

# Cat curfew - Frequently Asked Questions

## What does a 24-hour cat curfew actually mean?

All cats within the municipality are required to be confined at all times to the owner's premises, unless the cat is appropriately restrained.

Please know that the 24-hour cat curfew **does not** mean that cats are required to be kept inside all day.

## What does “appropriately restrained” mean?

This covers any reasonable means of restraint, such as a safe cat carrier or container.

## How did Council reach the decision to implement a 24-hour cat curfew?

During Council's Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-25 (DAMP) community engagement in 2021, we heard that cats harming wildlife was one of the three biggest concerns from 734 survey respondents - both pet owners and non-pet owners. Fifty-five per cent of respondents said they would like a 24-hour cat curfew in both rural and urban areas to minimise trespassing by cats and to help protect the native wildlife, particularly birds.

As a result, the DAMP identified an action to investigate and make recommendations regarding extending the cat confinement order. The previous order required cats to be securely confined to the owner's premises between 8pm and 6am.

As part of our investigation, we conducted more consultation in 2022 which included the 'Cattitude' survey (684 survey respondents - 42% were cat owners). Feedback found there was support for a stricter cat confinement order, evidenced by:

- 57% said cat curfews need to be more restrictive in urban areas.
- 58% would like a 24-hour cat curfew in urban areas.
- 58% believe the urban cat curfew (8pm to 6pm) should be implemented in rural areas.
- 52% have experienced a cat nuisance in the past 12 months.
- Majority thought a 24-hour cat curfew should be considered for urban areas (59% said yes) and rural areas (47% said yes).
- Majority of cat owners keep their cats inside most of the time (51%) or all of the time (21%).

## How was the consultation carried out?

The engagement campaign started with an education program in August 2022, followed by the engagement period which was underpinned by the 'Cattitude' survey.

Various communications channels were used to promote the education campaign and engagement period, including:

- Council's social media accounts, featuring posts with a range of subject matter experts and shared to community group pages.
- Advertisements, news stories and councillor columns in local media outlets, both printed and online publications, and a 3AW interview.
- Emails to our database of 3,000 pet owners.

- Council's website.

The consultation period ran from 9 August to 12 September. The survey welcomed 684 responses - a strong participation rate. View the survey responses via [surfcoast.vic.gov.au/Cattitude](https://surfcoast.vic.gov.au/Cattitude).

## **I noticed that all cat owners, except one, who participated in the survey responded 'no' to a 24-hour cat curfew, so why has Council introduced it?**

Feedback from two surveys has helped inform Council, prior to the decision.

- Our Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-25 (DAMP) community engagement in 2021 told us:
  - o Cats harming wildlife was one of the three biggest concerns from 734 survey respondents - both pet owners and non-pet owners.
  - o Fifty-five per cent of DAMP respondents said they would like a 24-hour cat curfew in both rural and urban areas to minimise trespassing by cats and to help protect the native wildlife, particularly birds.

Council is committed to environmental leadership, and wants to see improved understanding and protection of biodiversity, local ecosystems, landscapes and natural features. According to [a study by The University of Sydney](#), on average each roaming pet cat kills 186 reptiles, birds and mammals per year, most of them native to Australia.

- The Cattitude survey welcomed 684 respondents, including 42% cat owners - many who would have been alerted to the survey via the email we sent to our database of local pet owners.

As well as helping prevent harm to wildlife, cat curfews improve the health and safety of cats. A cat curfew can prevent injuries that can occur through fights with other cats, being run over by a vehicle, eating toxic plants or poisons, or from wandering onto neighbouring households where they could cause a nuisance.

We also know that according to [Animal Welfare Victoria](#), cats don't need to roam. If their basic needs are met, cats enjoy longer and healthier lives when safely contained to the property.

## **Why can't there be a different cat curfew for rural areas and urban areas?**

While we recognise that confining a cat to a farm can be difficult and they are often instrumental in controlling vermin, adopting a 24-hour cat curfew for the whole Surf Coast Shire provides equity. It means that cat ownership responsibilities are consistent across the shire.

