

City of Darebin Cat Curfew

Summary

2017

During the development of Darebin Council's 2017-2021 Domestic Animal Management Plan (the Plan), a survey available via Council's Your Say webpage asked community members about the effectiveness of various animal management initiatives.

A survey question asked participants the effectiveness of "introducing a cat curfew to control cats from roaming at night". A total of 269 responses were received with 49.4% of respondents indicating that a curfew would be very effective. Respondents were requested to rate responses from 1(not at all effective) thru to 5(very effective). The average response was 3.8 which confirmed that respondents were supportive of a curfew.

Given an almost 50/50 response, a commitment was made to "Evaluate current information and consider the introduction of a cat curfew to prevent cats preying on native wildlife" and was included in the Plan.

2020

At its meeting on 29th June 2020, Council resolved to adopt a position to undertake community consultation, for a minimum 28 days, in relation to the introduction of a cat curfew. Community engagement was undertaken from 10 July to 7 August 2020.

Community Engagement Process

Engagement with community occurred during Stage 3 & 4 COVID-19 Restrictions, therefore no face to face consultation occurred. Feedback on the proposal to introduce a cat curfew within the City of Darebin was sought by:

- Council's Your Say information page
- Online survey (available via Your Say)
- Cat curfew email address catcurfew@darebin.vic.gov.au, available for direct submissions
- Direct emails to the RSPCA (Council's Pound provider), Cat Protection Society, bordering Councils (Yarra, Banyule, Moreland and Whittlesea), Darebin Vet Clinics and Pet Shops
- Direct emails to Council-led advisory groups:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Domestic Animal Management Reference Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Active and Healthy Aging Community Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Interfaith Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Nature Trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexuality, Sex, and Gender Diversity Advisory Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Ethnic Communities Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Women's Advisory Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darebin Youth Jury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darebin Climate Action Now
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darebin Youth Jury

- Direct emails to community groups including several Climate Action groups, Darebin Neighbourhood Houses, Friends of Merri Creek, Darebin Creek Management Committee, Extinction Rebellion, Intercultural Centre Community Groups, Northcote Lions Club and Rotary Preston.
- Weekly posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.
- Darebin Council Staff to Staff

Engagement Reach

- **1385** visitors to Your Say webpage
- **646** online surveys completed
- **14** email submissions
- **4** social media posts across 3 platforms

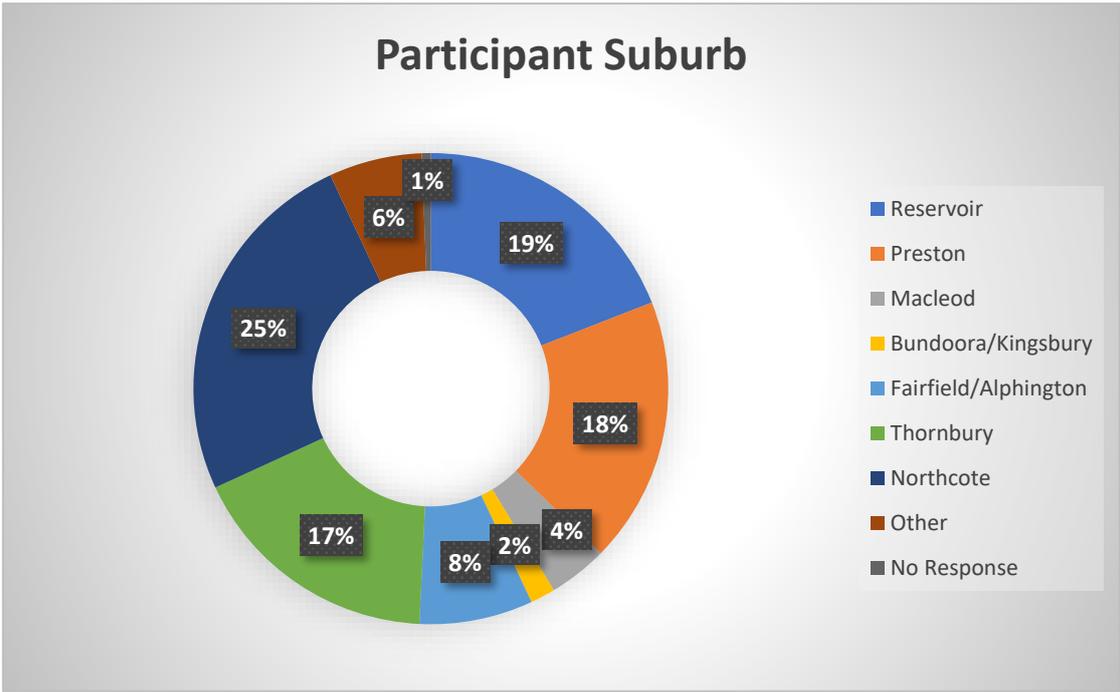
Online Survey

The online survey was available for public comment from 10 July to 7 August 2020. A total of **646** responses were received.

