

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

NO. 8 OF 1996

Section 22 of the Animal Welfare Act 1992 provides that the Minister may approve codes of practice relating to animal welfare.

The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats in the ACT was prepared by a joint working party of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee together with representatives of the Canberra Cat Fanciers, Animal Liberation, and the Australian Veterinary Association, as well as industry groups such as pet shop owners.

The ACT Animal Welfare Advisory Committee endorsed the Code of Practice for adoption in the ACT in November 1995.

The provisions of the Code are detailed in the Attachment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized first name followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The purpose of the Code is to specify the requirements for the welfare of cats within the Australian Capital Territory.

The Code details the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care that are appropriate to cats.

Section 2 outlines issues of responsible ownership including desexing and identification.

Section 3 details the nutritional requirements of cats.

Section 4 discusses appropriate housing and environment to be provided.

Section 5 provides requirements in relation to hygiene, including bowls, toilet trays, bedding and accommodation.

Section 6 describes appropriate health care, including methods of disease prevention, health monitoring and signs of disease.

Section 7 details requirements in relation to transport of cats, with reference to appropriate containers, food and water during transport and the use of tranquillisers during transport.

Section 8 discusses issues associated with breeding cats, including both registered cat breeders and any cat that is not desexed.

Section 9 deals with placement of kittens.

Section 10 discusses the disposal of unwanted cats.

Appendix 1 provides the contact address for the registered cat breeders association in the ACT.

**CODE OF PRACTICE
FOR THE WELFARE OF CATS IN THE ACT**

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1. Introduction

This Code of Practice for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has been prepared from a consideration of the welfare of cats by the ACT Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC). Its purpose is to provide general guidelines on the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care that are appropriate to the cat.

Animal welfare considerations are becoming increasingly important in the keeping of animals. This Code is based on established experience and current scientific knowledge. Practices once considered acceptable are now being reassessed and modified according to new knowledge and changing attitudes.

A person in charge of a cat has a legal liability under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* to ensure that it receives appropriate and adequate food, water, shelter and exercise.

2. Responsible Ownership

2.1 Urban Cats

Responsible ownership means looking after the emotional and physical needs of your cat, and taking into account its interaction with neighbours and its impact on wildlife. Cat owners should recognise that cats may take wildlife at any time of the day or night and should monitor their cats behaviour accordingly. For details on the physical and emotional needs of cats see Section 4.

2.2 Desexing

Cats not intended for breeding should be desexed as early as veterinary advice allows.

Desexing of both male and female cats is essential for minimising the number of unwanted cats which are abandoned, or neglected and, often, euthanased as a result. Desexing male cats also discourages them from roaming, fighting and the spraying of urine. Female cats do not need to produce a litter for full physical and emotional development.

Owners may request that the veterinary surgeon tattoo the cat's ear to indicate the animal has been desexed.

2.3 Identification

Cats should be identified so that it is obvious to the casual observer that they are owned. A collar showing at least the phone number of the owner can be worn. Collars with an elasticised insert are preferable. Care is needed in adjusting the collar to ensure that it fits comfortably without being restrictive.

Microchipping by a veterinarian is an alternative or additional method of identification. It enables a cat to be checked for ownership by veterinarians or animal welfare shelters if a collar has been lost or removed.

2.4 Cats Kept For Pest Control

Cats kept for rabbit or rodent control are the responsibility of the occupiers of the premises. Their nutritional needs and health care requirements must be met. Emphasis is placed on the need for desexing and for identification which distinguishes owned cats from feral cats.

3. Nutrition

Cats need a nutritionally complete and varied diet. For a healthy cat, a recommended diet would include fresh meat and bone. Bones should be raw to avoid splintering and to aid digestion, and be small enough for the cat to devour, for example chicken or rabbit. Raw bones encourage chewing and help prevent build up of tartar on teeth. It should be noted that dry food does not keep the teeth free of tartar.

Amounts given at each meal should vary according to age and condition of the cat as well as the type of food given. Young kittens should be fed more often. Kittens up to 4 months of age need a minimum of three meals a day. Pregnant and lactating queens at times will require twice as much food as other adult cats.

Some dry food may lead to cats developing crystals in the urine. Offal, especially liver should be limited as excessive amounts can cause vitamin and mineral imbalance.

A cat should not be fed prepared dog food as it lacks the essential nutrients which cats require.

Cats may be given milk. However, some cats are lactose intolerant and may develop diarrhoea.

Fresh water should be available at all times.

4. Environment and Housing

4.1 General

An environment which meets the cat's physical needs includes adequate protection from weather and temperature extremes. Cats should be kept indoors between sunrise and sunset. Certain potentially fatal diseases such as feline AIDS, as well as debilitating illnesses (e.g. abscesses), are spread by fighting, which is more likely to take place at night.

All cats should have access to jumping, running, climbing and playing facilities. Isolation in an area without windows and without contact with humans is not acceptable.

Part of the garden may be specially fenced or netted to give a controlled space, with adequate shelter provided by giving access to the house and/or garage.

