

A BLUEPRINT FOR HUMANE CAT MANAGEMENT / PART 2

Including a response to the New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG) Report, 2020.

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BACKGROUND:

The National Cat Management Strategy Group, (NCMSG), was established in November, 2014, with a brief to 'develop a National overarching strategy for responsible, compassionate and humane cat management through a collaborative and proactive approach'. Membership of the group was limited, but included selected representatives from Local Government New Zealand, (LGNZ), the Morgan Foundation, (MF), The New Zealand Companion Animal Council, (NZCAC), The New Zealand Veterinary Association, (NZVA), NZVA Companion Animal Veterinarians, (NZCAS), and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, (SPCA), with the Ministry for Primary Industries, (MPI), acting as observers, and the Department of Conservation, (DoC), providing technical advice. A draft report was produced in September, 2016, with 'submissions' from interested external parties following, and the final report completed and presented by the NCMSG in August, 2020.

Earlier, in the absence of any coordinated legislation relating to cat management, Local and Regional **Territorial Authorities** individually and severally undertook the task of drafting their own regulations for cats, predominantly through specific By-laws, in an effort to create, and enforce, local measures to control cats. During their deliberations councils received considerable lobbying from a number of groups with 'conservation' interests, most notably the Morgan Foundation, Predator Free NZ, Forest & Bird, together with the Department of Conservation, many of whom were already represented on the NCMSG, all seeking strict cat controls. The result was a wide-ranging array of heavily influenced regulations that were inconsistent, in many cases impractical or unenforceable, and in some cases even illegal. Additionally, as an added consequence, cats became targeted as 'pests' in some Regional Pest Management Plans, (RPMP), thus creating unprecedented lethal measures that threatened their lives, and indeed their future existence.

In an effort to restore some sanity and balance to the situation unravelling at the Local Authority level, the Community Cat Coalition, in consultation with a large number of interested parties, produced '**A Blueprint for Humane Cat Management**' in November, 2019, initially for the Auckland Council, but subsequently circulated nationally for the edification of all Territorial Authorities. This (Part 2) document will bring further clarity to the 'Blueprint', particularly in view of the recently completed NCMSG document, on which we will comment, bringing us closer to some national accord in the interests of cats, people and the environment.

NATIONAL CAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY GROUP REPORT AUGUST 2020:

'It is important to develop a scientifically and ethically well founded consensus on how to manage cats, explicitly bearing in mind the diversity within management that needs to occur. Strategies built on this consensus are most likely to be developed through constructive, collaborative engagement between those in animal welfare and conservation. While cats continue to suffer, and wildlife species continue to decline, all stakeholders share a duty of care to work together [in harmony].

Humane Society United States, (HSUS).

The full 197 page report from the NCMSG can be accessed on line by visiting the website www.companionanimals.nz under 'Publications' reference 'National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG) Report 2020'. The comments that follow address the contents of that report, in the approximate order presented to retain the sequence of recommendations, and only address matters in which we feel healthy, constructive engagement is necessary to reach an honest and mutual consensus.

It has always been acknowledged, by those involved, that **the management of cats and their welfare can be a complex, and often heart-breaking, vocation**, given their varying circumstances and needs, coupled with our moral and ethical duties towards them. This has been hampered by the reality that no regulatory guidance exists to attend to the complexities of their management, to ultimately provide a well informed and effective strategy for their well-being. For this reason the efforts of the NCMSG are to be applauded in the hope of achieving a 'national strategy for responsible, compassionate and humane cat management through a collaborative and proactive approach', as their brief called for.

The resultant report is clearly, and unashamedly, a scientifically based document, evidenced by the large list of selected science studies referenced in section 9, (pages 95 to 133), totalling 456 in all, and appearing on over 1,100 occasions throughout the body of the document. Where it would be expected certain reference materials would be included in a paper of this nature, the number, clearly carefully selected to underscore certain issues, is totally excessive. (By example, some 30 different papers study *Toxoplasma gondii*, a worldwide infection recently attributed to cats as carriers, infecting humans, animals including Hectors Dolphins, being experimentally used to infect farm animals, including goats, calves, lambs, red deer and pigs, in far-flung countries such as China, Brazil and even the sub-Antarctic. You really do have to question the relevance of such studies, and in such detail).

Knowledge, gleaned from a well-rounded study of scientific information, will always play a part in determining acceptable animal management strategies and practices, but it is only part of the equation. An equally significant amount of practical knowledge must also come from the actual experiences of professionals, such as veterinarians who have an intimate knowledge of their subjects, animal shelters who experience first-hand the public ignorance and the resultant despair that can bring, welfare caregivers who attend to those who are lost or abandoned and in need of love and care, and all those families who share their homes and lives with cats who understand and treasure their companionship, their pure affection, their curious habits and the numerous benefits they provide to enhance all our lives.

It is only when these elements fuse together in equal quantities that we can ever hope to devise a meaningful strategy for the management of cats that contains all the necessary ingredients for their well-being, and of those around them, that will satisfy the collaborative consensus we all strive for, and need, to succeed in our collective hopes and ambitions.