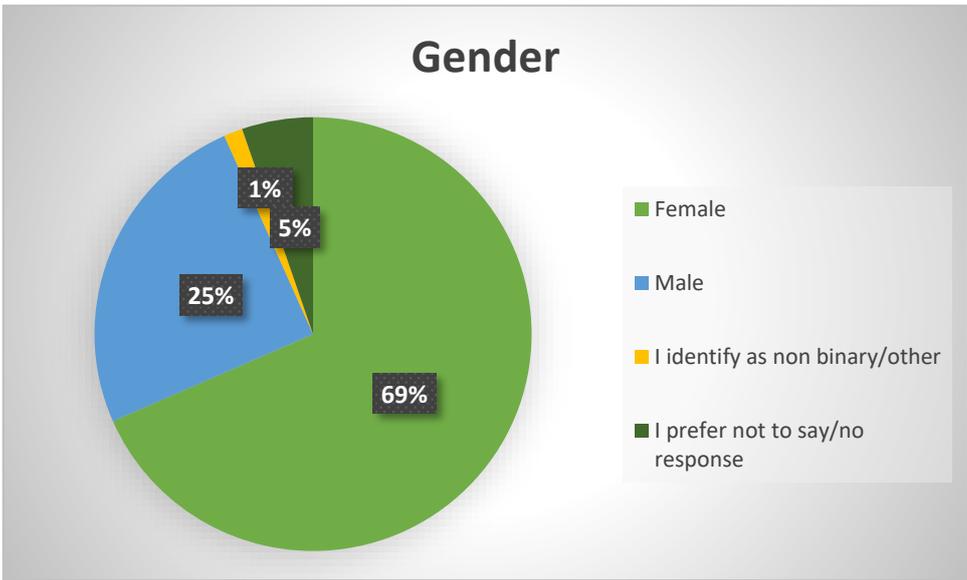
About the survey participants - Demographics

The majority (93%) of the survey participants lived within the City of Darebin, with some of the remaining living on the border of Darebin and other Councils or from elsewhere in Melbourne. Only 4 participants didn't indicate their suburb at all.

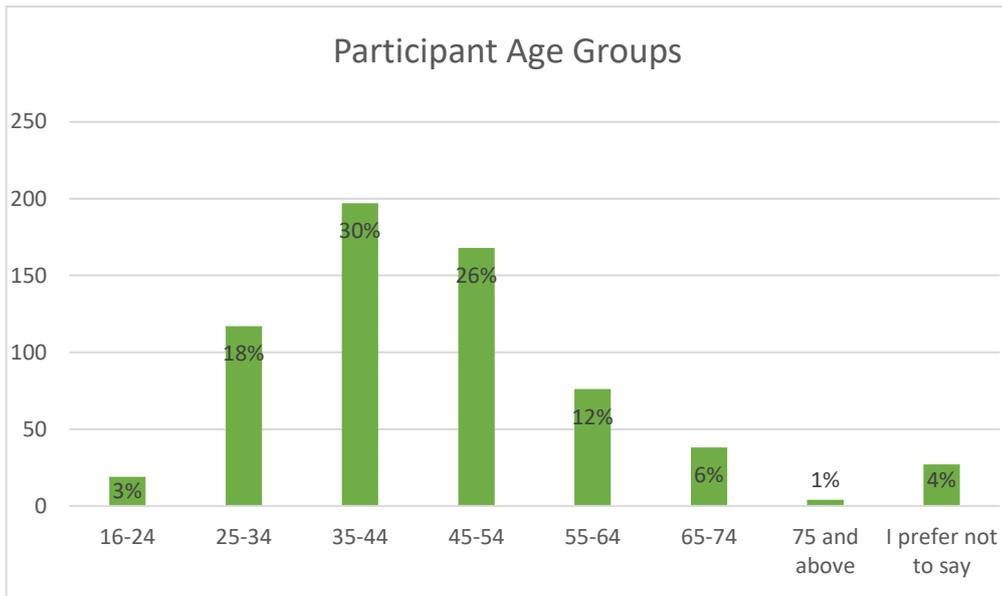
Reservoir	Preston	Macleod	Bundoora Kingsbury	Fairfield Alphington	Thornbury	Northcote	Other	No Response
123	118	26	11	50	112	161	41	4



