



Forest & Bird

TE REO O TE TAIAO | *Giving Nature a Voice*

Forest & Bird Conservation Policy - Cats

Forest & Bird recognises that cat owners, and cat control regulations and management, have an important role to play in protecting some of our special wildlife and therefore supports -

1. Promotion and regulation of responsible domestic cat ownership, particularly:
 - Sterilisation of all domestic cats
 - Microchipping of all domestic cats
2. Elimination of feral and stray (non-microchipped cats), particularly from all areas with high biodiversity values.
3. Regulations to limit domestic cat ownership and the presence of domestic cats, particularly adjacent to and within areas with high biodiversity value, especially where there are species that are vulnerable to cats.
4. Regulations preventing the establishment and maintenance of feral and stray cat colonies.
5. Adequate financing for the public education about, and the enforcement of, cat control regulations.

Forest & Bird Conservation Policy - Cats

Policy Background

Purpose

The purpose of this cat policy is:

- To inform the public of Forest & Bird's position on cats.
- To advocate for effective management of cats in areas where they are likely to threaten important wildlife species and habitats.
- To assist F&B staff, branches and members with submissions on council and local board plans, cat control bylaw reviews etc.

Context

What is Forest & Bird?

Forest & Bird is New Zealand's independent voice for nature. It is a national non-government organisation, with 50 branches throughout New Zealand with a supporter base of around 70,000. Forest & Bird's mission is *to protect and restore nature in Aotearoa/New Zealand*.

What is unique about Aotearoa/New Zealand?

Unlike the rest of the world, New Zealand's fauna evolved without mammalian predators. They developed unique characteristics, like flightlessness, that makes them especially vulnerable to disturbance by introduced mammalian predators. The arrival of humans and many of the plants and animals we brought with us, particularly mammals, have had a devastating impact on our native species.

A large number of our native species have already become extinct and many are struggling. While rats, mice, mustelids, possums, hedgehogs are recognised as significant predators, there are many species that are particularly vulnerable to predation by cats. Cats have been implicated in 21 of the 43 bird species extinctions in the New Zealand region in the last 800 years¹.

A great deal of success has been had in dealing with introduced predators particularly on offshore islands and mainland fenced sanctuaries. Large numbers of volunteers spend many hours doing pest control, while introduced predators are managed over large areas of public conservation land by DOC. Long term the Predator Free New Zealand initiative aims to eradicate all introduced predators. This approach will require us to work together towards an environment where people, their domestic animals, pets and native species can co-exist. Cat owners have an important part to play in this long term protection of our native species.

¹ Alan Tennyson & Paul Martinson (2006) Extinct Birds of New Zealand; Te Papa Press.

Why have a policy on cats?

Forest & Bird recognises the important role cats play in New Zealand society. Cats provide companionship and other positive benefits. Many Forest & Bird members own cats.

However cats – domestic, stray and feral - can have a negative impact on many of our native bird, lizard and insect species through direct predation or disturbance. Stray cat colonies pose a particular risk to the health of wildlife, humans and domestic cats through the transfer of diseases such as toxoplasmosis. Toxoplasmosis is understood to be present in a high percentage of New Zealanders, is a significant risk to pregnant women and has been implicated in the deaths of a number of native species².

This policy is about the ways in which cat owners and local government cat management policy can do their part to avoid the impact of cats on native species in New Zealand.

Councils have an important role in protecting the environment including native species, providing public amenities and providing for domestic animals' needs under the Animal Welfare Act. Forest & Bird encourages Councils to adopt meaningful cat management policies and regulations to support responsible domestic cat ownership, and to remove feral and stray cats from all areas of high biodiversity value.

Policy Detail

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² <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/news-events-and-notice/news/news-2013/2013/02/07/Acute-toxoplasmosis-impairs-memory-and-concentration.html> and <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/SC1301/S00060/acute-toxoplasmosis-impairs-memory-and-concentration.htm>

<https://www.tepunahamatatini.ac.nz/2016/11/23/dolphins-and-infectious-diseases-a-story-of-toxoplasmosis/>

Outcomes – What we want to see

- Increased recognition of the need for responsible cat ownership that includes active management of pet cats to avoid impacts on native wildlife.
- Reduced native wildlife disturbance and deaths from cats, both domestic and feral.
- Public awareness and compliance with cat management.
- Strong enforcement of cat management.

Relevant National Policy/Legislation

1. The Resource Management Act sets out that it is a Matter of National Importance that significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna (biological diversity) are protected, section 6(c). Council plans generally seek to identify such areas and either list them or identify them in their Regional and District Plans.

Regional Policy Statements set out the Regions objectives and policies for protection of biodiversity and direct responsibilities to both regional and district councils.

The “**New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010**” directs both regional and district councils in terms of protecting biological diversity within the coastal environment. Of particular relevance is the requirement under policy 11 to avoid adverse effects on threatened or at risk species.

The objectives and policies in **Regional and District Plans** set out how council will protect indigenous biodiversity and provide useful reference when advocating to council on the effects of dogs on indigenous fauna.

Regional Councils must have a pest management strategy under the Biosecurity Act. However these deal with non-domesticated pests and therefore focus on feral cat management.

Subdivision and Consent Notices - Pursuant to s.221 of the RMA, Councils can impose consent notice conditions on new Certificates of Title. For example, consent notice conditions to prohibit the keeping of cats, dogs and mustelids. Historically this has been a popular method to manage the adverse effects of subdivision and development on kiwi. The efficacy of consent notices is directly linked to monitoring and enforcement. For an example see Far North District Council Environment court decision APPLICATION NUMBERS RC-2170133, RC-2160327 and RC-2150179.

2. The Local Government Act (LGA) provides councils powers to make bylaws. And it is under Bylaws that cat restrictions are usually made.

Bylaws can be used to control and restrict cats in locations where they are likely to have an adverse effect on biological diversity. This is especially important in terms of both regional council responsibilities to protect biological diversity as set out in 1. above. The use of bylaws and education is also important in limiting the occurrence of offences.

District Councils have the responsibility to enforce bylaws in respect of the offences set out in the LGA.

3. The Department of Conservation has responsibility on conservation land and controls feral cats under the **Conservation Act 1987**.