messaging and other persuasive communication techniques to improve awareness and dispel misinformation
- continued one-on-one consultation with cat owners where required
- framing the community ranger's role as that of someone to assist and support, rather than enforce compliance
- promotion of the Alonnah facility and any vet services that will be offered in the future
- the waivering (or reduction) of proposed registration and permit fees to encourage all cat owners to register, along with further education about the necessity of registration
- the promotion of responsible cat owners 'good news' stories to reduce their feelings of alienation.

#### Feral cat management

This research highlighted that there needs to be more education about intended feral cat control methods before they are introduced on the island. In particular information around how these methods will be used, along with how any risks to non-targets and cat welfare will be mitigated. This will be particularly important for the less supported methods - baiting, leg-hold traps, detector dogs and fences, and should include information and feedback from other similar programs and results from any research.

Residents seem keen to report cat sightings (feral, stray or roaming pets) to Council. If Council wants to take advantage of this, they will need to develop a system of reporting that is easy to access (e.g. a dedicated phone number or an online form or app), as well as have a process in place to deal with each report, along with some form of feedback to the reporter so the motivation to report remains high.

Support for an annual contribution by the community to assist fund the project, similar to that paid in other States by landholders to fund key feral pest management programs, was divided. The council will need to consult further with the community before proposing any such contribution in the future.

Engagement ideas for the community that were supported include:

- setting up a permanent location on the island where the residents can interact with the project e.g. office space where information can be displayed and people have a chance to directly interact with ranger / a local staff member
- employment of locals where possible
- chances to be involved in citizen science programs including wildlife monitoring projects so residents can feel part of the project, and their contributions valued
- having the option of using Council supplied traps to trap cats on their own property or giving permission for someone else to conduct the trapping
- providing regular communications about the achievements of the project across a range of communication channels e.g. in the local media (Bruny News), on the Council website or social media (Bruny newsletter, emails)
- running a series of talks / lectures at local community venues
- promoting the program to island visitors, especially the benefits to wildlife and their obligations using appropriate signage.

Ideas that had less support but could be an option in the future included:

- the development of a community based consultative group
- spot checks on the ferry

There was some support for moving away from the anti-cat message towards a more positive wildlife / happy pets framing. This could be reflected in the project's communication messages and the program's name. Marketing style methods could be used to further refine these messages and name to ensure they will gain maximum traction within the community.