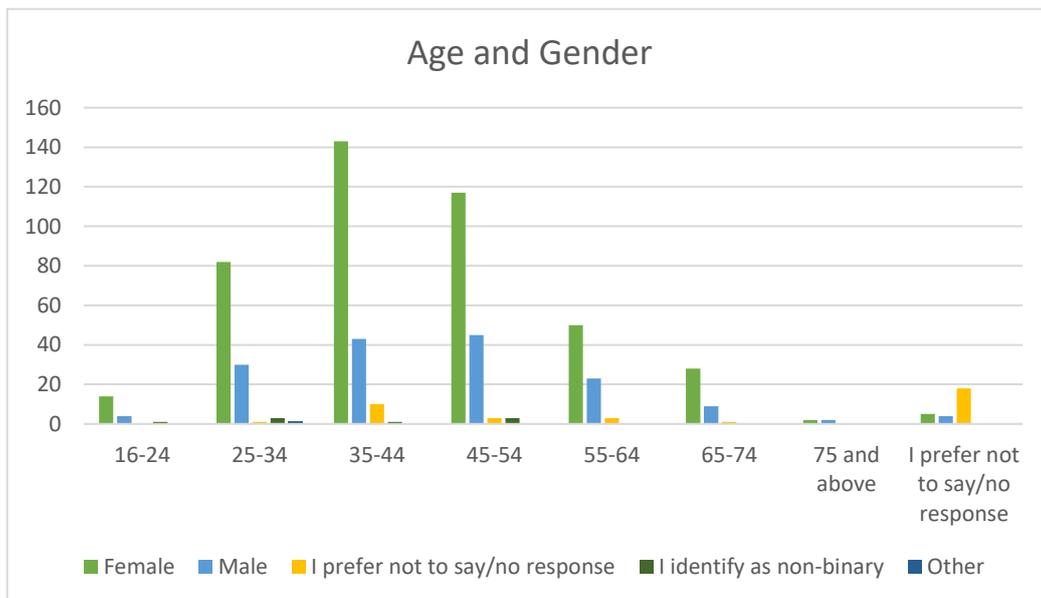
Just over two thirds of participants were female (69%), with 25% being male and the remaining 6% selecting other options (I identify as non binary/other/ I prefer not to say/no response).



The largest number of participants came from the 35-44 age group (30%), closely followed by the 45-54 age group (26%).



Broken down by gender, female responses dominated each age category except for 75 and above.

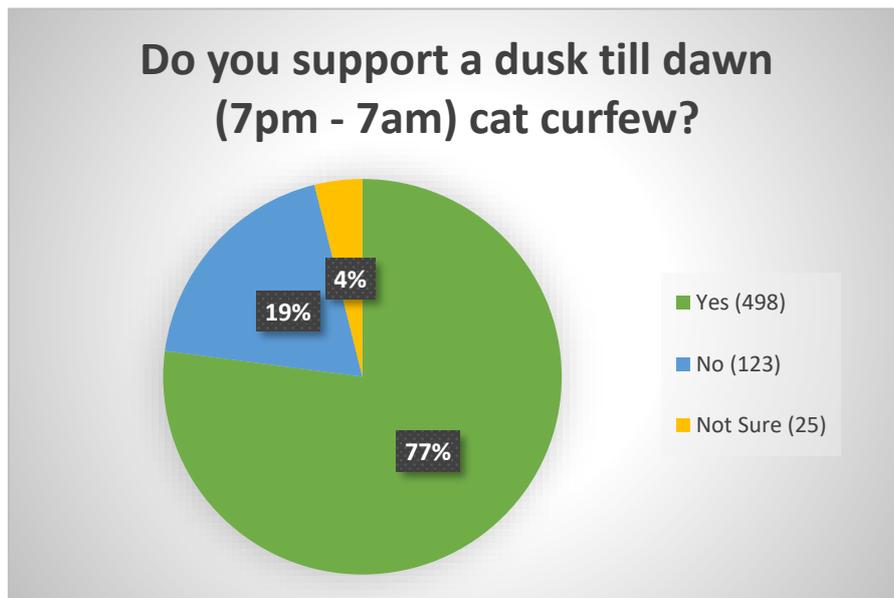


When asked if participants spoke a language other than English at home, 11% answered that they did, 76% didn't and 13% of participants selected I prefer not to say or did not respond to this question.