Finally, there is one other essential ingredient that is needed when we undertake the responsibility of planning for the needs of all sentient beings, (including cats), one that should be naturally inherent in all of us, and one that appears frequently in our own vocabulary as animal welfarists, (and also in the NCMSG document). The ingredient is described in a variety of words, including 'compassionate', 'ethical', 'responsible', 'honest', 'respectful', 'loving' and 'humane', (to name but a few).

These are not just words, they are beacons of hope that light the way ahead. They must **never** be excluded from our vocabulary.

POPULATIONS/CATEGORIES OF CATS DEFINED:

Biologically, [companion], feral and stray cat populations are distinct. Feral cat populations have no dependence on humans and avoid human contact. In contrast stray cats are a sub-set of the companion cat population and remain dependent on humans to a greater or lesser degree and seek out/do not avoid human habitation. These behavioural distinctions lend themselves to definitions of [companion], stray and feral [cats] which makes practical sense'.

Dr Denis Turner, Institute for Applied Ethology and Animal Psychology, Switzerland.

When the '**Code of Welfare for Cats**' was first drafted by the New Zealand Companion Council (NZCAC) in February 2005, considerable thought was given to the biological and ecological differences in the population demographics of cats to clearly determine and understand their varying needs. **The definitions 'companion', 'stray'. and 'feral'** were approved by National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, (NAWAC), and endorsed by the Minister in March 2007, becoming obligatory under the Animal Welfare Act, (AWA). These definitions have since been confirmed again in a review of the Code of Welfare in October 2018.

It is well to remember the origin and status of these definitions, now generally accepted internationally, as now, 14 years on, they are still not recognised, used or understood either by local authorities or the general public. Some councils have endeavoured to merge the two categories 'stray and feral' into one, to ease their administrative burdens, whilst others have resorted to re-labelling both collectively as 'pests' to further undermine them. The public constantly, and incorrectly, refer to 'feral' cats when describing any unwanted cats on their properties, and their desire to be rid of them, in a further example of ignorance as to their correct description.

It must be reiterated that any description, other than those in the 'Code of Welfare for Cats', does '**not** remove their welfare protections' in law, neither does it eliminate the obligation that all cats must be handled 'using generally accepted practices' at all times and under all circumstances under the Animal Welfare Act.

In an effort to ‘better capture cat categories’ the NCMSG suggests added wording to describe stray cats, whether ‘managed’ or ‘unmanaged’, as being ‘semi-owned’ and either ‘socialised’ or ‘un-socialised’, which we believe will only add to the confusion that already exists with the established, and approved, categories. For this reason alone **they should not be changed until there is a complete interpretation, understanding and knowledge of the existing categories.**

THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF RESPONSIBLE AND HUMANE CAT MANAGEMENT – DESEXING & IDENTIFICATION:

‘Desexing reduces cat overpopulation and is a key aspect of responsible ownership of cats which has positive long-term health and behavioural benefits. Identification is a fundamental tool of animal management at a community level’.

National Cat Management Strategy Group.

Before we delve into some of the individual recommendations of the NCMSG, we should start with two specific welfare topics in which there is no dispute, and conversely has the total accord of all.

Desexing has always been considered a pre-requisite of **‘best practice’ for all cat owners, guardians and cat carers**, and a considerable investment has been made to ensure it is undertaken as widely as possible. Historically the SPCA has always desexed all cats/kittens, including pre-pubertal, prior to adoption, and has also provided funds to stray cat rescue groups to assist with their desexing costs. In our ‘Blueprint for Humane Cat Management’ we recommended that local authorities should consider by-laws prohibiting the sale/adoption of cats/kittens from pet shops, shelters, rescue groups and individuals unless desexed prior, and that they should also provide financial assistance to recognised cat rescue groups undertaking desexing of the stray population. Should mandatory desexing be considered, as has been suggested, regulatory controls will be needed to enforce it (and that will not be an easy task), however, in terms of reducing the surplus cat population, and the potential resultant misery that can accompany it, there is definite merit in the idea.

The same reasoning could well be applied to the matter of microchipping, and its accompanying registration of cats, particularly **if it is enforced purely for identification and repatriation purposes**. However, any suggestion that the microchip be used as a device whereby any cat, whether companion, stray or feral, without a microchip can be targeted for destruction without question, or when trapped or captured no microchip search is undertaken, in both cases this is **totally unacceptable**. Since the introduction of the microchip there has been widespread support for this method of identification, (approx. 80%), with excellent repatriation results achieved for missing cats being reunited with their owners/guardians. The accompanying registration, undertaken at the same time as implantation by the veterinarian/implanter, ensures full records of the animals are kept, assuming maintained, and are available nation-wide. Although other methods of identification do exist, (with notes of caution), the use of the microchip, for reasons of repatriation, whether voluntary or mandated, is fully supported with appropriate conditions of use.

HUMANE CAT MANAGEMENT - ADDRESSING SOME HUMAN AND SOME ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES:

'Ecosystems are notoriously, and wonderfully, complex things. They are comprised of dense networks of interactions that bind the fate of one species to another. Cats have become deeply entangled in this web of life. Attempting to remove cats from [Australian] ecosystems will not be a clean [or] painless surgery, and it will not heal the patient'.

Dr Arian Wallach, Fellow, Charles Darwin University &

Dr Daniel Ramp, Senior Lecturer, University of Technology, Sydney.

