

**ACT Environment, Planning and Sustainable  
Development Directorate**

# **2019 Cat Management Survey**

**FINAL 2 September 2019**

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## Executive Summary

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate conducted an online survey from 6 April to 3 July 2019 to gauge community sentiment on cat management in the ACT.

- ◆ The survey used an opt-in process, rather than a random sample, which resulted in cat owners being overrepresented in the results. To account for this, analysis of the survey results was conducted separately amongst cat owners and non-owners.

The survey found that there are a number of semi-owned, unowned and roaming cats across the ACT, more noticeable by non-owners of cats (46%) than cat owners (25%). The research also suggests that there is a slight positive impact in reducing these figures within existing cat containment suburbs, reducing from 47% in other suburbs to 40% in cat containment suburbs for non-owners, with cat owners noticing less of a difference (22% in cat containment suburbs and 25% in other suburbs).

- ◆ These differences could potentially be explained by cats roaming from other suburbs into cat containment suburbs, considering that 42% of owners in other suburbs give at least one of their cats some sort of unsupervised freedom, compared to only 3% in cat containment suburbs (although during the day only).

The survey canvassed levels of support for five possible cat management measures:

- ◆ cat registration/identification;
- ◆ financial assistance for low-income cat owners (for instance, to de-sex their cat);
- ◆ cat containment;
- ◆ more domestic animal enforcement officers; and
- ◆ more fines and penalties.

The proposed cat management measures are broadly supported by both cat owners and non-owners (although generally more strongly amongst non-owners). Cat containment was arguably the most *divisive* measure canvassed by the survey, with very strong levels of support among non-owners (90%) and considerably more muted support among cat owners (51%, with 35% opposed to this proposed measure). However, these figures show cat containment attracted on-balance support even amongst cat owners.

Respondents were presented with three possible approaches to expanding mandatory cat containment in the ACT from the seventeen suburbs where it is currently in place:

- ◆ **Phasing-in approach** – gradually add additional identified suburbs over time
- ◆ **Grandfathered approach** – only new cats adopted/purchased after an established date will have to be contained (unless they live in an existing cat containment area)
- ◆ **Blanket approach** – declare all remaining suburbs cat containment areas at the one time at a set future date

In terms of public support, the survey results suggest considerations in favour of each of these proposals.

- ◆ Despite low support among cat owners (17%), the **blanket approach** received the strongest level of support among non-owners (63%), and therefore, given the relative proportions of owners and non-owners, is likely to have strongest support across the ACT population as a whole.

- ◆ Amongst cat owners, who are likely to be most affected by the approach chosen, a **grandfathered approach** received the strongest level of support (48%, compared to 13% among non-owners). This is also the approach most likely to be seen as reasonable by cat owners who are opposed to a containment policy altogether (69% of such respondents favoured a grandfathered approach over its two alternatives).
- ◆ The **phasing-in** approach was the second most preferred option amongst both owners (35%) and non-owners (24%), making it a possible compromise option between the competing preferences of owners and non-owners.

The survey found considerable difference in opinion between cat owners and non-owners as to the most reasonable timeframe in which to roll out cat containment to all ACT suburbs. However, the majority of both cat owners (56%) and non-owners (91%) would consider a timeframe of ten years to be a sufficiently extended timeframe.

# I. Background and respondent profiles

## A. Background and methodology

The Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate is exploring options for cat management in the ACT. As one of several components of community engagement, the Directorate designed and promoted an online survey of the ACT community, to gauge community sentiment on cat management, among both cat owners and non-owners.

The survey was conducted online from 6 April to 3 July 2019, accessible through the ACT Government's YourSay page.

The survey attracted a total of 4,087 survey respondents. For the purposes of this report a total of 203 non-ACT residents have been removed (leaving a sample of n=3,884).

As the survey adopted an inclusive methodology, rather than a strict random sample, some caution needs to be exercised in extrapolating results to the broader ACT community.

This report also draws on some findings from other ACT Government research—in particular:

- ◆ the Community Views Survey (conducted by ORIMA Research in March 2019); and
- ◆ the 2019 Pet Census (conducted by Micromex Research in May-June 2019).

Analysis and reporting was conducted by ORIMA Research, in accordance with the international quality standard ISO 20252.

## B. Presentation of results

Percentages in this report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the particular question being reported on. In most cases, results reflect those respondents who expressed a view and for whom the questions were applicable. 'Prefer not to say' responses have been excluded from the demographic profile (although respondents who declined to provide demographic responses have still been included in the overall results). Percentage results throughout the report may not add up to 100% (particularly when displayed in chart form) due to rounding or where respondents were able to select more than one response.

For some questions, respondents were asked to explain the reasons behind their practices (e.g. their reasons for containing their cat, not containing their cat, or feeding stray cats). These questions presented respondents with a pre-coded list, but also allowed for respondents to select 'Other' and offer a different reason. In some cases, these 'Other' responses have been coded into a new category and have been included in reporting. Where this has been done, the new category is marked with square brackets. Note that these categories may have been selected by more respondents had they been explicitly offered.