Owners who do not have access to garden areas should provide their cat with access to sunlight for approximately 30 minutes per day and uncontaminated grass twice weekly. If necessary, wheat grass can be grown in pots indoors.

A scratching post or fibre mat should be provided.

A toilet tray must be provided while cats are confined, and should be placed well away from the cat's bedding, food and water.

4.2 Cats Housed in Enclosures

An enclosure should have an area where the cat is protected from sun, rain, wind and temperature extremes. At least 60% of the enclosure should be solid roofed. Cats require firm flooring; mesh is not acceptable. Solid walls are needed to protect on the weather side. Insulation may be needed to prevent temperature extremes. A sleeping area well protected from the elements should be provided.

The minimum living area enclosure size is 0.9m x 1.8m x 1.8m. In an enclosure, at least two shelves should be placed at different heights to allow jumping. Cats kept in enclosures should have provision for free range exercise, which can be provided either by an outside exercise area at least 12 m², or within the house. One option is a wired enclosed run area adjoining enclosures in which cats can be rotated for individual exercise to prevent boredom and increase fitness.

Enclosures should be sited where there is plenty to see and there is much human contact. Where there is more than one enclosure, solid partitioning between enclosures should be used to prevent spread of disease. Openings or doorways should be designed to avoid the risk of injury or escape.

5. Hygiene

Food bowls should be washed after every meal.

Water bowls should be washed daily.

Bedding should be changed weekly or more often if soiled.

Toilet trays should be large enough for the cat to turn around comfortably, have high sides and a minimum of 5cm of litter. Faeces and soiled litter should be removed daily. Toilet trays should be washed and fresh litter provided every 3 days. It is recommended that gloves are worn when handling litter trays because of the risk to humans of toxoplasmosis infection.

Enclosures should be cleaned and disinfected weekly. Cleaning and disinfecting agents should be chosen on the basis of their suitability, safety and effectiveness. Some common disinfectants, particularly those derived from or containing coal or wood tar products are toxic to cats. Phenol-based agents, pine oil, cresol, and chloroxylenols should not be used because they are particularly toxic to cats.

Manufacturer's instructions for the use of cleaning, disinfecting or flea control agents should be followed since too dilute a solution may be ineffective and too concentrated a solution may be toxic to animals.

6. Health Care

6.1 Prevention of Disease

A program of vaccination against Feline Enteritis and Feline Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus should be carried out.

An effective worm control program with an approved medication against gastrointestinal worms should be carried out. It should be noted that cats under 12 weeks of age will require more frequent worming against roundworms than adult cats. Attention should also be paid to the control of external parasites.

If a new cat is brought into a home or cattery where other cats already reside, it may introduce contagious diseases or parasites into the environment, such as ear mites, fleas, ringworm (fungal infection), internal parasites, feline respiratory disease and Feline Enteritis. It is the responsibility of the new owner or carer to ensure that any new cat is free of contagious diseases and parasites.

A cat showing signs of a disease should be isolated immediately and veterinary advice should be sought.

6.2 Health Monitoring

Each cat should be observed at least once daily to monitor its health. The person observing the cat(s) should note whether each animal:

- * is eating normally;
- * is drinking normally;
- * is urinating and defecating properly;
- * is expressing its usual behaviour;
- * is able to move about freely; and
- * has a normal coat.

Regular grooming of cats enables detection of disease and parasite problems. Semi-long-haired and long-haired cats should be groomed every day. Short-haired cats may need grooming once a week.

6.3 Signs of Disease

Veterinary advice should be sought if a cat is showing signs of ill health, such as:

- * runny nose, runny or inflamed eyes;

- * repeated sneezing;
- * repeated vomiting;
- * severe or prolonged diarrhoea;
- * lameness for more than a 24 hour period;
- * inability to stand or walk;
- * bleeding or swelling of body parts;
- * significant weight loss or lack of appetite;
- * apparent pain;
- * fits or staggering;
- * straining or inability to urinate or defecate;
- * wounds, irritations or inflammations;
- * significant hair loss;
- * repeated scratching and shaking of head; and
- * bloody saliva or a rotten smell from the mouth.

7. Transport

7.1 Modes of Transport

Cats may be transported by motor vehicle, rail or air. The person(s) or company responsible for transporting them should ensure that they are transported at all times in a way that does not cause injury, escape or undue stress.

The mode of transport acceptable will be determined in part by the distance to be travelled, the familiarity of the cat to travel, and the health status of the cat.

In most circumstances cats being transported should be confined in a suitable container. These containers should be kept level and secured against movement at all times during transport. Suitable containers may be made of rigid plastics, metal mesh or wood. Adult cats can easily escape from cardboard containers. Containers should be constructed with a strong framework with joints made so the animal cannot escape due to continual biting and scratching at the corners of the container. The container should have no protuberance that could injure the cat during transport.

The container should be large enough to permit each cat contained therein to stand, turnaround and lie down.