Survey Question	Response		
Do you speak a language other than English at home?	Yes	No	I prefer not say/no response
	73 (11%)	492 (76%)	81 (13%)

The Cat Curfew Survey

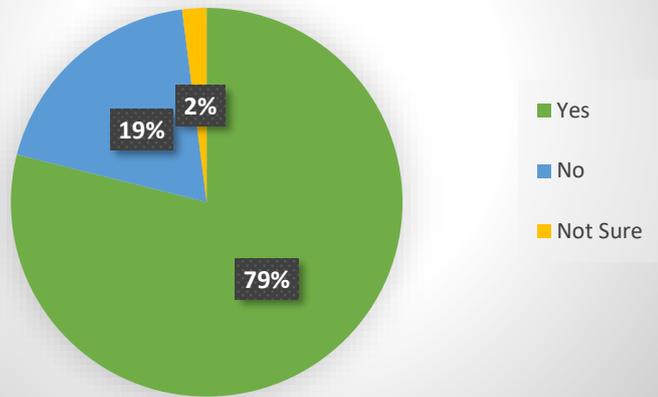
A total of **646** responses were received. Of these, **77% supported** a dusk till dawn cat curfew (7pm to 7am), with **498** respondents selecting **YES**.



Of the respondents who answered **Not Sure**, a further **12 were supportive a curfew**, but with an adjustment of times to suit 'true' dusk till dawn times, which are changeable throughout the seasons. The remaining **Not Sure** respondents appeared to be supportive, but were more concerned about penalties imposed, euthanasia of cats caught and changing old habits in cats.

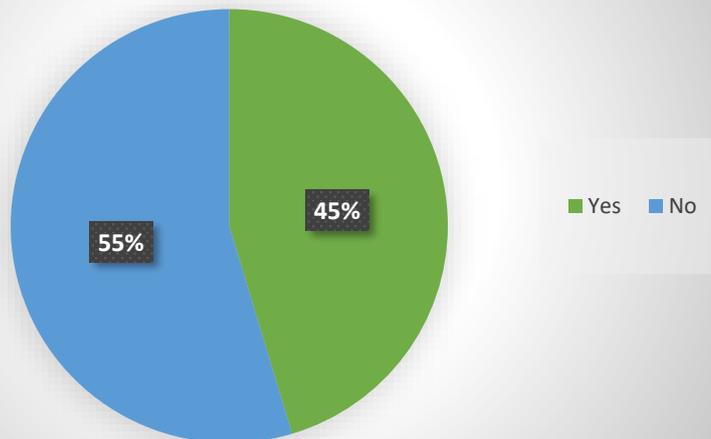
With this break down of the **Not Sure** category in mind, support for a curfew increases to **79%**, and those unsure to **2%**.

Participants supportive of a dusk till dawn (including seasonally adjusted times) cat curfew



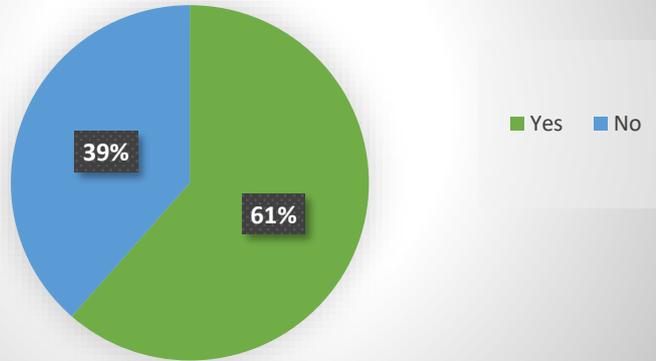
Of the 646 respondents, **45%** were cat owners, indicating a significant portion of cat owners were supportive of a cat curfew.

Are you a cat owner?



