



# Media Release

21 September 2020

## **Cockburn joins five south metro LGs to help pet cats stay safe and happy at home**

Keeping cats happy at home extends their average life expectancy from just three years to between 12 and 18 years, while helping preserve the 46 per cent of Australia's threatened fauna that live in our cities and towns.

The City of Cockburn is one of six neighbouring local governments in the southern Perth metropolitan region to launch Happy at Home this month, an education program for cat owners keen to keep their feline friends and native fauna safe from harm.

The South West Group (SWG), in partnership with the six local governments and Murdoch University, obtained grant funding from the State Government's Natural Resource Management Program. The funding was used to explore how pet cats and native animals benefit when owners keep their cats on their properties.

SWG Regional Natural Resource Management Facilitator Peter Nash said recent advances in GPS tracking technology had allowed cat owners to track the movement patterns of their cats, a real eye-opener for many cat owners.

"Recent cat tracking research undertaken by the University of South Australia found that many cat owners were unaware how far and how frequently their pet cats roam, and the many hazards their beloved pets face when they roam," Mr Nash said.

"One interesting finding of this research which tracked more than 900 cats nationally, was that of the 177 cats that were classified by their owners as being kept inside at night, 39 per cent of these were found to have actually roamed over more than a hectare during the night."

Murdoch University Professor Michael Calver said cats killed millions of native animals each year, and while the problem in remote areas was caused by feral cats, free-roaming domestic and semi-owned stray cats were the cause in cities and towns.

He co-authored a recent review that found free-roaming pet cats can kill on average up to 186 mammals, birds and reptiles a year.



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“There are some very big benefits to domestic cat health and survival when they are kept safely contained at home,” Prof Calver said.

Veterinarian Claire Sharp from Murdoch University’s Animal Hospital said the greatest risks to roaming cats were traumatic injury or death from motor vehicle accidents, and fights with dogs or other cats which could cause deadly feline immunodeficiency diseases and injuries from misadventure.

Dr Sharp said vet fees to successfully treat injured cats were often high and only a third of Australian cat owners had pet insurance.

Cats can also pass on deadly diseases, like toxoplasmosis, to the native animal population.

Native ARC Manager Dean Huxley said a significant percentage of native fauna treated at Native ARC’s Bibra Lake wildlife hospital had been attacked by cats and only about 40 per cent survived to successful release.

Cats can be contained safely and cheaply to their own properties by creating cat enclosures called ‘catios’, or by using lightweight mesh or fence-top rollers. These also keep other cats out, reducing the risk of fights and associated injuries.

The six local governments partnering in the Happy at Home campaign believe it is important for cat owners to take greater responsibility for the safety and behaviour of their pets, especially with significant natural assets in the south metropolitan region.

This includes the Beeliar, Jandakot and Woodman Point regional parks, the Swan and Canning Rivers and numerous conservation and nature reserves inhabited by native fauna, a significant percentage of which is classified as endangered.

The Happy at Home campaign has produced a range of educational videos tailored for residents in the Cities of Canning, Cockburn, Fremantle, Kwinana, Melville, and the Town of East Fremantle.

Find out more about how you can help preserve Australia’s native animals and keep your feline companion Happy at Home here: [southwestgroup.com.au/happyathome](https://southwestgroup.com.au/happyathome)



[cockburn.wa.gov.au](http://cockburn.wa.gov.au)

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For more information contact:  
Media and Communications Officer  
City of Cockburn  
T: 08 9411 3551  
E: [media@cockburn.wa.gov.au](mailto:media@cockburn.wa.gov.au)