## **I'm concerned that cats will still roam in my neighbourhood. Why can't cats be confined in cages, to prevent them from leaving their owner's premises?**

Owners are responsible for the health and welfare of their cat(s) and must provide both the basic necessities and a good quality of life for their cat(s). For some owners this means keeping their cat(s) inside, while others may choose to keep them outside. Or it might be a combination of both.

Minimum standards for housing, including enclosures, are set under the Domestic Animals Act. See [Animal Welfare Victoria](#) for details.

## **My cat enjoys spending time outside and occasionally ventures out of my property. How am I supposed to contain it to my property all of the time?**

Legally you cannot let your cat trespass onto other people's properties. If your cat is found wandering off your premises and is not identified, they can be impounded. You may have to pay a fine to reclaim your cat from the Council pound.

According to [Animal Welfare Victoria](#), cats that are confined to your property live three times longer than those that are allowed to roam.

You can keep your cat in the house or flat with you, or in the garage or shed at night. Make sure they have:

- a warm dry sleeping area
- a litter tray
- plenty of water.

Other options include buying or building a cat enclosure for your yard, or installing cat proof fencing. You can find advice on [enclosures and fencing options](#) via Animal Welfare Victoria.

(Source: <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/livestock-and-animals/animal-welfare-victoria/cats/enclosures-and-fencing/cat-confinement-enclosures-and-fencing>)

## **How will the revised cat curfew be enforced?**

Our Council rangers help keep our community safe, and respond to customer complaints and requests. The updated cat curfew will allow for stronger enforcement by rangers to manage domestic cats when not confined to their registered owner's premises.

Rangers can issue warnings to educate community members, while they can also issue penalties. A cat at large penalty is \$92 on the first offence, increasing up to three penalty units for further offences (one penalty unit is \$185).

From 1 February 2022 to 1 February 2023 there were 33 cats impounded or trapped, with all except two unregistered/feral cats. There was one infringement issued for a cat trespassing on its second offence.

## **How do I report a roaming cat?**

Contact us on **5261 0600**, even after hours.

## **I'm a cat owner. Will my annual animal registration fee be reduced, to assist with any costs I might incur to ensure I adhere to the new curfew?**

Council staff considered a variety of incentives including discounted registration, reimbursements and vouchers to help cover any alterations. We will not introduce these due to the impact on Council resources. Also, for urban cat owners there was an existing requirement to keep their cat confined to their property between 8pm and 6am.

## **When will the revised cat curfew come into effect?**

The revised cat curfew will start 30 September 2023, so cat owners have six months to prepare.

## **Why did Council decide on a six-month transition period?**

The Cattitude survey asked cat owners what timeframe would be required to transition, if a 24-hour curfew was introduced. We received similar responses for 'I'm ready to go now' (33%) and 'more than two years' (39%).

Given cat owners already have a legal obligation to ensure their cat doesn't trespass on other people's properties, six months was the preferred transition period.

From late March onwards, we'll support cat owners by promoting resources on how to make modifications to their property and their cat's behaviour if required, so that they can comply with the 24-hour cat curfew.

Resources and information sessions will be promoted on this webpage, and via email updates to our pet owner database.

## **What about dogs - how do they need to be confined?**

Under state law, dogs are required to be securely confined to their owner's property.

## **How many cat owners are there in the Surf Coast Shire?**

Registered cat owners (924) account for 2.5% of the shire's population.

## **Is Surf Coast Shire the first municipality to introduce a 24-hour cat curfew?**

A 24-hour cat curfew has been implemented in other municipalities, with some councils having one in place since 2000.

## **What are the penalties associated with cats in the Surf Coast Shire?**

- Penalty for unregistered cat or dog: \$370
- Penalty for cat at large: \$92 on the first offence, increasing up to three penalty units for further offences (one penalty unit is \$185)
- Cats who trespass: same amounts as 'cat at large', as above.

## **What was the previous cat curfew, before Council adopted the revised one in March 2023?**

The previous cat curfew - adopted 20 February 2001 - required cats in urban areas to be securely confined to the owner's premises between 8pm and 6am. There was no curfew in rural areas.

## **I have questions about the new cat curfew. Who can I contact?**

Please [Lodge a Request](#) with us. It's the quickest and easiest way to deal with us. This way your request can be tracked.