



Northland Cats in Balance

Fiddler's Green

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Comments on and Submission to “New Zealand National Cat Management Strategy “ document, issued on 21 September, 2016 by NCMSG

-Summary-

Above all: The NCMSG paper does not describe a strategy, since it does not identify and analyze sufficiently the challenges and obstacles to be faced in the future. For instance,

- its envisaged strategic outcome: “There are no stray cats in New Zealand” remains wishful thinking because there will always be dumped kittens and cats. No education whatsoever will ever change the shortfalls of human character.
- Its suggested compulsory Micro-chipping is dangerous. Because it opens the door to kill all lost, stray cats who are not chipped. Compulsory Micro-chipping would be a death sentence for stray cats.
- Any companion cat – although chipped – will become more or less “stray” and fair game for all cat haters the moment she leaves her home and property. The highly praised chip will not protect her from being killed. In fact, any micro-chipped but nevertheless unwelcome cat can be destroyed and disposed of without any consequences – like now when there is no mandatory micro-chipping.
- Not all scanners are created equal. Some are better than others at reading a wide variety of microchips. That means: A pet may get lost, found, scanned and euthanized if the scanner comes up “empty.”

Many Vets are aware that microchips fail, local vet Alan Probert commented on this issue back as early as October 2012 here: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/119027/vet-concerned-at-faulty-microchips>

- What's then the point of having your pet micro-chipped if you can't get him back?
- And what about the suggested curfew for cats? Just imagine farm cats: How do they “work”? Contained and under a 24 hour or nightly curfew as often suggested? To such an extent restricted, their help to get farms rid of vermin would certainly be made impossible. Any farm cat has to be free roaming, which implies of course at least a certain “stray effect.” Moreover: Many farm cats are actually stray – in the terms true sense, as they come home only for their daily milk allowance, the odd treat and cuddling with the farmer's kids.
- Furthermore: Compulsory micro-chipping as suggested and/or night time curfews would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to enforce. Who could possibly put through the proposed measures like compulsory micro chipping, de-sexing, curfews, cat registration etc.? Perhaps the F.B.I.? The “Feline Bureau of Investigation”? No, there is of course no such thing envisaged, because it is impossible. These ideas serve only one single purpose: To give authorities a free hand to get rid of all unwanted cats, or in other words: They are just a red herring drawn across the trail. In this context please refer to our website <https://northlandcatsinbalance.com/> on the **blog** page please read “A letter from Wellington”.
- In Paihia/Northland a group of elderly residents had taken care of a small colony of abandoned, former companion cats for more than 13 years. The animals were all desexed, fed regularly at a feeding station and treated by local Veterinarians when necessary. Although all of them were “too old to fend for themselves” as FNDC had stated in an official media release, the feeding station was removed, two of the cats were trapped and the rest was scattered and is now probably starving or has become feral. Not only did the Council force the persons in charge of the poor animals to break the Animal Welfare Act, they also acted against common sense and public interest only because they had been lobbied by a group of self-appointed, so-called environmentalists. How could we pursue NCMSG's strategic goal like “The protection of our native species and ecosystems is enhanced through the humane management of cats” or a strategic outcome like “Cat owners understand their legal obligations” when not even our Local Governments are capable of comprehending the basic relevant requirements?
- In New Zealand two poisons are used to control so-called pest birds: “Avitrol” and “Alphachloralose”. In the US they kill more than 200 million birds every year, but -characteristically enough – no relevant figures are available for NZ. But Northland Regional Council gives expert advice how to kill birds most effectively with Alphachloralose on their website. Recently staff members of a Kerikeri Nursery observed cats of that place bringing dying birds into the showroom. Obviously they were shocked and angry with the cats until they found out where the birds actually came from. The cats had picked them up from the ground around trees of an adjacent orchard. And amongst them were not only the targeted and poisoned nuisance birds but also Finches, Thrushes and even Tomtits, an endemic species. This sheds some new light upon the whole matter, doesn't it? How many of these millions of birds killed by cats every year – as claimed in the NCMSG-paper - have actually to be booked in human accounts? Like the elimination of nuisance birds on airports and runways, on boats, on rubbish dumps, beaches, boardwalks and urban parks.
- US-researches show that daytime window collisions with low-level structures account for one hundred million to one billion bird fatalities--of both migrant and resident species- each year. What is more, any single, tall building could be killing 2,000 birds a year. There are again – strangely enough - no figures available for New Zealand, but individual experience would indicate a similar massive problem, as there are 1,800,000 private dwellings in NZ. If we, for instance, assume that only 2,5% of them (mainly in NZ's 15 cities) belong to the tall category, we end up with 45,000. Multiply this figure with 2,000 and you have 90 million

