



FERAL CATS 30 November 1994

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): With pet ownership comes responsibility, and owning a pet cat is no exception to this requirement. Cats are super efficient killing machines. One only has to see a wild feral cat in our native environment to know that some of our unique native fauna have no chance at all. Feral cats can and do grow into animals the size of foxes. For the record, a vet practising in my electorate, Flinders, has a cat weighing 10 kilograms as a feline patient. That is a super efficient hunter—fortunately not a feral one.

As members will be aware, Port Lincoln is virtually surrounded by national parks. Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island both have large tracts of park. These national parks are supposed to provide a safe haven for many species of small fauna. In Port Lincoln we have colonies of blue wrens, sea birds of all shapes and sizes, parrots and a huge collection of small lizards. They are all vulnerable to attacks from feral cats. Wherever there is a patch of scrub there will be a feral cat problem. Our national parks are for recreation and conservation, not for providing a smorgasbord for wild cats. I do not believe that we have a choice in the matter. To keep our native fauna, we must reduce the potential for these feral cats.

The feral cat is an extremely tough animal. It can live in the most extreme of climates. In fact, it is so tough that it will survive, I am told, in a hot dry climate that would see a dingo succumb to the heat. The Streaky Bay District Council has recognised the potential problems of feral cats. It has introduced by-laws which limit the number of cats that can be owned within the town. Basically, if people want to keep one cat, they have few controls. However, if any more cats are kept, the by-laws demand, among other things, that they be confined to premises at night, that they must wear collars with the owner's name and address and that they must also be desexed.

Mr Brindal: Is that for two or more?

Mrs PENFOLD: For two or more. The by-laws are aimed at reducing the nuisance of cats to fellow property owners and are also seen as a way of assisting to keep to a minimum the potential for breeding more feral cats. The district council of Streaky Bay is way ahead of the rest of the State. It recognises that cat ownership brings responsibility with it. I fail to see why people should object to what is proposed. What is proposed in this Bill is nowhere near as limiting in its controls as those placed on people living in the Streaky Bay District Council area.

In this debate we are talking not just about cute little fluffy kittens playing on the lounge carpet but about limiting the 10 kilogram-plus cats which take prey with the greatest of ease. We are talking about national parks which are supposed to be refuges for our fauna. Instead, by neglecting our pets, we have turned these national parks into killing fields for cats as well as for foxes. We cannot do anything immediately about the foxes, but as responsible citizens we can do something right now about cats.

I have spoken strongly against poor puss, but I acknowledge the benefits of pet ownership. We have two in my family. Our children learn at an early age the value of having pets when they are given their first kittens. Cats provide company and companionship and they are capable of showing their appreciation to kindness and care. This all helps the learning process for children, and it is a very valuable time for them.

Cats are also particularly valuable pets for the aged and infirm and for those who live alone. A cat will sit and be patted for hours, bringing company and relief for many souls living out their lives alone. We must never lose sight of the therapeutic value of pets, especially pet cats. However, we must accept that we are responsible for other animals as well, especially our native animals. Their future is entrusted to us and we owe it to them to ensure that they survive without fear of molestation from feral cats. I support the Bill.