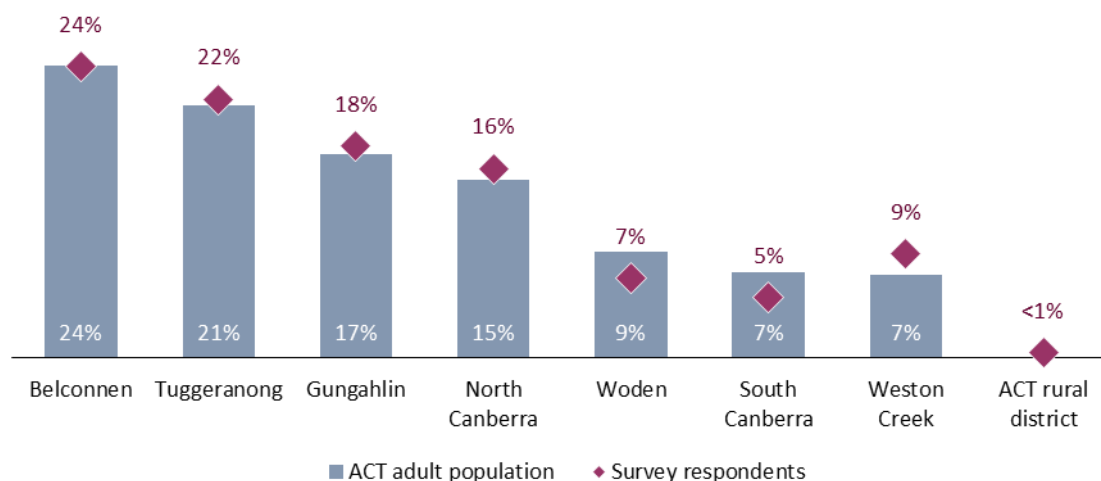
## C. Respondent profile

Representation of respondents by region was closely similar to the population (see Figure 1) with the majority of respondents from Belconnen (24%), Tuggeranong (22%) or Gungahlin (18%).

The age profile of respondents was broadly similar to the ACT population (see Figure 2), with some slight under-representation of the youngest and oldest age groups.

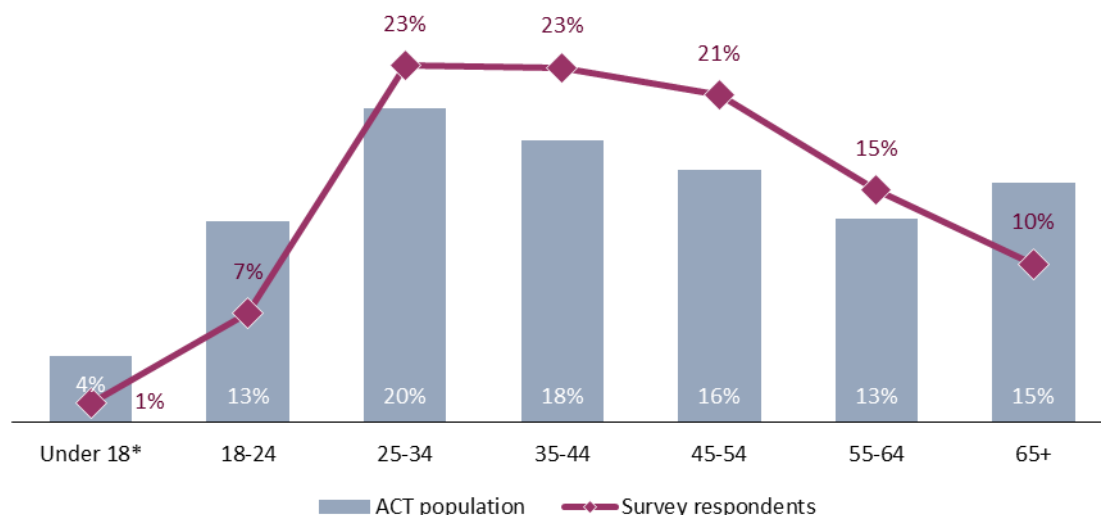
**Figure 1: ACT districts**

Survey respondents compared to ACT adult population (ABS 2016 Census data)



**Figure 2: Age groups**

Survey respondents compared to ACT population (ABS 2016 Census data)



\* The 'under 18' segment of survey respondents is compared with the 15-17 age group from Census data.

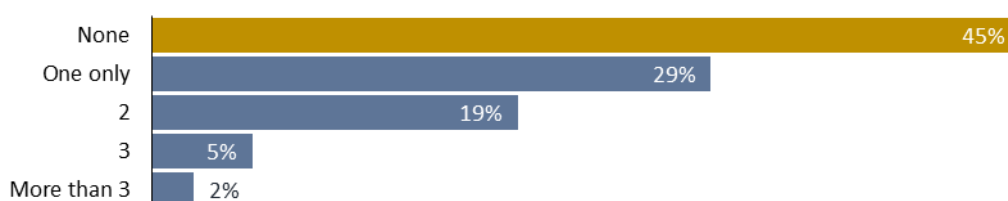
The survey sample was broadly similar to the ACT population in terms of home ownership (72% of respondents owned their home, compared to 65% across the ACT<sup>1</sup>—the slight difference being attributable to the relative mix of age groups in the sample).

The largest demographic difference between the sample and the ACT population was the gender mix, with females heavily overrepresented (71% of the sample, compared to 51% of the ACT population, according to 2016 ABS census data). However, this is likely to have minimal impact on overall results, given the similar demographic profiles, rates of cat ownership, and attitudinal results of males and females surveyed.

As shown in Figure 3, around half of respondents (55%) were cat owners; and of these cat owners, around half (48% of cat owners, or 26% of all respondents) owned more than one cat.

**Figure 3: Number of cats owned**

Base: all respondents (n=3,884)



The level of cat ownership among survey respondents is 2-3 times higher than more realistic estimates of cat ownership rates—for instance, the ACT Government’s March 2019 Community Views survey, which found 24% of households owned a cat; or the ACT 2019 Pet Census, which found a cat ownership rate of 16%.<sup>2</sup> Due to the differences in cat ownership levels between this survey and the Community View Survey, the rest of this report will provide results for cat owners and non-cat owners separately.

