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SPCA RE-AFFIRMS OPPOSITION TO CAT CURFEWS

The Royal New Zealand SPCA has re-affirmed its opposition to proposals for cat curfews and for by-laws limiting the numbers of cats to two per household in urban areas.

The Society's announcement follows the advocacy of these and other measures by SPCA Waikato and comments from the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, suggesting that New Zealand's cat population might be allowed to die out.

"We wish to make it absolutely clear that our Waikato colleagues, however well-intentioned their initiative, do not speak for the SPCA as a whole," says National President, Bob Kerridge.

"Policy on such issues is set by our National Council, which remains totally opposed either to cat curfews or to severe limits on cat ownership, whilst recognising that some local legislation restricting ownership might be necessary from time to time.

"We also reject the notion that curfews on cats can play a significant role in reducing predation of native wildlife. Although definitive research on this subject is still pending, the signs are that neither domestic 'companion cats' nor 'stray cats' are major predators. Nor is there much evidence that imposing cat curfews, as in many parts of Australia, significantly reduces predation.

"For that matter, curfews do not have much impact on the ability of un-neutered cats to breed and multiply. And, obviously, they do not prevent strays from moving about after dark.

"What curfews do achieve, however, is the targeting and often sadistic killing of cats found wandering at night. A further consequence is the inevitable spread of devices for containing cats in ways that have a negative impact on their welfare," he says.

Mr Kerridge adds that discussion of the place of cats in New Zealand is often bedevilled by a widespread confusion between 'strays' and 'feral cats'. The former live in areas of human habitation and do not have extensive opportunities for predation, whilst the latter live outside such areas and are not protected by the Animal Welfare Act.

“With respect to stray cat colonies, we encourage a policy of TNR (Trap/Neuter/Return), which we consider to be in the best interests of both cats and the community.

“We share our Waikato colleagues concern over the tendency of cat populations to mushroom and we are firmly committed to the de-sexing of ‘entire’ cats, be they domestic or stray, recognising that this is the most effective process in preventing surplus populations.

“In addition, we encourage the micro-chipping of cats for ease of identification if they get lost or injured. But we do not support SPCA Waikato’s call for the compulsory registration of cats with local authorities, as this would impose an additional cost on owners without serving any conceivable useful purpose,” he says.

Bob Kerridge describes as misconceived and highly regrettable, recent suggestions from the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society that New Zealand’s feline population should be allowed to die out.

“Cats are beloved members of hundreds of thousands of human families across New Zealand, bringing joy and companionship into our lives and helping us teach our children the values of empathy, kindness, care and responsibility. In addition, their companionship has been shown to have great therapeutic value for those who live with them, particularly the elderly.

“Cats may not be native to these islands but, then, neither are humans. And just like the human members of our families, our lives would be a lot poorer without them,” he adds.

For further information, please contact:

Bob Kerridge
National President
Royal New Zealand SPCA
DDI: 09 256 7306
After Hours: 09 528 9940
Mob: 027 4959 449
bob.kerridge@spca.org.nz