

# New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy Implementation Summary Consultation Draft Document

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## Purpose

To proactively address the positive and negative impact of cats in New Zealand. Key national organisations have agreed to develop a humane cat management strategy through a collaborative and proactive approach as they recognise the significant positive benefits of cat ownership but also acknowledge that there are concerns regarding the impact cats have in New Zealand.

## Strategic vision

Cats in New Zealand are **are responsibly owned and valued and** humanely managed in a way that protects their welfare, and our unique environment, by 2025.

## Strategic goals and outcomes

**Table 1: New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy strategic goals and outcomes**

Strategic Goals	Strategic Outcomes
All cats are responsibly owned, valued and the benefits of cat ownership are recognised	The intrinsic value of owning a cat is recognised
	All cats are responsibly owned
	The benefits of cat ownership are recognised
Cat management is supported through an appropriate legislative, regulatory and educative framework	Appropriate legislative and regulatory framework enables humane cat management
	Responsible agencies are identified to implement legislative and regulatory requirements
	Cat owners understand their legal obligations
	Responsible cat ownership is defined, understood and complied with
The protection of our native species and ecosystems is enhanced through the humane management of cats	There are no feral cats in New Zealand
	There are no stray cats in New Zealand
	The public understand the potential impacts of cat predation on our unique environment
Minimising the negative impact of cats on the community and our shared environment, both urban and rural	The effects of cats on human health are recognised, understood and addressed
	The effects of cats on New Zealand pastoral industries are recognised, understood and addressed
	Nuisance behaviours of owned cats on communities are reduced

**Project Owner:** National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG)

## **The National Cat Management Strategy Group**

The National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG) was formed in November 2014 by six national organisations and two technical advisors to develop a national overarching strategy for responsible, caring and humane cat management in New Zealand through a collaborative and proactive approach. The NCMSG recognises there are significant benefits to cat ownership but also acknowledges there are concerns regarding the impact cats have in New Zealand, particularly on native wildlife and pastoral industries. The key principles of the strategy are the promotion of responsible cat ownership, humane cat management, and environmental protection.

The NCMSG consists of representative national organisations that have an interest in cats. The members are the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA); NZVA Companion Animal Veterinarians (CAV); New Zealand Companion Animal Council (NZCAC); Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RNZSPCA); Morgan Foundation; and Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ). The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) are technical advisory members.

It is difficult to numerically quantify the extent of the cat population in New Zealand as exact cat numbers are unknown. There are estimates indicating that there is a significant cat overpopulation problem in New Zealand. There are approximately 1,134, 000 owned cats, and an estimated 196,000 stray cats. It is impossible to estimate the number of feral cats in New Zealand as the reported densities vary widely. There is extensive evidence demonstrating the impact that feral cats have on native birds, lizards and insects. At least 50,000 cats are rehomed, euthanased or trap-neuter-returned by veterinarians and animal shelters annually. In addition, lethal control is carried out by the DOC, Councils, private land owners, and private trapping groups. Data concerning the cat problem are largely unavailable or estimated, as there is no central depository for the numbers of cats rehomed, euthanised, trap-neuter-returned or trapped and killed.

The NCMSG recognises the many inherent positive benefits and value of cat ownership, and supports responsible cat ownership, despite the problems associated with cat overpopulation and feral cats. The NCMSG recognises that the issue of cat management is complex, and that the interests of all species must be considered. Collaboration between the diverse national stakeholder organisations in the NCMSG and many others not yet involved, is the key to addressing this important issue. There is no 'one solution' for humane cat management and environmental protection, instead there are a range of possible solutions dependent on numerous factors. The NCMSG feels strongly that when stray cat management is necessary non-

lethal methods of removal (e.g. rehoming or best practice trap-neuter-return [TNR]) must always be the first option. However, even best practice TNR should not occur near sensitive wildlife areas. The NCMSG preference is for stray cats to be rehomed but it is acknowledged that this will not always be possible as many of the cats lack human socialisation. If cats must be euthanased, the NCMSG firmly believes that only the most humane, best practice methods should be utilised.