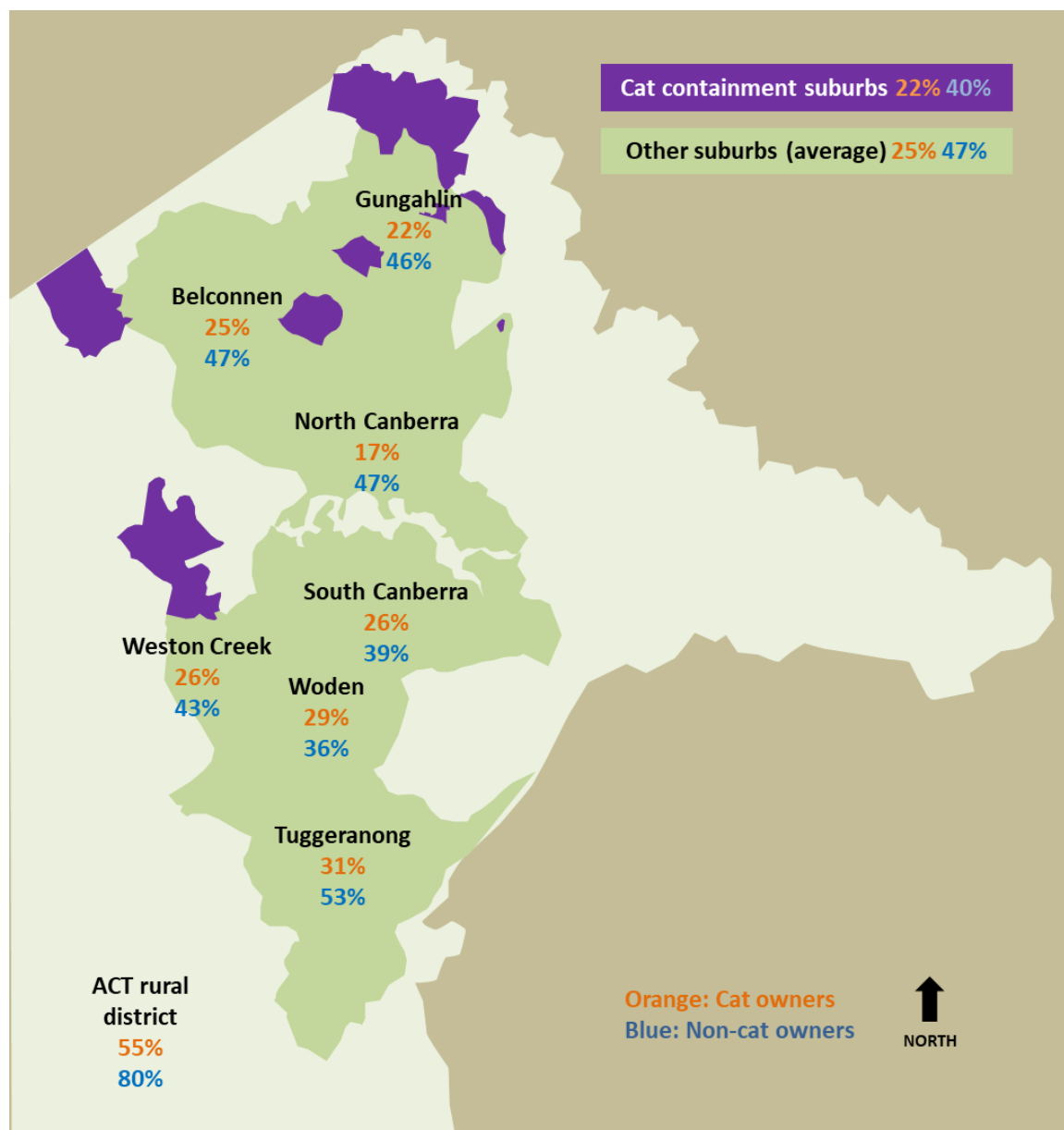
<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics: *Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2017-18*

<sup>2</sup> There may also be over-representation, among cat owners, of those who own more than one cat (52% of cat owners in the Cat Management Survey, compared to 32% in the ACT Pet Census).

## II. Semi-owned, unowned and roaming cats

One quarter of cat owners (25%), and nearly half of non-owners (46%) indicated they were aware of semi-owned, unowned and roaming cats in their suburb. Across the broad regions of the ACT (as shown in Figure 4), the reported incidence of unowned/semi-owned cats was highest in Tuggeranong (31% by cat owners, 53% by non-owners).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 4: Incidence of semi-owned or unowned cats across the ACT



<sup>3</sup> Incidence of unowned cats was highest among respondents indicating they lived in an 'ACT rural district' (55% for owners, 80% for non-owners). However, these figures should be treated with caution due to low respondent numbers (n=11 and n=5 respectively). For the rest of the report, this group will not be included in district-level comparisons.

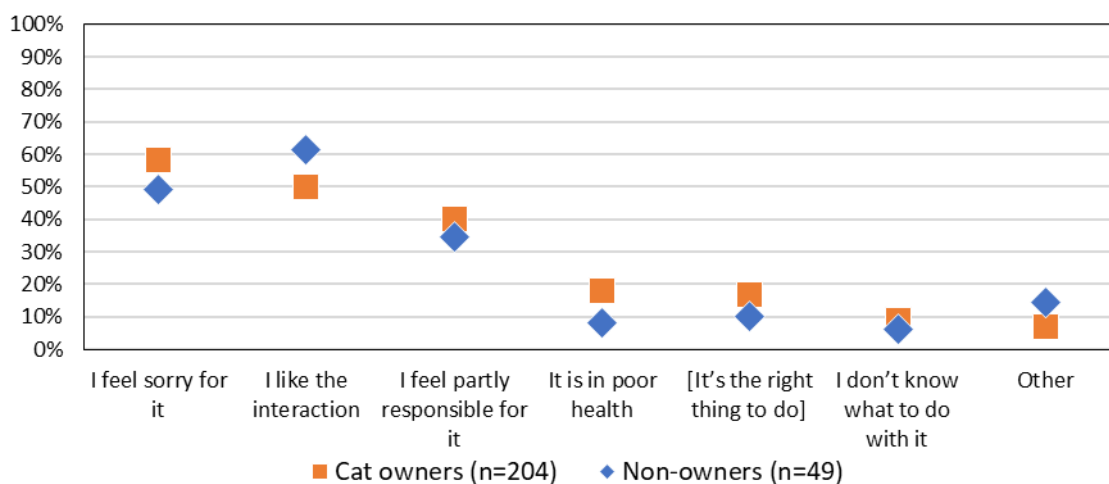


Cat owners were more likely to indicate they fed or cared for one or more of these stray cats (10%, compared to 3% of non-owners); and owners are more likely to do so the more cats they already own (7% of single-cat owners feed strays, compared to 18% of those who own three or more cats).