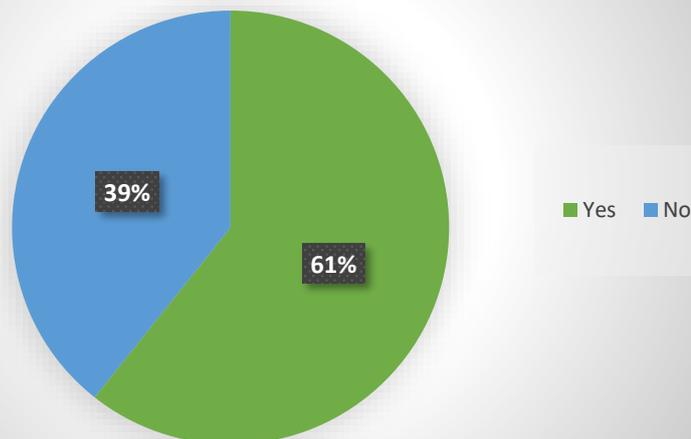
When asked about cat nuisance, **61%** of respondents indicated they had experienced cat nuisance related issues in the last 12 months.

Have you experienced cat nuisance in the last 12 months?



With the very close results to those who had experiences cat nuisance issues, almost two thirds (61%) of participants indicated that they lived near parkland, reiterating that whilst the City of Darebin is a suburban environment, the municipality includes 39 bushland conservation sites.

Do you live near parkland?



Numbers summary of survey Questions

Survey Question	Response		
	Yes	No	Unsure
Do you support the draft proposal of introducing a dusk till dawn (7pm to 7am) cat curfew?	498 (77%)	123 (19%)	25 (4%)
Please provide any comments here (in support of response to previous question). Number of comments.	488	119	24
Have you experienced cat nuisance in the last 12 months?	Yes 397 (61%)	No 249 (29%)	
Would you like a response to your comments?	Yes 148 (23%)	No 498 (77%)	
Are you a cat owner?	Yes 293 (45%)	No 353 (55%)	
Do you live near parkland?	Yes 392 (61%)	No 254 (39%)	

Feedback Themes

Out of the 646 survey participants, 631 (97%) left comments in support of their responses – indicating, that participants felt strongly about the proposal and were keen to have their voices heard.

With almost 80% expressing their support for the introduction of a cat curfew, common reasons amongst participants for backing the proposal included:

- Concern for wildlife, many having experienced cats hunt and kill birds, possums and other animals in the yards.

“Absolutely fabulous idea,” one person says, continuing by adding, “I love my cats, that’s why they’re kept indoors. A cat curfew would keep both our vulnerable native wildlife and our pet cats safe.”

An observant participant writes, “Darebin’s bush and refuges for wildlife make it one of the best examples of urban country in Australia. But given it is a municipality that acknowledges that we’re in an environmental/climate crisis, more can be done to be good custodians of that country. That means controlling private animals, particularly ones that like to hunt native wildlife and cause so many social conflicts.”

Another commenting, “I urge Council to give weight to the evidence of threats to wildlife from the presence of cats (and dogs) given that wildlife cannot speak for themselves” and another, “with native habitats diminishing every day, native wildlife relies on the resources found in backyards all across Darebin. It is critical that we do everything in our power to protect the native species that remain in the Darebin area.”

- Experiences with cat nuisance issues such as noises from cats fighting and mating at night creating disturbing people’s sleep, toileting in vegetable gardens and other places and associated smell, fear of and also experience with their own cats being attacked and dogs barking due to cats entering properties.
- Cats preying on other pets eg. rabbits, guineapigs, caged birds etc.
- Concern also for the health and safety of cats themselves
- Comparisons made between the requirements for cats and all other domestic animals. One participant stating, *“cat owners should be responsible for their pets at all times, just like dog owners”* and another, *“If I wanted a cat I’d have one. I don’t see why should I have to deal with someone else’s? I’m allergic to cats.”*

Many people indicated that they would be supportive if Council were to introduce a 24-hour cat curfew.

Whilst the 7pm-7am curfew was supported, many people queried whether a later curfew start time would be more reasonable – mostly to suit already established routines people had with their cats. Others stated that a dusk till dawn curfew would be more widely supported if times were modified seasonally (eg. later in the summer, earlier in the winter).

Community education and support when transitioning to a cat curfew was raised by a number of people who supported the curfew. A resident commenting, *“please do this! I’d love to see a full community engagement campaign to ensure this is understood and adhered to.”*

RSPCA's Safe Cat, Safe Wildlife campaign was referenced by several participants as a means to help educate the community.

