

## **Naidene McClew**

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**Subject:** FW: My feedback from www.lawcom.govt.nz

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to make a submission about the ease at which individuals and/or organisations can be harmed and harassed by people who make fictitious, slanderous and libellous comments (often anonymously) via the internet.

I run a voluntary organisation called Cats Unloved. It was started in 2001 by myself and co-founder Kerry Downey (who was murdered in 2008 by a Housing N.Z. tenant). We trap abandoned, wild and diseased cats for Housing N.Z. the Christchurch City Council, SPCA, businesses and the public.

We also rehome domestic cats and kittens and help owners with the cost of desexing.

We have a well documented record of those we have helped and our voluntary services are always in demand.

However, in 2009 an ex-volunteer who was dismissed from our organisation for stealing (also dismissed by her employer for suspicion of theft) went to the Christchurch Press and other media with false allegations.

Her allegations include but are not limited to accusing me personally of (1) killing pet and healthy domestic cats. (2) Profiteering from the organisation I founded. (3) Accusations that I have personally murdered two non-existent people. (4) More accusations of attempted murder.

She has also made the above accusations to the police, the Prime Minister and other parties as well as the media.

Because her accusations are not credible she has not been taken seriously by the police, who have investigated her claims that I “kill healthy pet cats” and found that this is not the case. Neither have I murdered or attempted to murder anyone. However, this has not stopped the Christchurch Press from publishing an article about Cats Unloved under the heading of “Backyard Killing” which created a heated response both for and against our organisation.

The sensationalized headline “Backyard Killings” and the ‘twisted’ comments garnered from other groups asked to comment on the subject of euthanasia (who use the same method of euthanasia as we use) produced a hostile response towards me personally. Further comments made at the Press website “Stuff” produced vicious, ill-informed, libellous and slanderous comments about me personally and Cats Unloved.

Libellous comments were also published at the Press website regarding my late mother (Peggy van Bree) who established Dog Watch Sanctuary Trust, a voluntary organisation dedicated to rescuing and rehoming unwanted dogs.

I consulted a lawyer over the fictitious and libellous comments being published on the Press website and a legal letter was sent to the Press threatening them with legal action over the fictitious and libellous comments they were publishing. The Press withdrew the offending comments.

This one letter from the lawyer cost Cats Unloved almost \$1000 a high price for a charity to pay in order to stop the Press from printing fictitious and libellous comments, they should not have printed in the first place.

However, there is no way of stopping the person behind the false allegations of doing further and on-going damage to myself and our organisation via the internet. She uses the website [www.tbb.co.nz/orator/index.html](http://www.tbb.co.nz/orator/index.html) on which to harass, humiliate and endanger my life and ruin the work of Cats Unloved. She has also secured various domain names in the very name of our organisation specifically to direct people to her sites at which to slander and malign our work.

Her actions have now resulted in a written death threat to myself and my husband (the Police are aware of these threats). The closure of one of our charity shops (the income from which funded our work) and the cessation of our rehoming and trapping activities for the public.

This comes at a time when Christchurch is already suffering from the consequences of the earthquakes and has even more homeless and displaced, injured, diseased and lost cats in the city needing help.

The Christchurch Press and the internet sites have been instrumental in shutting down the activities of a voluntary group that has done nothing but good for the community. Statements about our work can be read at our website [www.catsunloved.org.nz](http://www.catsunloved.org.nz) not to be confused with one of the internet sites (in our name) dedicated to our demise i.e. [www.catsunloved.org](http://www.catsunloved.org)

The late Kerry Downey (co-founder of Cats Unloved) and I envisaged the day when we would establish a charity vet clinic in Christchurch. However, this ideal has been dashed not because Kerry has been murdered but because one vindictive person using the Press and the internet can ruin an organisation doing good for the community and destroy and put the life of another individual(s) at risk.

The Chch Press doesn't care what damage their sensationalized headlines do. The lack of any control of content malicious people can post on the internet means that the lives and the livelihood of individuals and organisations can be ruined by the uncensored right vindictive people have to publish lies and libellous comments under the guise of 'free speech'.

Free speech is not free when it is fictitious and the truth distorted or not fully reported. There is a cost and in this case it has cost the volunteers in Cats Unloved their voluntary positions within our organisation. There are no volunteers who now foster cats for us. There are no volunteers who work in our opportunity shop that has been closed down. There are no volunteers trapping wild and injured cats for the community. The 'free speech' the digital media has offered to one disgruntled and unbalanced person has cost Christchurch the charity vet surgery, we were in the very process of setting up.

We were in the process of engaging a vet when the death threats and further false allegations of 'human murder' were being made. The recruitment agency charged us fee of \$2750 for their services that did not produce a candidate. The consequence of the harmful material currently on the internet meant the recruitment agency had no success in finding someone suitable for us.

There is NO redress for us.

The police say that people can say what they want, even if it is libellous, fictitious and likely to foster hatred. It is not a criminal offence. The cost of taking a civil case against the other party is financially prohibitive. If a civil case were to be pursued it doesn't correct the damage done and the offender (who is a beneficiary) has zero ability to pay restitution.

Therefore, this submission is to give you the brief outline of what one unbalanced person can do (via the media) to ruin a voluntary organisation who were providing a free and much needed service for the community and who had plans to do even more.

No good has come from the Press article, their website or the internet, only harm.

Yours

Wendy Sisson