As shown in Figure 5, the most common reasons cited for feeding stray cats are:

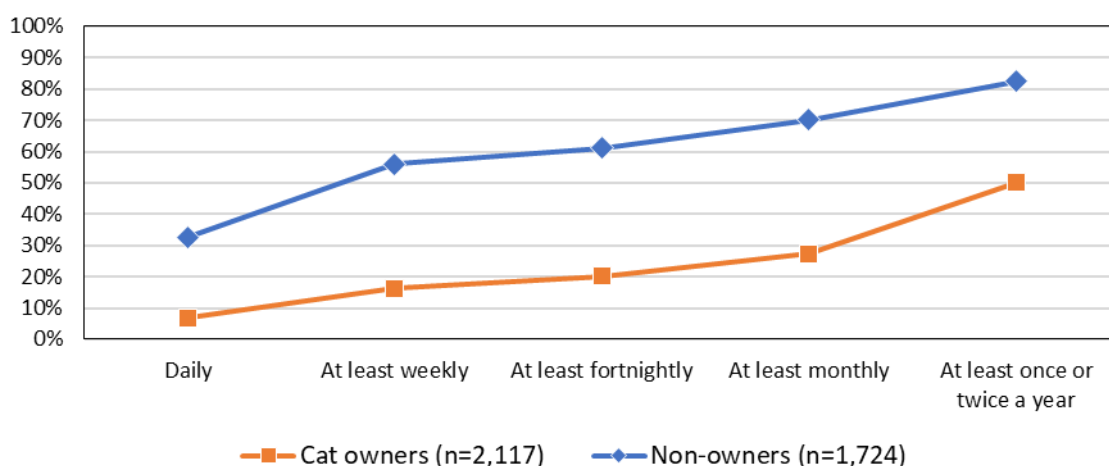
- ◆ feeling sorry for the cat—more common among owners (58%) than non-owners (49%); and
- ◆ enjoying the interaction—more common among non-owners (61%) than owners (50%).

**Figure 5: Reasons for feeding a cat you do not own**



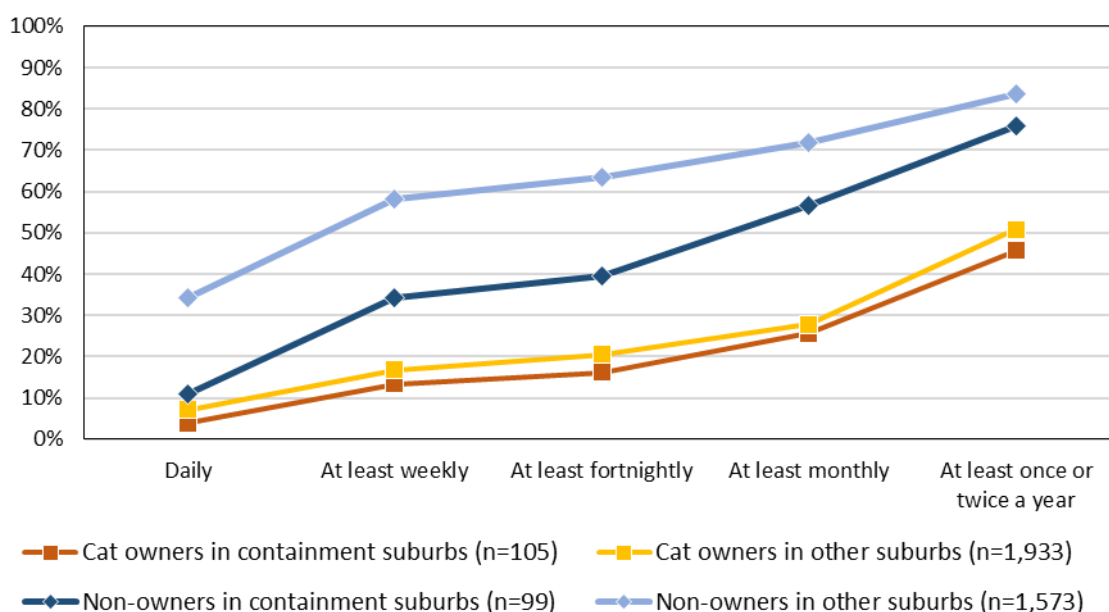
The majority of respondents indicated that roaming cats are at least sometimes a nuisance to them, although this perception varied considerably between owners and non-owners (see Figure 6 on the following page). Non-owners were over four times more likely as cat owners to perceive roaming cats as a *daily* nuisance (33%, compared to 7% for cat owners), and around six in seven non-owners felt roaming cats were a nuisance at least once or twice a year (82%, compared to 50% of cat owners).

- ◆ The reported incidence of nuisance roaming cats was highest in Tuggeranong, among both cat owners (57% indicated at least some nuisance) and non-owners (89% indicated at least some nuisance, with 44% indicating a *daily* nuisance).
- ◆ Among both owners and non-owners, the central districts (North and South Canberra) and Woden were seen as having either a lower incidence, or a less severe frequency, of nuisance roaming cats.
- ◆ In general, perceptions of cat owners were more similar across regions than those of non-owners.

**Figure 6: Perceived frequency of nuisance cats**

Nuisance roaming cats were less frequently experienced in cat containment suburbs, as shown in Figure 7. However, even in these suburbs, roaming cats were experienced as a nuisance at least once or twice a year by around three quarters of non-owners (76%), and just under half (46%) of owners.

As shown in Figure 7, the difference between cat containment suburbs and other suburbs was more apparent to non-owners than to owners. For instance, similar (and low) proportions of cat owners reported that roaming cats presented a *daily* nuisance, whether they lived in cat containment suburbs (4%) or other suburbs (7%); but among cat owners, the difference was much greater (11% in cat containment suburbs, compared to 34% in other suburbs).