The NCMSG report has highlighted a few 'issues' with cats, most of them manageable, but all needing to be addressed for reasons of 'best practice'.

- **HEALTH ISSUES INVOLVING CATS** – In addition to the normal 'risks' associated with handling cats, including scratches and bites which can become infected, zoonotic diseases, such as flea infestations, ringworm and roundworm contaminating the environment are mentioned, although most are minor, and manageable, posing little threat to humans. However the recent emergence of the protozoan parasite **toxoplasma gondii**, where cats are the only definitive host, and responsible for spreading **toxoplasmosis**, has sent ripples of concern through some conservation circles.

Transmission of this from cats to humans is 'extremely uncommon' and even although approximately 30% of the world's population carry the infection, only a very small percentage of humans is likely to develop symptoms. Given the brief time frame, (1–3 weeks), in which cats can be infected, and the limited sources from which it can be contracted, (including undercooked contaminated meat, handling cat faeces, and congenital (mother-unborn child) transmission), in reality the human infection rate is extremely low. Main environmental sources include garden soil, sandpits, unwashed vegetables and fruit, and poor kitchen hygiene especially when handling raw contaminated meat, simple hygienic preventative measures can be taken to minimise the likelihood of human infection.

In the agricultural sector toxoplasmosis can cause problems in some stock, particularly sheep during the lambing season, causing them to abort. The presence of cats may encourage the spread of the disease through oocysts which allow the transfer to other animal hosts in pastures where stock feed and graze. Preventative measures are available through a single dose vaccine for the variety of stock affected. Of real concern has been the discovery of toxoplasmosis in our treasured and much loved Hector's and Maui dolphins, which is caused by contaminated water from the infection spilling into streams, rivers and storm-water drains and into their places of habitation. Preventative steps must be taken to protect these species.

The 'name and shame game' displayed by a number of detractors has been seriously overstated when laying the blame totally in the direction of cats, particularly given the **low incidents of human contamination, and the preventative and remedial measures that are available.**

- **PROTECTING OUR BIODIVERSITY** – Unquestionably, New Zealand’s unique biodiversity is one of our most precious assets. Described as **‘affecting every living organism within the ecosystem’** it reflects the richness and variety of life, considered both essential and desirable, touching every species, be they plant, animal or human, ‘binding the fate of one species to another’. We disturb that to our peril.

We need no other reason to passionately protect this valuable asset with all the skills at our disposal because of its complexity and its far-reaching effect on all our lives, and in that reality there is no debate on the need to treasure and preserve it. Accordingly, in the area of cat management anything that is perceived to be a threat to our biodiversity needs to be addressed, and it is here that the cat debate becomes polarised, divisive and sadly distorted, particularly when it becomes in a matter of ‘cats vs wildlife’.

Cat owners/guardians/carers will all acknowledge that most cats will hunt some prey, not necessarily as a need to survive but as a natural instinct, and in the process there will inevitably be casualties, including birds some of which may even be native species. The extent of this predation is highly dependent on the categories of cats (previously described), the environment in which they live, the relationship they have with humans, their existing diet, care, age, and other circumstances. They certainly cannot collectively be described as ‘serial killers’ as has been the case with some militant cat critics, neither is there, as the NCMSG suggests, ‘well documented’ evidence of their ‘significant cause of mortality’ in native species - even the scientific community is at serious odds over the quantum and extent of this.

‘What I find inconsistent in an otherwise scientific debate about biodiversity is how the indictment of cats has been pursued in spite of the evidence’.
Dr Gary J Patronec, VMD, PhD, DCM, Veterinarian & Epidemiologist, (USA).

Irrespective of the factual anomalies that may be contained in the ‘science’ of cat management, one reality does exist, and that is our absolute obligation to respond to concerns expressed that may affect the welfare of any species in the ecosystem, to their detriment. The response to this concern is extrapolated in the NCMSG report, and in our own ‘Blueprint’ document, and quite simply proposes **the selection and establishment of designated ‘sensitive ecological areas’, (SEA) where ‘at risk’ species may reside in safety.** These currently exist in various forms but a more formal and visible system is required that will draw attention to them, and educate the public on their purpose and function.

Whether they are existing islands, which have their own natural boundaries, and where undesirable predators are precluded, or the construction of ‘predator exclusion boundary fencing’ in which protected species reside, or simply larger designated reserves where vulnerable wildlife are protected by local authorities, and/or other trust-worthy bodies, where their safety can be assured. Where these ‘sensitive ecological areas’ extend to include houses, it is understood that the residents who choose to live there are fully cognisant of the limitations imposed on them, and the reasons they exist

It should be noted that cat management in designated 'sensitive ecological areas' applies to both **companion and stray cats**, (feral cats also live in sensitive ecological areas but their management requirements differ substantially from those applying to companion and stray cats), and must be compliant with the Animal Welfare Act, and the Code of Welfare for Cats, where they are protected, but could also be subject to additional regulatory measures, including those Acts listed [below].