- dead birds per year – the remainder of 1,755,000 buildings not even taken into account!
- How many birds do actually survive the human impact? The question arises how many of them remain for cats to be killed, doesn't it? Or are we just looking for a scapegoat whom we can blame for our own failure? Northland Regional Council for instance estimate that cats kill up to 100 million birds in New Zealand each year. If we compare this figure with the above mentioned we'll find that there is a remarkable and suspicious coincidence.
 - Other human-induced threats to our native wildlife, cats can barely be blamed for either, include: felling of native forests for timber, damming of lakes and rivers for hydro-electric development, destruction and contamination of native habitats by mining, roading and other construction work, clearing of native vegetation and draining of wetlands for farmland, over-fishing and “by-catch” of marine mammals in our oceans, run-off of fertiliser and effluent from agriculture in our waterways.
 - On pages 21/22 of the “Strategy-Paper” 14 points are mentioned which suggest responsible cat-ownership. Most of them are based on pure illusion: How many people, e.g. would think of “undertaking some advance preparation to ensure the cat's well-being in the case of an emergency or disaster, including assembling an evacuation kit” if they don't even think of themselves re such matter? Shouldn't we rather remember that most people are quite reluctant to learn?

Although it has been demonstrated how much the NCMSG's “strategic” document lacks proof of being a serious program for the intended strategy that “Cats in New Zealand are responsibly owned and valued and humanely managed in a way that protects their welfare and our unique environment by 2025”, its main purpose should also be seen in the context of the government's plan “to get New Zealand predator free by 2050.”

New Zealand has never been a predator-free country:

- Today there are eight, perhaps even nine birds of prey : The New Zealand Falcon, the Swamp Harrier and the Morepork Owl, which prey on **other birds, lizards, frogs, fish and insects and nobody would call them pests.** Wekas eat **lizards, eggs and the young of other groundnesting birds.** Kingfishers eat **fish, frogs and other amphibians, lizards, birds and nobody would call them pests either.** And there are: The native Barn Owl, the Nankeen Kestrel and the Little Owl, which all feed on small birds, mice and insects and they neither **would be called pests.** The Pukekos however, certainly are a pest, because they uproot seedlings, destroy crops and wholegardens. They are very territorial and aggressive and they also feed on **eggs, frogs, fish, and small birds** . In the past they even have been culled to protect threatened species, but today they are -strangely enough-protected because they are native birds.
- Freedom of predators is a hypocritical human vision which is meaningless in an evolutionary sense. Not only do we exclude ourselves from the consideration, although we are the worst predators, but we also ignore the fact that predators are actually necessary to keep nature in balance.

However it can not be denied that NZ's nature has become badly balanced, but the impact of cats is much less significant than especially the human one or the damage unquestionable pests do to it. Of course, cats also do kill birds and lizards, but if cats vanished, some bird populations would actually take a nosedive. Rats and other vermin love to eat bird eggs and baby birds, and it is an outright lie that man could ever control rat populations by himself.

“The lofty goal of making the country pest-free by 2050 is based on unsubstantiated claims, not science,” NZ First outdoor recreation spokesman Richard Prosser said correctly.

The bottom line is that cats are an easy target. Seemingly there are no reliable figures available

about the overall damage cats in general do to New Zealand's wildlife. There are only unqualified estimates and claims. But there is scientifically well-found evidence for the corresponding behaviour of Companion and Stray cats.

The study "Seventeen years of predation by one suburban cat in NZ," in: "New Zealand Journal of Zoology, 2007, Vol.34: 289-296 looked at just that and found that the 63 rats and 2 weasels this single cat caught outnumber by far the 54 native birds, especially when one considers that 10 killed rats stand for literally hundreds of saved birds. Dr. Flux also quotes a number of other studies to support his contention that keeping cats indoors at night is the completely wrong thing to do if we want to protect birdlife in our towns and cities. Cats catch rodents rather than birds at night and rodents are a much bigger threat to birds.

Dr John Bradshaw (BA, PhD, University of Bristol), an anthrozoologist says:

"Rats abound in towns and cities worldwide and are far-worse vectors of human disease than cats ever were or will be. Moreover, rats are predators themselves, and given their numbers are more of a threat to wildlife than are cats. Cats were domesticated primarily to keep mice and rats — man-made pests — at bay, and I have few qualms about allowing them to continue to do this where they can be useful."

On the other hand, feral cats doubtless have become a threat to New Zealand wildlife. Thus, the real issue is how best to manage feral cats, not whether to restrict pet cats indoors..

So, couldn't this be the better, since logical approach to solve the problem?

Towns and their surrounding environment are not endangered by cats but by humans who have begun to displace most native wildlife long ago. These areas will never become a natural habitat again. So let's do the obvious and let's rather save nature where the exertions are still worthwhile and money can be spent with some hope for success.