The long term strategic vision of the NCMSG is for all cats in New Zealand to be responsibly owned and valued; and that cats are humanely managed in a way that protects their welfare, and our unique environment. To achieve this vision, given the importance and sensitivity of this issue, the NCMSG has proceeded cautiously and is in ongoing consultation with identified interested parties on all aspects of the proposed draft national cat management strategy and will pursue a range of actions to implement the required change.

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***National Cat Management Stakeholders***

**National Cat Management Strategy**

**Group Members**

NZVA: Callum Irvine, Pieter Verhoek

CAV: Helen Beattie

RNZSPCA: Ric Odom, Shalsee Vigeant,  
Arnja Dale, Sarah Zito

NZCAC: Barry Helem, Arnja Dale

LGNZ: Mike Reid, Wayne O'Donnell,  
Myfanwy Emeny

MF: Geoff Simmons

**Abbreviations**

RNZSPCA - Royal New Zealand Society for  
the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

LGNZ - Local Government New Zealand

MPI - Ministry for Primary Industries

MF - Morgan Foundation

DOC - Department of Conservation NZVA -  
New Zealand Veterinary Association

CAV - NZVA Companion Animal  
Veterinarians

NZCAC - New Zealand Companion Animal  
Council

**National Cat Management Strategy**

**Group Technical Advisors**

DOC: Allan Ross, Herb Christophers, Simon  
Kelton

**National Cat Management Strategy**

**Group Observers**

MPI: Marie Guigou

**Interested parties**

Regional and Territorial Authorities

Cat groups

Landcare New Zealand

Federated Farmers

AgReserach

Academics

Environmental groups

New Zealand public (both cat owning and  
nocat owning)

Animal welfare groups

## Executive Summary

The National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG) recognises the intrinsic value of cats and their value to people, the community and to New Zealand society. The NCMSG also recognises the need to balance the needs of cats, cat owners and cat carers with the negative impacts of cats on other species and communities. There is a need to humanely manage cats in New Zealand in a way that protects their welfare and our unique environment. The Draft New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy outlines recommendations and supporting evidence from the NCMSG on ways to achieve this goal.

The cat population categories used in the strategy are:

- Feral – these cats are unowned, unsocialised, and have no relationship with or dependence on humans.
- Domestic cats
  - Companion (owned) cats - these cats are considered to be owned by a specific person, sociable, and are directly dependent on humans.
  - Stray cats – these cats are unowned, of varying sociability, have varying interactions with humans and dependence on humans. This category has been subdivided into:
    - Socialised stray cats - this category is further subdivided into managed and unmanaged socialised stray cats.
    - Unsocialised stray cats - this category is further subdivided into managed and unmanaged unsocialised stray cats.

Managed strays cats may be socialised or un-socialised cats. This category includes but is not limited to cats referred to as:

- Colony cats – these managed stray cats are managed within a specific cat colony.
- Semi-owned – these managed cats are of varying sociability but are usually socialised to humans, they interact with people regularly and are directly and indirectly dependent on specific humans but are not part of a cat colony.

The National Cat Management Strategy Group has assessed the existing literature and available resources concerning feral and domestic cat management strategies and taken

into consideration feedback from the first phase of consultation to devise an evidence based draft cat management plan for New Zealand. Key recommendations have been agreed by the NCMSG and are outlined below.

## Key recommendations

- 1 Any legislation and plans to manage domestic cats and control feral cats must recognise that all cats are sentient animals capable of experiencing positive affective states and pain, suffering and distress.
- 2 Effective management of stray and companion cats requires an integrated, consistent and long-term approach focusing on non-lethal control methods. Changing community attitudes, beliefs and behaviours must be a foundation of every strategy to manage cat populations. Key components of this approach must be:
  - Nation-wide responsible cat ownership education programmes and legislation to encourage and reinforce responsible ownership with the aim of:
    - Increasing acceptance and implementation of cat containment, especially in areas of high conservation value. Measures to ensure suitably enriched containment for cats to safeguard cat welfare must be included.
    - Increasing the number of cats who are identified through mandatory microchipping and physical identification. In addition, cat owners and carers need to be made aware of the importance of both microchipping and physical identification (collar/tag) for cats.
  - Introduction of nation-wide mandatory microchipping and chip registration.
  - Desexing initiatives for companion cats and stray cats that are accessible for all those who need access to these services.
  - Introduction of wide-spread pre-pubertal desexing of cats.
  - Restrictions on the number of cats allowed to be kept on a property or by an individual without permission from the Council or a designated cat management agency.
  - Nation-wide mandatory desexing and microchipping of cats and kittens at