Applications for recognition as a 'sensitive ecological area' should go through an 'official' process describing and justifying the species being protected, formally gazetted/registered, and made publically visible with appropriate signage with special regulations detailed. All animals being removed from sensitive areas must be undertaken humanely, and in the case of trapped cats have identification checked to determine 'ownership' and if owned repatriated, or rehomed/relocated to another area. Cat owners/guardians/carers must respect these designated sensitive areas, and fully comply with the detailed regulations applying to them.

THE ART OF MANAGING FERAL CATS IN AN ETHICALLY RESPONSIBLE AND HUMANE MANNER:

'Whatever metaphysical position is adopted, and whatever place is given to the human species, man has no right to destroy a species [of plant or animal] on the pretext that it is useless. We have no right to exterminate what we have not created. A humble plant [or] a tiny insect, contains more marvels and greater mysteries than the most wonderful edifices we can construct'.

(Jean Dorst – ornithologist and philosopher – (France)).

Because of their circumstances the management of feral cats require different skills and, in some cases regulations, to companion and stray cats. However our moral and ethical obligations towards them are not lessened by the circumstances or environment in which they live, or their perceived role in our overall ecology.

Firstly it is essential that we revisit the established definition of a 'feral cat' as detailed in the Code of Welfare for Cats to ensure we are absolutely clear in our understanding of their circumstances and needs. By definition **feral cats do not live in areas of human habitation, avoid human contact, and have no dependence on humans for any of their needs**, and are therefore distinctly different to companion and stray cats. They are described as 'living in a wild state' which can impose some varying management techniques under various Acts which do not lessen the general principles of the Animal Welfare Act calling for the humane treatment of all animals. Those Acts possibly affecting cat management include:

- **WILDLIFE ACT (1953)** – Feral cats appear under the definition of 'animal', and also 'wildlife' in the Act. They are not protected under this Act but the Director-General may authorise the hunting of any wildlife causing damage.

- **BIOSECURITY ACT (1993)** – There is no specific mention of ‘feral cats’ under this Act although they are managed under Regional Pest Management Plans (RPMP) administered by Regional councils, which call for the ‘eradication or management of harmful organisms’.
- **CONSERVATION ACT (1987)** – No animals can be ‘trapped, killed or taken from a conservation area without a permit’, which is issued under this Act. This extends to include entering and/or discharging any hunting weapon, trapping, netting or snaring of any animal, or the laying of poisons, without this special permit. Additionally no animals (including cats) can be released/liberated into a designated conservation area.

It is quite apparent that the majority of feral cat management is undertaken by the Department of Conservation, (DoC), whose permits appear to extend to wide-ranging powers which seem to leap the boundaries of public acceptability, and ethical responsibilities, and it is here that the gap between ‘conservation’ and ‘welfare’ widens. **Conservation, by definition, means the preservation of species of value, and not the annihilation of those perceived to be of little or no value.** Until we achieve accord on that issue we will continue to have statements as wide apart as “my [department] at DoC are incredibly good at killing things” (Maggie Barry, Minister of Conservation), as opposed to “the aim of conservation is not to generate and ever increasing {dead} body count, but to guide human behaviour to enable [all] species to flourish” (Arian Wallach, Fellow, Charles Darwin University). **We need to decide as a Nation which of those statements best defines and upholds our animal welfare standards.**

The NCMSG report outlines current methods used in the management of feral cats, and by direct implication, approves such methods. They include:

- **SHOOTING** – The lethal shooting of feral cats, either during the day or by spotlighting at night, is considered by many to be humane, however it is subject to a variety of variables, including the competency of the hunter to clearly identify the target and its distance, the use of the correct firearm and ammunition, and their ability to evaluate a quick and ‘humane’ death, (a condition of the Animal Welfare Act), all of these requiring appropriate training, experience and skills to undertake efficiently. The shooting of cats caught in traps is unacceptable as there is no opportunity to establish ownership or whether identified before the shooting is undertaken.

A very unfortunate by-product of this activity is **the public perception that shooting cats is perfectly normal, and therefore acceptable**, resulting in a large number of cats, both companion and stray, being dispatched in this way by the untrained public, which is well documented, as is the resultant despair inflicted on large numbers of owners/guardians/carers who have lost their beloved animals in this most unacceptable manner.

- **TRAPPING** – Three types of traps are commonly used in feral cat control and management in New Zealand, all of which are regulated under the Animal Welfare Act, and the National Animal Welfare Advisory, (NAWAC), as to their suitability on welfare grounds.

The three traps include a variety of lethal *Kill Traps* causing instant death to trapped animals, *leg-hold traps*, (restricted use under the Animal Welfare Act), capturing the cat by the leg until attended to, and the 'humane' *capture traps* caging animals until also attended to either re-release or kill. It is probably reasonable to assume that the regulations applying to these traps are sufficient to ensure their proper use for feral cat management, although their use is questionable, but this is far from the case when used, often illegally and unmercifully, to dispatch companion and stray cats.

