



## ANIMAL JUSTICE PARTY

### **“Proposed changes to the Pest Animals Declaration”**

The newly formed ACT Committee of the Animal Justice Party (AJP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the ACT government’s proposed changes to its “Pest Animals Declaration”.

As a growing voice which challenges much of how discussions in Australia occur around animals, issues such as this one are a good example of where the alternative perspective of the AJP is required.

There are four elements the AJP is most concerned about:

1. The concept of ‘pest’ animals;
2. The importance of human behaviour in preventing the arrival of ‘pest’ animals;
3. The actions taken when an animal is assessed as being a ‘pest’; and
4. The need for independent and comprehensive expertise, including animal welfare and ecology, to review the declaration and treatment of 'pest' animals.

In the Declaration, the term ‘pest’ to describe an animal is used pejoratively. It diminishes the worth of an animal and the consideration due to it. In practice, the word 'pest' supports a context for the use of cruel 'control' measures that would otherwise be prohibited under the Animal Welfare Act, including (but not limited) to extremely cruel poisons. The AJP believes the term ‘pest’ should be replaced with the more accurate and less loaded term of ‘introduced wild animal’.

The arrival of introduced animal species which alter the natural ecology is usually due to action by people - not animals. On compassionate, ecological and economic grounds, prevention of the arrival of introduced wild animals is always preferable to the later 'control' of these animals. The AJP recommends the ACT Government focus on education, raising awareness, measures to check the spread of introduced animals (for example subsidised desexing of cats and prohibiting the further importation of exotic species) and appropriate deterrent measures for people caught facilitating the spread of introduced wild animals (for example criminal sanctions).

The AJP stands for the humane treatment of all animals whether they are deemed to be 'pests' or not. There are a plethora of effective, ethical non-lethal means for addressing difficult interactions between humans and introduced animals, such as fertility control, animal-proof fencing and relocation. For example, desex and return programs have been successful in eliminating unwanted cat populations all over the world.<sup>1</sup> Cats are caught, desexed, medicated and returned to their territory.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://catassist.org.au/humane-control.html>



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There is also evidence that lethal measures lead to increased rather than decreased populations of the unwanted animals - because they make way for rapid population expansion due to the increased availability of food and territory.<sup>2</sup> Lethal measures to control 'pests' are therefore not only cruel but are also contrary to the Government's objective to be rid of particular animals.

We are also very concerned that declaring unowned (homeless) cats as 'pest' animals will negate the current law against poisoning them. Not only is poisoning an inhumane, lethal measure the AJP opposes, we also note that a poison laid in a public place may be consumed by an owned cat, dog or birds such as hawks, eagles and kookaburras.

In the case of the proposal to prohibit the 'keeping' of foxes in the ACT – the AJP agrees that the keeping and breeding of foxes by whim buyers who like the idea of owning a wild animal is inappropriate. Such people may, after a time, get bored with their purchase and release it into the wild. However, we have not heard of this ever happening in the ACT.

Consequently, it appears that the only people who would be affected by this provision are compassionate, responsible people who, after rescuing an orphaned fox cub and raising it, keep the neutered adult fox at home rather than returning it to the wild. The AJP therefore recommends the proposed declaration exclude neutered foxes.

The AJP strongly urges the ACT Government to take a more rounded and comprehensive assessment of the way non-human animals interact with Canberra residents and the natural environment of the ACT. In this regard it needs to seek independent expertise that includes animal behavior, trans-species psychology, animal welfare and compassionate conservation. By itself, ecology is far from an adequate contribution to understanding the dynamics between animals, humans and the natural environment.

We suggest such a comprehensive assessment team of independent experts would make recommendations on:

- Prevention measures rather than 'lethal management control measures';
- A more humane interpretation of the concept of 'pest'; and
- Non-lethal measures to reduce any deleterious impact of 'pest' species.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments.

The AJP remains committed to scrutinising these issues over the long term. We are happy to continue these discussions and to support the actions proposed utilising our networks and specialists.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://theconversation.com/culling-pest-animals-can-do-more-harm-than-good-40702>



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Yours sincerely

A rectangular area containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature appears to read "Geoff Pryor" and is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Geoff Pryor  
Convener  
Animal Justice Party ACT Committee  
December 14<sup>th</sup> 2015