**Figure 7: Frequency of nuisance cats (cat containment and other suburbs compared)**

### III. Cat management and containment

#### A. Current practices

The majority of cat owners (58%) indicated that they keep their cat either contained, restrained or supervised at all times (as shown in Figure 8). This includes 44% of owners who keep their cat physically contained (within their house, a cat run or a containment fence), and an additional 14% who allow their cat outdoors but only under supervision, or on a lead.

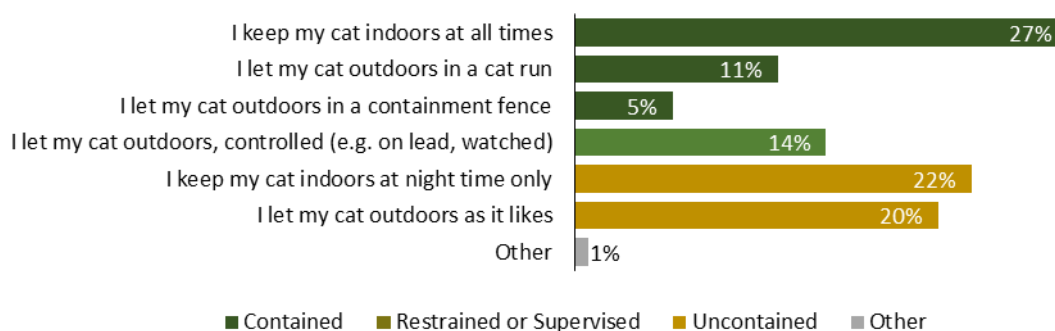
- ◆ This finding is in line with the 2019 ACT Pet Census, which found 56% of cats in the ACT are confined.

The remaining 42% of owners give at least one of their cats some sort of unsupervised freedom, including 20% who let their cat outdoors whenever it wishes.<sup>4</sup>

- ◆ Within containment suburbs, 97% of owners keep their cats contained, restrained or supervised at all times (compared to 56% in other suburbs). Of the remaining 3%, most indicated they keep their cats inside at night-time only.
- ◆ Owners with more cats are slightly more likely to ensure they are either contained, restrained or supervised at all times (increasing from 56% for one cat, to 64% for three or more), and are much more likely to invest in a physical structure to do so (11% of people with one cat have a cat run or containment fence, compared to 21% for those with two cats and 30% for those with three or more).

**Figure 8: Current cat containment practices**

Base: Cat owners (n=2,192)

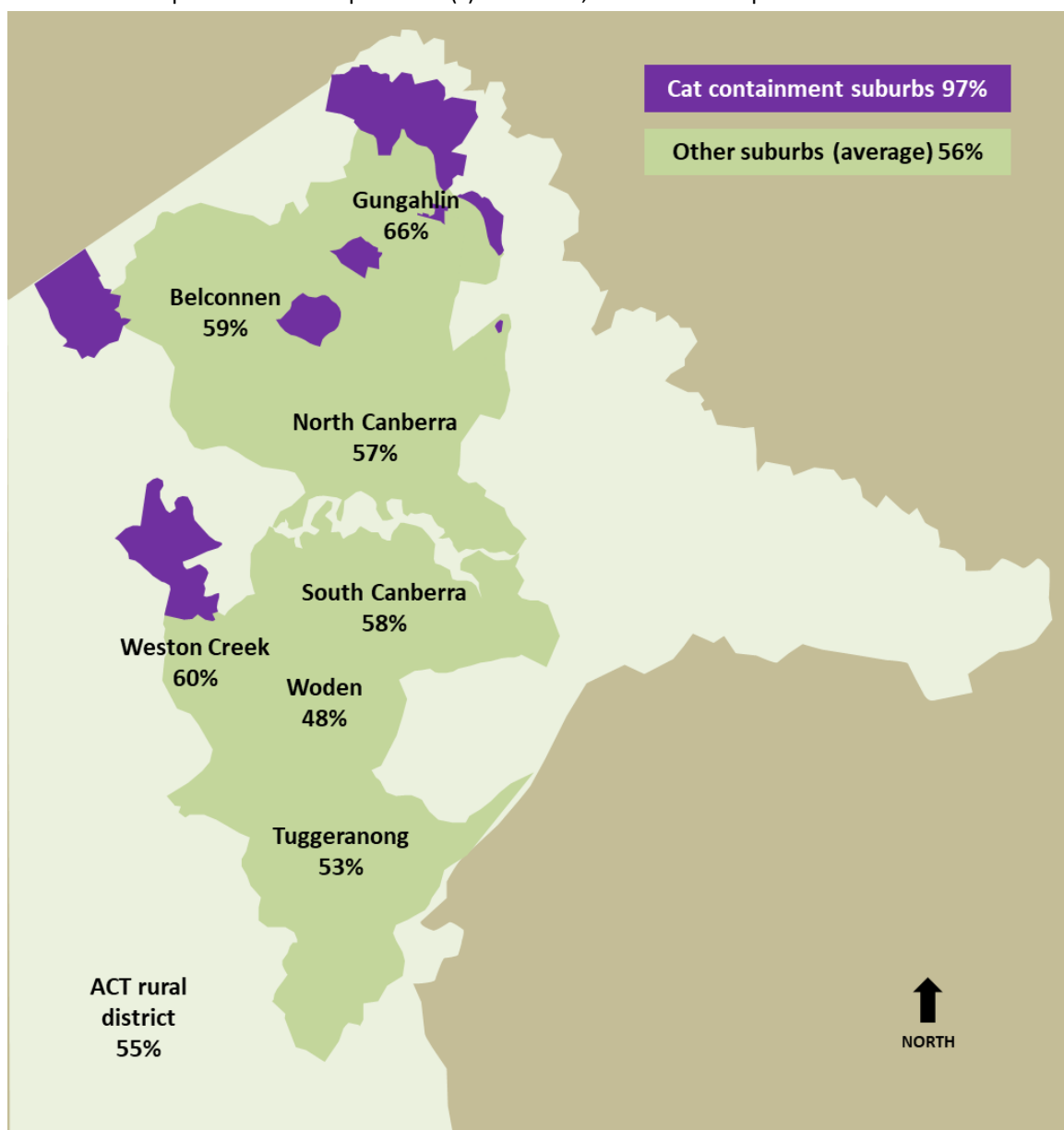


<sup>4</sup> Owners who indicated in their text responses that they had different arrangements for different cats, or for the same cat at different times, were classified under the option that included the highest level of cat freedom—for instance, owners of two cats who let *one* of the cats outside whenever it likes, are classified under 'I let my cat outdoors as it likes'. The 1% of unclassified 'other' responses are from people who give their cat(s) some unsupervised freedom.