The use of traps is encouraged, and even promoted, by Local Authorities through their agencies, sub- contractors, 'conservation' entities, community groups and even members of the public, to undertake cat management/control, which is dangerous to the extreme, and certainly in many cases not compliant with conditions of the Act. Lethal traps are placed indiscriminately in parks and other public places posing a risk to untargeted animals and children, and illegal leg-hold traps that find their way into the hands of the public and pose similar risks to both, Cage traps are sold/given to the public, including families with children, to trap any cats they can, whether feral, companion or stray, without any efforts to determine ownership, to be killed without any instruction on the legality of their actions or the method to be used. **It is inappropriate to set cat traps in the community, or to encourage their use, for the sole purpose of extermination, as ultimately we cause more damage to our ecology than any good that may come of it - these activities are morally wrong.**

- **THE USE OF POISONS** – It is the use of poisons that generates the widest controversy when it comes to the control and management of 'unwanted species' in Aotearoa, and feral cats, ('in all kinds of habitats', incorrectly suggested by the NCMMSG), sadly seem to fall into this category. As opposed to the humane alternative of using chemical, or even surgical, means to reduce the reproductive activities of cats, and therefore their numbers, feral cats are included for poisoning along with many other 'undesirable' species.

Sodium fluoroacetate, (or 1080 by which it is best known), is normally spread by aerial drop and is the most commonly used Toxic Agent used, within New Zealand accounting for around 90% of the world's production, (a somewhat frightening statistic). It kills a wide range of vertebrate animals, (and some plants), indiscriminately, (including native species), relentlessly and painfully, often following agonising hours, with its residue spilling into and contaminating our waterways causing further deleterious ecological damage. Although its use is regulated, **as a direct threat to our unique biodiversity 1080 has no place in our ecosystem, and humane, safe and ethical alternatives need to be located, and used.**

Para-aminopropiophenone/4-aminoprop (PAPP) was developed in New Zealand for the sole purpose of targeting cats and comes in a paste form. Again a regulated product. its use extends beyond the habitat of feral cats and into rural/urban areas where stray and companion cats may reside. Death by ingestion is a long and extremely painful process and far from humane, causing some concerns as to when, how and where it is used.

THE HUMANE MANAGEMENT OF STRAY CATS, AND THE EMERGENCE OF TRAP/NEUTER/RETURN, (TNR):

‘[Trap/Neuter/Return], TNR saves Government resources, protects public health, respects the lives of community cats [as supported by a large majority of the public], and protects wildlife by reducing [over time] the number of free-roaming cats’.

The American Bar Association – (USA)

One of the proposed ‘outcomes; from the NCMSG report is that ‘there be no stray cats in New Zealand, and this idealistic approach is most unlikely to ever occur given the reality of the many reasons stray cats exist, and the sheer volume of their numbers, which have never been accurately calculated. Although humane measures to reduce these numbers through various desexing initiatives exist, and will be effective, the circumstances of their origins, including a tendency to wander and become lost, to be abandoned and discarded by uncaring humans, and their natural instincts and abilities to survive, will ensure that this ‘subset of the companion cat’ will always exist and be a part of our community, and certainly not necessarily to our detriment in view of their ability to hunt vermin.

Lethal ‘trap and kill’ methods have been used in an attempt to ‘manage’ stray cats, but in addition to being extremely controversial in its ruthless and indiscriminate procedures, it has also been ineffective in reducing stray cat populations in the long term, and in reality, thanks to the phenomenon of the ‘vacuum effect,’ has often resulted in substantial increases in their numbers. Lethal measures are immoral.

The only internationally recognised, and accepted, system for the humane management of stray cats in the community is the Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) program and it is recommended that this be accepted and adopted into our stray cat management policy.

TNR has a long history dating as far back as the 1950’s when it was first introduced into Europe, the UK, and later more formally into America when a resolution was adopted in the US House of Delegates (as a result of the submission of the American Bar Association, [above]), to ‘urge state, local, territorial and tribal legislative bodies and government agencies to adopt laws and policies to allow the implementation and administration of Trap/Neuter/Return programs for community [stray] cats within their jurisdictions to promote their effective efficient and humane management’.

TNR has been widely used in New Zealand by some shelters, (including the SPCA where the Community Cat Coalition was established in Auckland in 2009), as well as independent cat welfare groups, and individual cat carers. The NCMSG in its report acknowledges its use as follows: ‘An increasing body of evidence suggests that long term TNR programs can effectively reduce free-ranging cat populations, especially those that include an adoption programme, monitoring and desexing of new cats arriving into the colony’. These conditions, and more, form the basis of **TNR activities working under strict codes of practice requiring training, special skills, compliance and ethical behaviour.**

Trap/Neuter/Return, (note: **Not release**), requires the permission and support of the land owner to operate. Humane capture traps are used by trappers, with cages checked at least daily and covered for eventual transportation. Microchips must be scanned to ensure the captured cat does not have a registered owner, and if so it must be repatriated immediately. After a general health and temperament check the veterinarian will undertake the desexing. Identification (microchip recommended), vaccination with a final health check before the trapper returns the cat to the colony, (or, if of suitable temperament, arranges the adoption into an approved home). If released back to the colony arrangements for the ongoing feeding and welfare must be made, and guaranteed, for the cats in care.

