

National Cat Management Strategy Group address to Wellington City Council

Callum Irvine, Head of Veterinary Services, New Zealand Veterinary Association and Geoff Simmons of the Morgan Foundation, addressed Wellington City Council (WCC) on behalf of the National Cat Management Strategy Group before WCC made their landmark decision for compulsory microchipping of cats. Here's what they had to say:

Thank you for opportunity to address you today.

Both myself and Geoff Simmons are speaking to you today on behalf of the National Cat Management Strategy Group (NCMSG). The NCMSG is a group of national organisations including New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA), New Zealand Companion Animal Society (NZCAC), the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RNZSPCA), Morgan Foundation, Companion Animal Veterinarians (CAV) and Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) with observers from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Department of Conservation (DOC) who have been working for the last two years to deliver a strategic framework to enable communities and government to address the issue of cat management in New Zealand.

This strategy primarily recognises the value and benefits of cat ownership to New Zealanders, with a strong emphasis on responsible cat ownership, but also addresses the impacts of cats on our unique native species, our farmland, our environment, human health and our communities and proposes solutions to allow all parties to work collaboratively to address these issues. It is critical for New Zealand that we do so.

Great progress has already been made in this city to find solutions to the impacts of predators, including cats, and this has positioned Wellington as a leader in this area, particularly in light of the governments recently announced vision for a Predator Free NZ by 2050.

However continued progress will not be possible without the management of stray and feral cats.

In order to be able to manage their impact it is essential that cats are responsibly owned and identified, and as such, one of the key recommendations of the NCMSG will be that all cats in NZ are microchipped and identified on a national data base.

Our reasoning for this recommendation is well considered, based on scientific research and expert opinion. Identification is a fundamental tool of animal management at a community level and in order for any management strategy to work it is imperative that every cat has an owner, is cared for appropriately and is identified through a microchip (which is the only reliable and unalterable form of identification available).

The presence of a microchip is critical to enable veterinarians, welfare agencies and others to make appropriate decisions about the management of cats presented to them. It allows quick identification of an owned, and thus valued and loved cat, and acts to protect that animal's welfare by:

- 1. Enabling timely veterinary intervention when an animal is suffering or injured**
- 2. Ensuring the return of pets to an owner when lost**
- 3. Avoiding the potential for euthanasia of cats that are owned and valued**

As such, we see microchipping as a key mechanism to protect the wellbeing of owned cats, which is imperative if we are to successfully manage stray and feral cat populations.

Research shows that mandatory microchipping of cats leads to increased rates of return of cats to their owners.

It is also a valuable tool to allow the identification of cats causing nuisance behaviours which facilitates owner education and minimises further impacts on communities.

The NCMSG applauds the leadership being shown by the Wellington City Council in this area and strongly supports the proposal to microchip cats in this city. It is our hope that such leadership will enable other councils to consider implementing the same requirement.