**point of sale or transfer of ownership and prior to return to their owner if the cat or kitten is impounded.**

3 Identification of the different cat populations in separate categories (as described above) to provide the basis for a management framework:

- Feral
- Domestic cats
  - Companion (owned) cats
  - Stray cats
    - Socialised stray cats (managed and unmanaged)
    - Unsocialised stray cats (managed and unmanaged)

4 Specifically targeted education, desexing and other relevant cat management programmes for stray cat carers, particularly encouraging desexing and identification (microchip and physical identification) of managed stray cats. Desexing of these cats must also be facilitated to make this viable.

5 Creation and implementation of National Stray Cat Management Guidelines to facilitate implementation of best practice managed and targeted trap-neuter-return (mTTNR) programmes for stray cats and active cat management.

Creation and implementation of Cat Colony Management Guidelines.

Creation and implementation of a managed stray cat registry with specific criteria (e.g. cats must be desexed, eartipped, microchipped and not in environmentally sensitive area exclusion zones as per the Colony Management Guidelines)..

6 Communication with all stakeholder groups and involvement of stakeholders in decision making and solutions to ensure collaborative best practice humane cat management.

7 Significant inconsistencies in legislation, approach and level of commitment to cat management at the local government level need to be urgently addressed.

8 The implementation of a national cat management task force that addresses the contributions of feral, stray and companion cats. Allocation of resources, coordination and priority setting at a national level to support vital ongoing research to inform humane cat management strategies.

9 Creation and implementation of a national cat action plan and supporting legislation in the form of a National Cat Management Act and local bylaws. This plan must include provision for effective and ongoing evaluation and transparent reporting. The National Cat Management Act should allow for the creation and implementation of cat bylaws which will allow for cats to be managed through a variety of mechanisms as deemed appropriate by the relevant Council. This may include:

- Cat curfew/containment and/or restriction in ecologically sensitive areas
- The ability to deal with nuisance cat issues (for example, through an infringement system)
- Setting a limit on the number of cats to be kept in each household, above which the owner would have to seek permission from the Council
- The removal of stray cats if necessary with the proviso that non-lethal methods of removal (e.g. rehoming or TNR) will always be the first option where possible
- A cat colony management register

10 Changes to legislation should be incremental to allow public education, acceptance and compliance with new requirements.

11 Local governments should consider establishing cat management advisory groups with terms of reference that include:

- Monitoring the implementation of cat management legislation and compliance with mandatory requirements
- Consulting with key local stakeholders
- Developing relevant codes of practice and SOPs for cat control methods
- Identifying key metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of cat management legislation

12 Evaluation of cat management strategies is essential in order to determine their effectiveness. Key evaluation measures and processes for data collection need to be agreed by all stakeholders and applied to all new and existing initiatives.

13 Evaluation outcomes should be reported and incorporated into the development

of cat management plans at the national, regional and local level.

- 14 Creation and implementation of a centralised national database of statistics relevant to cat management (including data on cat euthanasia, trapping, TNR, shelter intake, and killing methods).
- 15 An integrated approach to the management of feral and domestic cats is vital. Assessment of the effect on feral cat numbers and their impacts on wildlife from management strategies which address owned and stray cats is needed to provide data supporting this approach. This framework should be applied to any new initiative in cat management.
- 16 Practitioners responsible for implementing feral (and domestic) cat management need to have an understanding of the animal welfare impacts of available methods, and be competent to implement strategies using best practice. This must be monitored and managed with a regular auditing and compliance framework.
- 17 Nation-wide identification of areas of high conservation value as outlined in local legislation and subsequent implementation of:
  - Comprehensive but humane pest removal from within those areas, including feral and stray cats.
  - Local authorities are given powers to implement as they see fit in zones of human habitation and development near areas of high conservation value, including: restriction of cat ownership, cat curfews and/or strict 24 hour cat cantonment laws and enforcement.