(Full details in Community Cat Coalition Handbook or visit the website, www.catcoalition.org.nz/resources/handbook)

Any perceived disadvantages of TNR are far outweighed by the humane outcomes that occur with the programme, including:

- **ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF WELFARE** – Through TNR, essential management ingredients are provided to stray/abandoned cats in the community that would not otherwise be provided, including population control (reduction) through desexing, identification to signal managed cats in care, ongoing welfare needs including feeding and health catered for, community ‘nuisance’ complaints about stray cats substantially reduced to and control and monitoring with continuing activities.
- **ELIMINATING HEALTH CONCERNS** – Because TNR requires the involvement of veterinarians for desexing procedures, this includes examinations for any specific health concerns that may exist for cats being returned to colonies which can be attended to as recommended, also including parasite treatments and vaccinations against potential health threats that may exist. Additionally, temperament assessments for potential adoptions can occur at the same time.
- **MANAGED COLONIES PROTECT, AND SAVE, LIVES** – The purpose of TNR is to undertake humane cat management rather than lethal control methods. In undertaking this, special care is taken to ensure the existing colonies are safe and free from potential risk risks that may present themselves. Care is also taken when returning cats to avoid sensitive ecological areas, and the need to hunt is greatly reduced through regular feeding regimes. Rescued stray cats from colonies can be individually adopted, with friendly adult cats who have been evaluated as suitable for rehoming, as well as kittens who are young enough to be socialised, thus providing further opportunities to humanely reduce colony populations.
- **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT CREATES CARING COMMUNITIES** – Finally, the involvement of the community in managing stray (‘community’) cats will not only reduce local nuisance behaviours associated with them, but it will also provide the opportunity for communities to come together to help in the ongoing care of those rescued cats, thereby developing a caring community which can be a significant and satisfying emotion within any community that cares for animals, and people, in need.

It should not be forgotten that TNR is undertaken exclusively by individuals and groups on a voluntary basis simply out of their reverence, compassion and respect for these animals who rely on them for their total wellbeing, generally sustaining them from their own funds, whilst undertaking a valuable and effective service to the communities in which they live. Their unselfish dedication to the animals is undeniable and is without the support they should be receiving, a situation that can be resolved with the acceptance and inclusion of TNR as the humane management procedure for all stray cats **The endorsement of TNR by MPI and the inclusion of it in local body management plans**, to include financial subsidies for desexing, identification and vaccination procedures for recognised operators, **will ensure the effective execution of a humane stray cat management strategy.**

MANAGING COMPANION CATS, THE CODE OF WELFARE FOR CATS & RESPONSIBLE CAT 'OWNERSHIP':

'I am cat. I am honourable, I have pride, I have dignity and I have memory. I am older than you. I am older than your Gods, the tree Gods, the stone Gods, the thunder and lightning Gods, the sun Gods and your God of love. I too can love, but only with half a heart and that I offer you. Accept what I am able to give, for were I to give you all I could not bear your inevitable treachery. Let us be honourable friends'.

Paul Gallico, (1989) – "Honourable Cat".

Humans have shared the company of cats for many centuries in varying degrees – they have been worshiped as Gods, guarded our food stores and have made our homes their homes – they have also been vilified as the work of the devil, burned alive in sacrificial sacks and declared relentless predators to be exterminated. **The words of Paul Gallico ring true for the future of cats in New Zealand as we are a nation sadly divided when it comes to their welfare and protection as sentient beings.** On the one hand they are the country's most popular companion animal. (41% of our homes share them as one of the family), providing love, companionship and therapy as their legacy, whilst on the other hand, thanks to vigorous campaigning against them, they have good reason to fear for their lives as humans devise various nefarious ways to kill them.

Until these differences in attitude are amicably and ethically resolved, and sound strategies for cat management emerge, we have little chance of reaching an amicable conclusion. We do however have one ingredient from which we can seek considerable guidance, that being **the Code of Welfare for Cats** issued by the Ministry for Primary Industries, (MPI), which contains essential information on cat welfare which must be incorporated into our management planning strategy.

The full Code of welfare can be viewed on the MPI website:

www.mpi.govt.nz/companioncats/codeofwelfare

an abridged version should also available from www.companionanimals.nz

The Code of welfare plays a vital role in establishing legal obligations to owners or 'persons in charge' of companion cats to provide the highest standard of care for those animals in their care by establishing **minimum standards** by which they **must** comply, with further supporting **recommended best practices** to further enhance the standard of care provided. The minimum standards are regulations prescribed under the Animal Welfare Act with penalties applicable for non-compliance. For this reason it is important to include the details of the Code of Welfare with any advice on the management of cats offered to the public which should include both the minimum standards and recommended best practices.

In addition to the standard welfare standards provided by the Animal Welfare Act, including food and water, shelter, encouraging normal patterns of behaviour, physical wellbeing and protection from disease, the Code of Welfare for Cats also provides in detail the requirements and best practices particularly pertinent to a high standards of care, including desirable body weight, general hygiene, housing and caging, breeding practices, general health concerns, behavioural problems, identification and transportation, to name a few. **This is knowledge that needs to be shared to move the public closer towards the desirable responsible cat ownership model we all seek.**

- **CAT CONFINEMENT AND LIMITING NUMBERS** - Both of these issues fall under the 'responsible ownership' category as they will reflect a public attitude, and compliance if legislated, on how their companion cats should ideally be treated, which is a matter of personal choice for obvious reasons. The NCMMSG sheds no definitive view on this subject simply pointing out the 'pros and cons' of confinement, including, on the one side, preventing roaming, avoiding encounters with other cats with possible matings, dog attacks, the reduction of potential wildlife predation, reducing then risks of road accidents and community concerns involving stray cats. Against the perceived benefits of confinement the negative welfare aspects are detailed, including, lack of exercise and potential obesity problems, and stress related issues, loss of natural enrichment stimuli including natural environmental benefits, and a reduction in their quality of life affecting both the physical and psychological needs denied them with confinement.