Concerns raised included:

- Issues in training cats to be home at a specific time
- Issues in confining cats who prefer to be outside and free, many opposing people echoing this view - "it is part of our cat's nature to go out at these times, let them be."
- Confusion around confinement – a few interpreting the curfew as needing to be inside the home during the curfew times
- Penalties associated with non-compliance
- Increased cat impoundment (assumption of Council Officers patrolling during curfew hours), and subsequent issues regarding difficulties in travelling to the Epping Animal Welfare Facility (EAWF) and payment of reclaim fees for low-income earners
- Increased cat euthanasia at Council's the EAWF
- The negative image placed on cats if a curfew is imposed, one resident stating that the proposal, "*unfairly targets cats and their owners.*" Others stating the proposal is biased and '*vilifies*' or '*demonises*' cats.

Email Submissions

A dedicated inbox catcurfew@darebin.vic.gov.au, was set up to receive submissions directly. A total of **14** were received.

Out of the 14 submissions, **11** were supportive of a cat curfew. Of these, **3** further stated a 24/7 curfew was necessary and **1** supportive, but of a later start time.

Of the remaining 3 submissions, **2** were opposed to introducing a cat curfew and **1** unsure.

Feedback summary

RSPCA Victoria expressed their support in the introduction of a cat curfew stating, "*that government policy on the management of cats in the community must maintain a balance between the need to ensure the welfare of cats and the need to reduce the potential negative impacts of cats on wildlife and the community.*" Also adding, "*we would recommend that council continues to promote this campaign to cat owners in their municipality to assist with transitioning to having cats at home more.*"

A representative of the **Darebin Nature Trust** also wrote in support of a cat curfew, however advocated for a 24/7 curfew, stating that whilst wildlife predation does occur at night, it also occurs during the daytime.

Furthermore, remaining submissions were written in support of the cat curfew being concerned about the impacts roaming cats have on wildlife, but also the health and safety of domestic cats.

In non-support, one person wrote that domestic cats only target pest species, but also that *“domestic cats get plenty of food from their owners and are really quite fat and lazy.”* Adding that many cats and residents will not be able to adjust their lifestyle.

The second submission opposing the cat curfew was submitted from a representative from local cat rescue group **Maneki Neko**. The main concerns raised that the curfew will *“likely to result in owned and loved pets being impounded.”*

Social Media

Information regarding the proposed curfew was posted on Council Facebook, Instagram and Twitter profiles, once each week during the consultation period (4 total on each platform). The Facebook posts were then shared on Council’s Darebin Lost Animals Facebook page also

Across the two Council Facebook profiles a total number of **377 comments** were received, with **369 likes** and **77 shares** to other Facebook pages and profiles.

Comment Themes

Comments regarding the proposed cat curfew were largely supportive, with one respondent commenting, *“in an environment with so many threats, reducing them where it is very feasible is welcome indeed”* and another, *“great way to protect native wildlife and cats alike.”*

Other reasons people were supportive of a curfew were to reduce incidents of cat nuisance, including noise from cats fighting, mating and entering properties as well as toileting in and around properties and destroying garden beds.

Some concerns were expressed regarding difficulty enforcing a particular time such as the proposed 7pm to 7am curfew. Several people stating 7pm was too early. *“Cats don't have wrist watches”* one respondent said, however noted they would be supportive a curfew time appropriate for the season.

Another noted, *“I didn't think I could train my 3-year-old cat to stay indoors at night but as of early this year he has a dusk/dinner time curfew. A bit of work for a very important change.”*

Comparisons were made between requirements to keep dogs and other domestic animals confined, *“cats should be inside,”* one person said, adding *“don't see my dog running around coming to visit yours.”*

Other Media

The proposed cat curfew gained media interest also, with an article appearing in The Age. The article presented support for the curfew who interviewed a Darebin resident and cat owner. Also adding that Wildlife Victoria, Zoos Victoria and the RSPCA were in favour of cat curfews.

Wildlife Victoria's CE confirming, "*we wholeheartedly support the idea of cat curfews*".

The curfew was also discussed on various radio stations, including 3AW. Additionally, Darebin Mayor Rennie was interviewed on 7 News. Interest on the cat curfew was even sparked interstate, with a NSW Council interested in adopting Darebin's approach to addressing cat nuisance issues.

Summary and Recommendations

- Approve a dusk till dawn (7pm to 7am) cat curfew commencing from 1 January 2021.
- Organise for Gazettal in the Victorian Government Gazette.
- Endorse a community education program prior to implementation.