Rates of cat containment were highest in Gungahlin (due largely to the concentration of cat containment suburbs there), and lowest in Woden, as shown in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Rates of cat containment across the ACT**

Proportions who keep their cat(s) contained, restrained or supervised at all times



## B. Reasons for containing or not containing cats

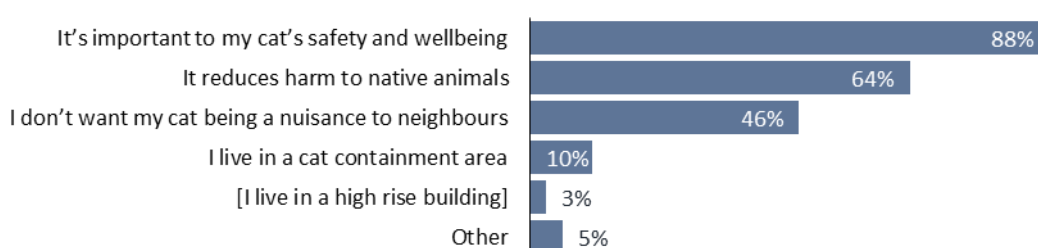
Cat owners' concern for their pet's wellbeing is the predominant reason cited for keeping the cat contained (see Figure 10), and also the predominant reason for *not* keeping the cat contained (see Figure 11, below).

Owners who keep their cat(s) contained mostly cited their concern for either the cat itself (88%), or native animals (64%), and/or neighbours (45%).

- ◆ Within cat containment areas, 93% of owners cited the fact that they lived in such an area as a reason for containing their cat, including 22% who cited this as the *only* reason. Owners in cat containment areas were also a little less likely to cite the 'concern' reasons mentioned above.

**Figure 10: Reasons for containing cats**

Base: cat owners who keep their cats contained (n=1,224); multiple responses allowed

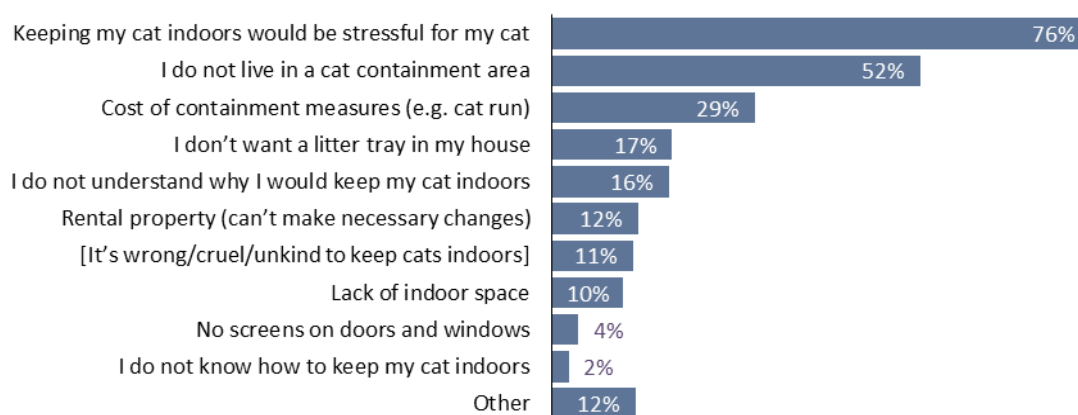


Owners who did *not* contain their cats most commonly did so because they believed this would be stressful for the animal (76%); and related to this, 11% expressed the opinion in their free-text comments that containing cats is cruel or unfair to cats in general.

- ◆ Over half of owners not containing their cats gave 'I do not live in a cat containment area' as a reason (52%), although this was rarely (only 4% of the time) cited as the *only* reason.
- ◆ The next most commonly given substantive reason for not containing cats, after concern for the animal's stress levels, was the cost of containment measures (28%).

**Figure 11: Reasons for not containing cats**

Base: cat owners who give their cats unsupervised freedom some or all of the time (n=905); multiple response allowed



## C. Level of support for cat management measures

The survey canvassed levels of support for five possible cat management measures:

- ◆ cat registration/identification;
- ◆ financial assistance for low-income cat owners (for instance, to de-sex their cat);
- ◆ cat containment;
- ◆ more domestic animal enforcement officers; and
- ◆ more fines and penalties.

As shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13 below, support for these measures was generally stronger among non-owners, and not all measures attracted majority support among cat owners. However, all measures attracted *more support than opposition*, among both cat owners and non-owners.

- ◆ Among non-owners, there was majority support for all five cat management proposals canvassed by the survey.
  - The highest level of support was for cat registration (94% of non-owners—also supported by 73% of owners).<sup>5</sup>
  - The lowest level of support was for ‘financial assistance for low-income cat owners’; however, this still enjoyed solid majority support (67%).
    - By contrast, financial assistance was the *most* strongly supported measure among cat owners (82%).
- ◆ The five measures had variable levels of support amongst cat owners. Within this group, there was:
  - strong majority support for financial assistance for low-income owners (82%) and cat registration (73%);
  - bare majority support for cat containment (51%), which also recorded the highest level of opposition (35%); and
  - only minority support for more domestic animal enforcers (46%), as well as for more fines and penalties (41%).

Figure 12 and Figure 13 also show net balance levels for each of these possible measures. ‘Net balance’ is defined as the level of positive sentiment minus the level of negative sentiment—in this case, support minus opposition. Net balance scores can be negative or positive (from 100 to -100), and any positive score indicates that a measure is more supported than opposed.