To provide ventilation, the whole of one end of the container should be open and covered with bars, metal mesh or smooth expanded metal securely attached to the container. Additional ventilation holes should be provided on all three of the remaining sides. The total ventilation area should provide a minimum of 16% of the total surface area of the four sides.

Access to the container should be by a sliding or hinged door adequately secured to prevent accidental opening and escape.

Containers should be easy to clean and disinfect.

The number of adult cats in one container should not exceed two, and then only if they are compatible. Kittens from the same household may be transported together and the number should be related to the size and strength of the individual animals.

At all times during transport, cats should be protected against extreme temperatures. They should not be left in a parked vehicle in warm weather or in a container that is exposed to direct sunlight.

For interstate transport, advice should be sought from the airline or railway. International transport should follow the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service standards or requirements.

7.2 Food and Water during Transport

Cats should be transported in the shortest time possible. If in transport longer than six hours, adequate drinking water should be provided in a water vessel securely fixed to the side of the container.

If in transport for 24 hours or longer, provision must be made for food to be given to the cat at least every 24 hours. Cats/kittens under the age of 6 months may need to be fed every 8 hours.

7.3 Labelling of Container

Except when the cat(s) is travelling with its owner in a private motor vehicle, the transport container should have both a label on the top and at least one of the four sides with the name, address and phone contact number of both the sender and receiver and a label saying LIVE ANIMALS.

7.4 Use of Tranquillisers during Transport

Tranquillisation of cats for transport can be dangerous to their health. For example, some tranquillisers can disrupt a cat's ability to regulate its body temperature. Only tranquillisers prescribed by a veterinarian may be used and their use should be discussed fully with the veterinarian.

Tranquillisation should not be used as an alternative to a properly constructed container to prevent a cat from escaping during transport.

8. Breeding

Persons planning to breed cats should carefully assess their own lifestyles. It takes time and energy and an extensive initial financial outlay to produce, raise and find homes for every litter. These comments relate to minimum standards which are not necessarily the same as the standards required by the controlling body for registered cat breeders. People interested in registered cat breeding should contact the local registering body (see Appendix 1).

Cats selected and retained for breeding should have a balanced temperament, be physically healthy, and genetically sound.

The deliberate breeding of malformed animals is unacceptable. For example, breeds such as the Sphinx, Manx, Cymric and Scottish Fold may have genetic health problems associated with such breeding.

Kittens are best raised where they have extensive contact with their carer to ensure that they will be emotionally stable and acceptable as part of the family. House raised kittens should be trained to use a toilet tray, to accept grooming, to relate to other cats, and to respond positively to humans. Long haired and semi long haired kittens should be groomed daily from 5 weeks of age to accustom them to grooming.

Prior to going to their new homes, kittens should be health checked by a veterinarian while being given their first vaccination. A vaccination program as recommended by the veterinarian should be followed. Kittens should not be removed from their mother younger than six weeks of age, preferably eight weeks.

Females can come into oestrus (in season/on heat) as early as four months of age. At first mating they should be a minimum of ten months of age, but preferably 12 months, and be checked by a veterinarian for sound health (including teeth) and physical maturity. The veterinarian should be requested to vaccinate against Feline Enteritis and respiratory diseases at this visit to boost immunity.

Males mature from around 6 months onwards. It should be noted that inexperienced, young males can be emotionally scarred by an aggressive, unwilling queen if used too young.

Breeders should introduce a queen to a stud carefully. A scared or aggressive queen can attack animals or people, or escape. The queen should be initially housed separately, and should be separated after each of the first few matings. Some queens will then be able to be left with the stud dependent on the personality of each.

Sexually mature stock should be kept confined at all times to prevent contact with infectious diseases and parasites, and separate from cats of the opposite sex to prevent unplanned pregnancies. Any area of confinement should meet the requirements of sections 4 and 5.

For companionship, a stud should be housed with a compatible neutered male or spayed female. Studs should not be housed together.

The average gestation period for a cat is nine weeks. After 60 days, owners should provide a suitable area for kitting. The area should be clean, safe, quiet and protected from weather. If the cat experiences difficulty, veterinary advice should be sought.

Queens should be used to breed no more than 3 litters over 2 years. It should be noted that queens may come into oestrus within 2 weeks of the birth of a litter.

9. Placement of Kittens

Owners should be responsible for finding suitable homes for all kittens produced by their cats.

They should provide new owners with information about its diet; when to desex and vaccinate; worming; grooming; housing; identification and general health care.

10. Disposal of Unwanted Cats

It is recognised that there will be times when a person(s) will be unable to keep and/or care for their pet cat(s) any longer.

These owners may make arrangements to pass their cat(s) on to a new owner as a companion animal either privately or through organisations such as the RSPCA and the ACT cat clubs.

Persons wishing to dispose of unowned stray cats/kittens on their property should take them to the RSPCA. When a cat cannot be rehomed, it may be necessary to dispose of it by euthanasia. Euthanasia should be performed by a veterinary surgeon.

Appendix 1

The registered cat breeders association in the ACT is

**Capital Cats Inc.
PO Box 404
DICKSON ACT 2601**