DRAFT

Submission to The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on the Draft Environmental Assessment of the Suitability of the import of the Savannah Cat (Domestic Cat × Serval hybrid species) into Australia.

The Australasian Wildlife Management Society (AWMS) is the lead wildlife management society in the Australasian region. It strongly opposes the introduction of Savannah Cats on the following grounds:

1. Savannah Cats are a cross between the African Serval cat and the domestic cat. The feral domestic cat is already listed as a Key Threatening Process under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act because of its impact on native Australian species[1].
2. Serval cats, like domestic feral cats, have a catholic diet. It is therefore logical that Savannah Cats will have a similar catholic diet should they become feral.
3. Because Savannah Cats are derived from the much larger Serval cat there is a reasonable probability that if Savannah Cats become feral or interbreed with feral domestic cats, the feral cat population will increase in size and weight. This will increase their ability to enlarge the suite of native animals they are able to prey on in the wild.
4. Feral domestic cats do not like to hunt in water or very wet areas but Savannah Cats are very comfortable with wet environments[2] (Wikipedia -savannah cats). Feral Savannah Cats or their domestic crosses may then be able to occupy the one area in which feral domestic cats are not currently a pest and that is the wet tropical rainforests.
5. Savannah Cats are much more athletic than feral domestic cats, being able to jump vertically for eight feet from a standing position[2] (Wikipedia –savannah cats). This increases their ability to capture a broader range prey more readily and potentially be more efficient predators than feral domestic cats.
6. A risk assessment based on Bomford (2003)[3] for terrestrial mammals concludes that Savannah Cats present an extreme risk of establishing a wild population and an extreme risk of becoming a pest following establishment. The F1 female Savannah Cat and beyond is fertile while the male Savannah Cat is fertile after the F5 generation.
7. Australia has a poor record of preventing domestic animals and other introduced species from becoming feral or wild and impacting on the environment or agriculture. We have feral cattle, horses, camels, pigs, deer, goats, dogs, cats, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. We have wild populations of rabbits and foxes. Each year tens of millions of dollars are spent managing the problem across the country. The Federal Government and the States have a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) established specifically for the research and management of invasive species. The Australasian Wildlife Management Society believes that over time the Savannah Cat would be included in the feral cat component of the Invasive Animals CRC should it be imported to Australia.
8. Control of feral cats has proven to be very difficult, not only because of technical problems but also because of different State, Territory and Local Government laws and regulations developed in response to varying community values and beliefs over time.

In Summary, the Australasian Wildlife Management Society believes:

a) The Commonwealth Government would devalue the natural common wealth of Australia if it allowed the importation of Savannah Cats. They pose an extreme risk of establishing a wild population and an extreme risk of becoming a pest once they established in the wild or interbred with the current established population of feral cats.
b) The most cost effective and environmentally responsible way to control Savannah Cats would be to ban their importation.

References:

[1] Environment Australia 1999. Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Domestic Feral Cats. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

[2] Wikipedia.org/wiki/Savannah_ (cat)

[3] Bomford, M. 2003. Risk Assessment for the Import and Keeping of Exotic Vertebrates in Australia. Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra

 Bomford, M and Hart, Q 2002 Non –Indigenous Vertebrates in Australia. Pp 25-44 in D. Pimental (Ed) Biological Invasions: Environmental and Economic Costs of Alien Plant, Animal and Microbe Invasions. CRC Press, New York