The Code of Welfare does not have a specific requirement to confine cats, unless they are at risk from, or to, their surroundings, but does contain necessary minimum standards and recommended best practices in the event that it is deemed necessary to cage them. **It is clear that the decision to confine cats to the indoors is a personal one and not one that can be legislated**, unless prevailing circumstances dictate the necessity, at which time the overall welfare of the cat needs to be seriously considered. General research indicates that cat owners are reluctant to permanently confine their cats in view of the negative impacts on their overall welfare.

Regarding the limiting of cats per household, currently this is achieved by the creation of specific by-laws for this purpose, and 17 councils have imposed limits, ranging between 3 and 5, and this inconsistency in the numbers of cats allowed by individual councils causes some consternation.

Limiting numbers in this way has also met with some resistance in certain quarters, particularly with registered breeders who require special exemptions, cat sanctuaries, foster homes and cat rescue groups whose numbers fluctuate according to the extent of their activities. These are issues that can be overcome by having uniform national regulations, and a clearly communicated explanation of the reasons for the need to impose such limits. In brief, **although local authorities may need some mechanism to deal with complaints, normally from neighbouring properties about excess numbers**, (generally as a result of ‘cat hoarding’), these can cause a variety of nuisance problems including noise, hygiene and health issues. These situations need to be attended to quickly, and with some authority, as generally these excess numbers are poorly housed in cramped conditions, undernourished and with severe health and welfare problems, and in all cases are difficult to deal with given the resistance encountered from irresponsible, but purportedly caring, individuals.

It should be emphasised that the need to regulate numbers only arises when problems exist from excess numbers resident on a single property where, in the interests of all, they need to be reduced.

A NATIONAL CAT ACT – WILL LEGISLATIVE MEASURES SUCCEED IN CREATING COMPASSIONATE, HUMANE AND EFFECTIVE CAT MANAGEMENT?

‘I call on the New Zealand Government, organisations, communities and the people of New Zealand to ensure that if control of non-native species is to be undertaken that it be done so as humanely as possible, and with empathy and compassion. The task need not employ malice and disregard for living things which unfortunately find themselves to be in an unwelcome environment through no doing of their own’.

Dame Jane Goodall, DBE - (Primatologist & Anthropologist)

Another desired ‘strategic outcome’ of the NCMSG is a proposal for the enactment of a National Cat Management Act to allow the ‘mandated, comprehensive and consistent implementation of [the] nationwide humane management of all cat populations in New Zealand’. Where on the surface the creation of this special piece of legislation may seem a vast undertaking, with potential pitfalls if not enacted totally in the spirit of the intent, the outcomes and benefits that could accrue will be far reaching and potentially beneficial. If the proposed Act does achieve the expectations of the NCMSG extrapolated, and there is a robust consultation process to achieve unanimous support for the ‘humane’ management of all cats, nationally driven, we will have come a long way to erasing the injustices of the past some cats have endured at the hands of humans. Cats can be easily abandoned without any recourse, they can be shot on sight, suffer slow and agonising pain from poisoning, and trapped in lethal traps to die, they can be, declared ‘pests’ and unfairly subjected

to vicious and vitriolic campaigns, and actions, against them' – **if legislative measures are needed to correct those injustices, then so be it.**

What should we expect to find in a 'comprehensive', 'nationwide', (and 'humane'), National Cat Management Act? Potentially we would expect a number of advantages from the enactment of such an Act, including: considerable clarity of purpose, absolute uniformity of direction, clear and comprehensive interpretation of the law, decisive leadership in execution, and above all a compassionate hand in its drafting. Some recommendations follow:

- Relevant obligatory passages from the Animal Welfare Act (1999) will need to be included, in addition to the Code of Welfare for Cats, including the mandatory Minimum Standards and the Recommended Best Practices to ensure the public is well educated on these matters, and to also ensure the ingredients of responsible cat ownership are fully promoted.
- Regulatory portions from other Acts, including the Wildlife Act (1953), the Biosecurity Act (1993), and the Conservation Act (1987), that may have a direct impact on any proposed legislation in the National Cat Management Act will need to be considered and evaluated as to their pertinence and importance in the new Act, and whether they should be included.
- A nationally driven Cat Management Act should relieve Local and Regional Territorial Authorities of the need to create their own specific By-Laws to control and manage cats, as, even although the administration of the Act may be locally undertaken, it will apply nationally with consistent rules and regulations, thus replacing the widely varying regulations that were the product of earlier local body administrations.
- The new Act should alleviate the confusion that currently exists, either by accident or deliberately, of the three categories of cats as clearly detailed in the Code of Welfare, and the biological and ecological differences of their habitats and management needs, so that they will be recognised and managed according to their actual requirements and not those that may be concocted or conveniently assumed by administrative authorities.
- The National Cat Management Act will potentially attend to those issues of real importance to the welfare of cats in general, by imposing mandatory regulations, imbedded in law, where compliance is essential. These could include desexing, (with exemptions for registered breeders), microchipping, (to provide identification for repatriation and no other regulatory reason), and registration, (for administrative purposes only). Provision should also be made for financial assistance for those organisations, charities and volunteers attending to these matters.
- One of the issues the new Act will be commissioned to address is the matter of cat predation, particularly pertinent with feral but less so with companion and stray cats, and here there is accord, in varying degrees, of the need to attend to it. The establishment of designated sensitive ecological areas to reduce predation, particularly of protected native species, is an acknowledged solution, but comes with conditions such as gazetting, registering, clear

signage including regulations applying, and with welfare provisions applying to the removal of cats from such areas.