All five measures had positive net balance scores, among both cat owners and non-owners.

- ◆ The weakest net balance score overall was for ‘more fines and penalties’ amongst cat owners (41% supported, 35% were opposed—a net balance score of 7).
- ◆ The weakest net balance score amongst non-owners was for more financial assistance for owners (67% supported, 18% were opposed—a net balance score of 49).

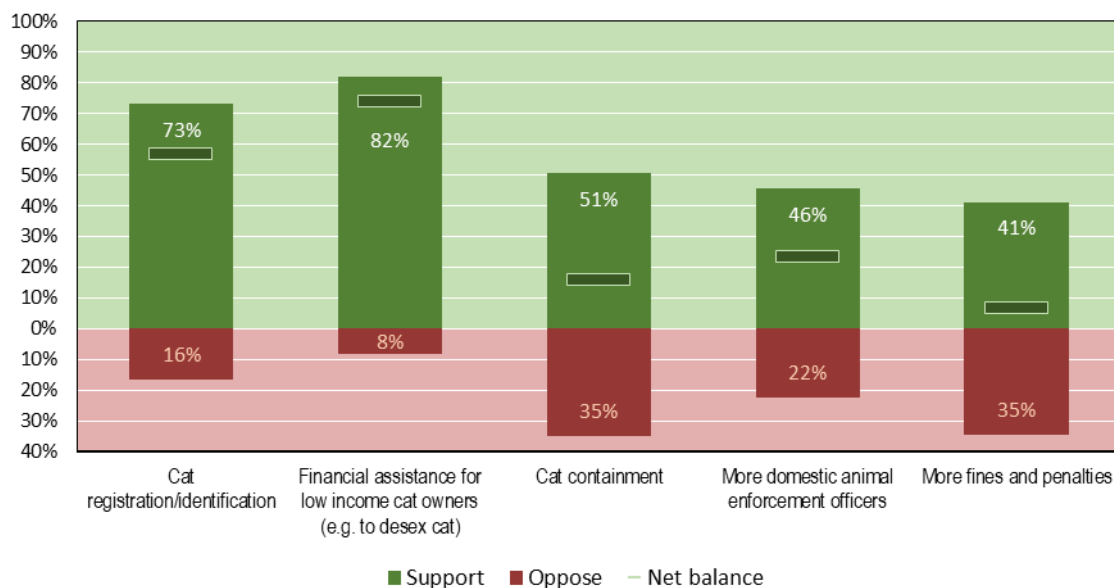
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<sup>5</sup> The ACT Pet Census found lower levels of support for cat registration, but a similar split in opinion between owners and non-owners (64% support among owners, 84% among non-owners).

The most polarising of the measures canvassed by the survey was cat containment, which is discussed in more detail below.

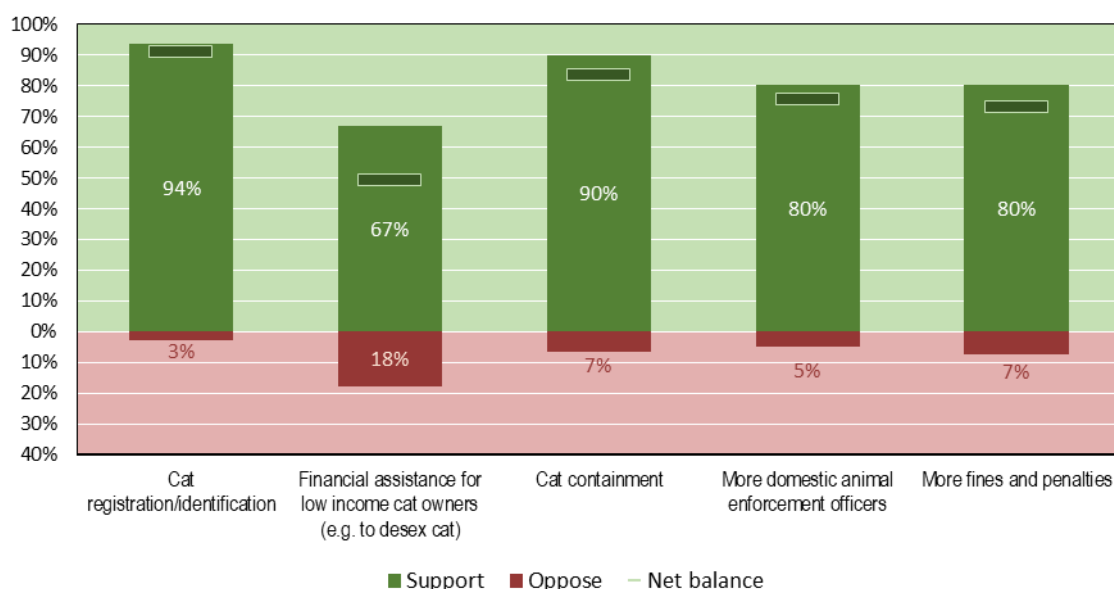
**Figure 12: Support for cat management measures: cat owners**

Base: All cat-owning respondents (n=2,056-2,066). Chart shows the % supporting each measure (green bars), the % opposing (red bars), and the *net balance* (support *minus* opposition; narrow rectangles)



**Figure 13: Support for cat management measures: non-owners**

Base: All non-owner respondents (n=1,678-1,689). Chart shows the % supporting each measure (green bars), the % opposing (red bars), and the *net balance* (support *minus* opposition; narrow rectangles)



## Attitudes to cat containment

### Support

The greatest *difference* in support levels for any measure canvassed by the survey was for cat containment, which was supported by most non-owners (90%) but only a bare majority of cat owners (51%).

- ◆ Cat containment was more strongly supported by cat owners who already live in containment suburbs—76% of these owners indicated support, compared to 50% in other suburbs.
- ◆ *Net balance* support scores for cat containment were lowest among cat owners in Woden (-3), Tuggeranong (8) and South Canberra (10), and highest in Gungahlin (30). With the exception of Tuggeranong, a similar pattern held among non-owners (although at much higher levels of net support).