## Conclusions

There is clear and urgent need for an evidence-based, coordinated and consistent action plan which delivers humane and effective cat management for New Zealand.

The NCMMSG has worked towards this goal through:

- Gathering and utilising available research findings
- Providing leadership through facilitated stakeholder groups and maintaining good communication
- Collaborating with stakeholders to

- define the problem and identify solutions
- set agreed objectives

The New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy Implementation Background Document has summarised and assessed the existing literature and available resources on feral and domestic cat management strategies and taken into consideration feedback from the first phase of consultation in order to devise a draft cat management plan for New Zealand.

In terms of the management of stray cats, two key points emerge. Firstly, the evidence indicates that current low-level trap-and-kill programmes aimed at controlling stray cats are not effective in achieving the main objectives of cat management. Any form of cat management, whether lethal or TNR requires intensive implementation to be effective and local community support to ensure success. Given the lack of public support for lethal control programmes in many urban or peri-urban areas, resources in those areas may be better spent on more effective non-lethal alternative strategies. These include education and community engagement campaigns to encourage cat carers to desex, identify and manage the stray cats they care for, combined with accessible desexing programmes. Secondly, evidence from overseas studies indicates that well designed, implemented and monitored targeted trap-neuter-return (mTTNR) programmes can be a successful component of urban cat management. mTTNR for stray cats and active cat management has the potential to reduce the number of stray cats, improve cat welfare and decrease wildlife predation but this needs to be confirmed under New Zealand conditions. The implementation of mTTNR programmes with robust monitoring, especially in terms of the effect on wildlife predation, could provide data on many of the elements that are needed to adequately assess whether this is a suitable and effective strategy for New Zealand urban cat management.

In terms of the management of owned cats, many existing strategies have the potential to be effective in achieving the objective of cat management, if an integrated and consistent approach is taken. Methods that have the most potential to effect change are making accessible desexing and microchipping initiatives widely available, increasing the uptake of pre-pubertal desexing, and encouraging the containment of owned cats, along with public education programmes and social marketing campaigns to increase community acceptance of the need for cat management and the various cat management strategies.

In terms of the management of feral cats, the key message is that even though the goal is to have a New Zealand free from predators, including feral cats, it is vital that only the most humane effective methods of cat control are employed. In order to achieve this all feral cat management programmes must be regularly monitored and audited to ensure that they adhere to best practice and do not contravene the Animal Welfare Act 1999. In addition, ongoing research is needed to inform improved humane cat management.

Changing community attitudes, beliefs and behaviours must be a component of every strategy to manage cat populations. Traditional methods used by government to change community behaviours are legislation, regulation, penalties, taxes, and subsidies. These must be supplemented with other methods that improve cooperative community behaviour change (Head 2008), such as education and community awareness programmes (Toukhsati et al. 2012a; Toukhsati et al. 2012b). Changing community attitudes and beliefs relating to cats is an important first step in increasing positive associated behaviours and moving towards a consistent, effective approach to cat management in New Zealand.

Ongoing funding sources are necessary for many of the approaches described in the strategy. National and some local governments do allocate some funding for cat management but this is often for short term or one-off initiatives and so will have limited impact. Animal welfare organisations make a significant contribution also through coordinating and implementing key initiatives such as accessible desexing and education programmes. Many veterinarians also make a major contributions through working with other groups to deliver accessible desexing initiatives.

There will always be cats in New Zealand and the only viable route to effective cat management is to implement facilitating legislation and simultaneously work with the stakeholders involved with all cat populations to find agreed solutions that are acceptable and have a realistic chance of reducing cat numbers and mitigating cats' negative impact on wildlife. Well designed and managed cat management that is both humane and effective is possible with the implementation of an evidence-based, coordinated and consistent cat action plan.