- Some methods currently being undertaken in the management of cats are totally unacceptable and will need to be seriously considered with the proposed new Cat Act, particularly in the area of lethal controls – these include the fatal shooting of companion/stray/feral cats at random with no accountability, setting lethal traps in public areas, distributing and encouraging the use of cage hold traps to the public, trapping companion/stray cats for 'disposal' without checking for identification, inhumanely disposing of these cats without supervision or guidance, and encouraging the teaching of children to undertake these activities as acceptable. The new Act will need legislative measures with appropriate disciplinary action to curb these activities.
- The general use of lethal poisons may be beyond the scope of a proposed Cat Management Act even though many cats, particularly feral, suffer as a result of its use. However the use of PAPP specifically targeting all cats, even though 'regulated, needs to be legislated against for private use.
- The use of Trap/Neuter/Return, (TNR), should be utilised as an effective tool in managing stray cats, and the proposed Cat Management Act should acknowledge and promote its use, establishing guidelines within the Act to ensure it is professionally undertaken by approved operators. The ability to adopt, with the usual conditions, should also be included, along with financial support for recognised organisations/volunteers undertaking TNR.
- Being standards of welfare that apply in law, as indicated, the published Codes of Welfare for Cats needs to be included in the proposed Act to ensure the development of responsible cat ownership is understood and achieved. In the matter of cat numbers and confinement, although these will be perceived as 'best practice', care should be taken in considering whether legislation is practical or desirable to ensure compliance to accommodate the varying circumstances surrounding each situation,

Clearly the first step towards the creation of a National Cat Management Act will be in the hands of the Government, through the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI), assuming it has the will to explore the virtues of such an Act, and to then put in place the mechanisms necessary to enable its development. As indicated, extreme care will need to be taken in its planning to ensure all those with a genuine interest in the outcomes will be adequately consulted, and heard, and be prepared to accept the animal welfare reforms it will likely bring.

It is also likely that Regional and Local councils will play their part in its administration, but with the support of approved welfare organisations empowered to undertake the responsibility of maintaining welfare standards, including MPI, SPCA, and the Police together with practical advice from the New Zealand Veterinary Association, (NZVA). Additional input from stakeholders with 'vested commercial interests', such as cat breeders and pet retail outlets will need to be provided, in

addition to input from conservation groups, cat sanctuary operators, volunteer care givers and foster homes, stray cat rescue groups, TNR operators, as well as the many cat owners/guardians whose lives are inextricably linked to and enriched by the presence of cats, and are accordingly very interested in their welfare.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

Occasionally opportunities present themselves where you can make a significant and meaningful contribution in your chosen vocation, and I hold the firm belief that when such occasions present themselves that is the time to rise to the occasion and welcome it with open arms. One such moment exists right now as we seriously consider a proposal to develop a humane and effective cat management strategy that will fully attend to their welfare needs into the future. The Humane Society in the USA provided an insight into our responsibility when they stated that ‘strategies built on consensus are most likely to be developed through constructive, collaborative engagement between those in animal welfare and conservation’.

Many years ago I played a major role in the development of a Code of Welfare for Cats which laid the foundations for this current task, and the logical next step, to develop a national strategy for cats to fill the void in the absence of a complete and definitive strategy. I humbly present this blueprint in response to earlier consultative documents on the subject addressing all facets of cat management which will benefit cats, people and the environment.

I confess that this document unashamedly comes from the pen of a dedicated animal welfarist who wishes nothing more than to express his gratitude to all cats nationwide, and their guardians, for their unconditional love and companionship, and to play my part in ensuring their lives will be respected and protected for all time.

‘There is little that separates humans from other sentient beings – we all feel pain, we all feel joy, we all deeply crave to be alive and live freely, and we all share this planet together’.

‘The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way it treats its animals’.

Mahatma Gandhi – (1869 – 1948) – Lawyer, Political Ethicist, Philosopher/

BOB KERRIDGE
ANIMAL WELFARIST

Bob Kerridge was the Executive Director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, (SPCA), in Auckland for 32 years, and a National President of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, (RNZSPCA). He was the Founding President of the New Zealand Companion Animal Council, (NZCAC), and a board member of the World Society for the Protection of Animals, (WSPA). He is a Justice

of the Peace, JP (retired), a Knight of Justice with the Order of St John, (K St J), and a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Management, (FNZIM). The Community Cat Coalition was created to care for stray cats in Auckland under his guidance. Bob has been honoured as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, (ONZM), for services to animal welfare and governance.