### Opposition

Just over one third of cat owners (35%) indicated they were opposed to cat containment. In addition, opposition to *blanket* cat containment, across the entire ACT, may be slightly higher among cat owners than this figure indicates. Elsewhere in the survey (and discussed further below), respondents were asked to give a preferred timeframe for rolling out cat containment across the entire ACT, and even among cat owners not opposed to cat containment in some form, 5% indicated that this ACT-wide measure should ‘never’ take place.

Considering all respondents who answered either question, 39% of all cat owners (and 8% of non-owners) indicated some kind of opposition to cat containment.

Further analysis of this 39% cohort opposed to cat containment (referred to as *opposed owners* hereafter) found several differences between them and other cat owners (referred to as *non-opposed owners*).

- ◆ While some opposed cat owners kept their own cat contained, restrained or supervised at all times, this proportion was much lower than among non-opposed owners (30%, compared to 74%). The proportion giving their cat total freedom was also much higher among opposed owners (34%, compared to 11%).
- ◆ Opposed owners who did not contain their own cat were more likely than non-opposed owners to give ‘I do not understand why I would keep my cat indoors’ as a reason (21%, compared to 4%), and also to express the opinion that it is unkind to keep cats indoors (14%, compared to 4%).<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ Opposed owners were less likely to be aware of semi-owned or unowned cats in their suburb (17%, compared to 31%), and much less likely to indicate they ever encounter any *nuisance* from roaming cats (31%, compared to 62%).
- ◆ Opposed owners also indicated lower levels of support for all *other* cat management measures canvassed by the survey, including financial assistance for low-income owners. This group recorded *negative* net balance scores (i.e. were more opposed than supportive of) more domestic animal enforcers, and more fines and penalties.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that this response was coded from the verbatim comments and was not presented to all respondents. As *absolute* percentages these figures should be treated with caution, as more respondents are likely to have selected this option had it been explicitly offered.



Opposed owners differed considerably from non-opposed owners in their preference for *how* cat containment should ideally be introduced. These differences are discussed further below.

## D. Methods for expanding cat containment

Respondents were presented with three possible approaches to expanding mandatory cat containment in the ACT from the seventeen suburbs where it is currently in place:

- ◆ **Phasing-in approach** – gradually add additional identified suburbs over time
- ◆ **Grandfathered approach** – only new cats adopted/purchased after an established date will have to be contained (unless they live in an existing cat containment area)
- ◆ **Blanket approach** – declare all remaining suburbs cat containment areas at the one time at a set future date

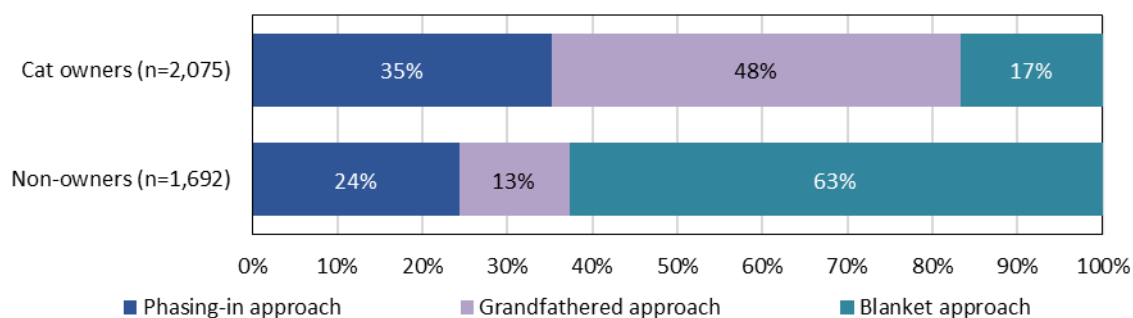
Respondents were asked to nominate which of these three approaches was most reasonable. Figure 14 shows the extent to which cat owners, and non-owners, preferred each approach.

- ◆ Of the three approaches, a blanket approach was most likely to be seen as the reasonable approach by non-owners (63%), but *least* likely to be seen as reasonable by cat owners (17%).
  - Given the relative numbers of cat owners and non-owners in the ACT, this measure is likely to be the first preference of approximately half of the overall ACT community.
- ◆ Amongst cat owners, a grandfathered approach is most preferred (46%)—although this is *least* preferred among non-owners (13%).
- ◆ Phasing in approach is second most preferred option in both groups (35% support among cat owners, 24% non-owners).

Amongst cat owners, the preference for a grandfathered approach is most pronounced among those who oppose the expansion of cat containment altogether. Among these *opposed* owners, 69% prefer a grandfathered approach, with almost all of the remainder (30%) preferring phasing-in. Among *non-opposed* owners, preferences are much more evenly divided (39% phasing in, 34% grandfathered, 27% blanket).

**Figure 14: Preferred approach to expanding cat containment in the ACT**

Single response; respondents were asked to indicate what they considered the 'most reasonable' approach



Respondents were also asked to indicate a *reasonable* timeframe for all pets to be contained within all suburbs. Responses of cat owners and non-owners are shown in Figure 15.

- ◆ More than one third of cat owners think it will *never* be reasonable to implement cat containment in all suburbs (34%, compared to 7% among non-owners). As mentioned earlier, this includes a small proportion of cat owners who are not opposed to cat containment in some form.
- ◆ The shortest possible timeframe (five years) is seen as reasonable by 82% of non-owners (and hence, given the relative proportion of non-owners in the ACT, by a majority of the ACT community as a whole).
- ◆ Only 38% of cat owners consider five years the most reasonable timeframe, although a majority (56%) would accept a timeframe of 10 years.
- Cat owners already within cat containment suburbs are more likely to accept shorter timeframes (55% consider five years reasonable, and 78% would accept 10 years).

**Figure 15: Preferred timeframe**

Respondents asked to nominate a reasonable timeframe for total pet containment in all suburbs. Apart from 'Never', results shown are cumulative (i.e. 10 years *includes* the proportion who selected 5 years; 15 years includes the proportion who selected 5 or 10 years)

