

Forest & Bird Dunedin  
PO Box 6230, Dunedin North, Dunedin 9059  
[dunedin.branch@forestandbird.org.nz](mailto:dunedin.branch@forestandbird.org.nz)

Dunedin City Council  
PO Box 5045, Dunedin 9054  
[dcc@dcc.govt.nz](mailto:dcc@dcc.govt.nz)

***Keeping of Small Animals (excluding Dogs) and Birds Bylaw Review***

Wednesday 17 November 2021

**Introduction**

The Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc (Forest & Bird) is New Zealand's longest running independent conservation organisation. Its constitutional purpose is to take all reasonable steps within its power for the preservation and protection of the indigenous flora and fauna and the natural features of New Zealand.

Forest & Bird has for many years had a strong interest and involvement in the Dunedin area and has a long-standing interest in improving biodiversity and protecting and enhancing landscapes in the wider Otago region. We have one branch in Dunedin that is involved in a wide range of conservation and advocacy activities.

**Submission**

1. We would like to provide feedback on the Keeping of Small Animals (excluding Dogs) and Bird Bylaw review.
2. We use this opportunity to strongly advocate that controls around cats be included in the Keeping of Small Animals bylaw. Forest & Bird Dunedin encourages Dunedin City Council to adopt meaningful cat management policies and regulations to support responsible domestic cat ownership, to minimise risk to human health, and to minimise the risk of nuisance cats to biodiversity.
3. Forest & Bird is pleased to see that Dunedin City Council has previously submitted a successful remit at Local Government New Zealand's annual conference advocating for national legislation to support cat control measures at a local government level.<sup>1</sup> At least 25 territorial authorities have since introduced cat control measures within their bylaws and demonstrated there is scope within Section 145 of the Local Government Act 2002 to do so.
4. Forest & Bird is pleased to see that Dunedin City Council has non-regulatory advice relating to responsible cat ownership in Dunedin which is aligned to Forest & Bird's views around desexing and

microchipping.<sup>ii</sup> However, considerable leadership has been demonstrated by many territorial authorities around the country in recent years to address cat control issues in a regulatory manner. We urge Dunedin City Council to be part of this leadership approach for Dunedin residents and Dunedin's natural environment.

5. Cats are predators. Domestic cats pose a significant risk to native and endemic birds, lizards and insects throughout New Zealand. The detrimental direct effect of cats on populations has been widely recognised and documented.<sup>iii,iv</sup> This includes devastating examples such as a recent case where a single domestic cat predated the only breeding colony of banded dotterels inside Wellington Harbour for two consecutive years.<sup>v</sup> As the wildlife capital of New Zealand, Dunedin City Council must take action to protect the native taonga species its residents clearly value.
6. Domestic cats are carriers of zoonotic diseases. This includes toxoplasmosis which is now present in a high percentage of New Zealanders<sup>vi</sup> and a contributing factor in the death of a number of native species.<sup>vii, viii, ix</sup> Recent research from Australia has shown the costs associated with diseases transmitted by cats cost the Australian economy more than AU\$6 billion annually through their impact on human health and the agricultural sector.<sup>x</sup>
7. Domestic cats do not respect property boundaries. They are the cause of many cases of nuisance such as defecating in peoples' gardens as well as having the potential to kill beloved pets (birds, guinea pigs etc) of those who have no control over the unwanted movements of others' free-ranging cats. Furthermore, cats (particularly un-neutered males) pose a significant threat to other cats and can cause large vet bills after fighting.
8. When poorly managed, irresponsible owners of domestic cats contribute to the growth of stray and feral cats, which have even more devastating impacts.
9. Forest & Bird Dunedin acknowledges the position cats hold as a valued companion animal to loving owners. As a loved animal, owners need to take responsibility for their cat's behaviour. Limiting the number of cats on a property and ensuring all cats are de-sexed and microchipped is the bare minimum of this responsibility.

#### **Forest & Bird Dunedin proposed a limit of three cats per households**

10. New Zealanders show a high level of support for limits to be placed on the number of cats owner per household (> 65%).<sup>xi</sup> During consultation by Auckland Council, a number of residents specifically noted the need for tougher limits on pet numbers. In Whanganui, an online survey of residents as part of consultation on its Animal Bylaw review revealed 48% of respondents consider two cats or fewer as the most appropriate number and 34% considered four cats was appropriate.<sup>xii</sup>
11. Forest & Bird Dunedin requests a limit on the number of cats per household in Dunedin to three. More than 50% of councils that regulate cat numbers have set the limit to three.

#### **Forest & Bird proposes that microchipping and registering is compulsory**

12. Forest & Bird Dunedin believes microchipping and registering cats should be required of all cat owners. Requiring individuals to microchip and register their cats allows clear definition between

stray, feral and roaming owned cats. Identification of cats is critical for the management of effective strategies for control of feral or stray cats.

13. In this context, catching microchipped cats allows an opportunity to educate cat owners who may be unaware of the negative impact their cat is having on the local community.
14. Compulsory microchipping would bring Dunedin City Council in line with recent bylaws enacted by Whanganui, Palmerston North, Wellington City<sup>xiii</sup> and Selwyn District Council<sup>xiv</sup>.
15. Microchipping is a well-supported management tool for cats in New Zealand, with almost 80% of the general public in favour of a national requirement for mandatory microchipping (in addition to restriction for cat numbers and mandatory desexing). The Ministry for Primary Industry's Code of Welfare: Companion Cats 2018's Recommended Best Practice is that cats should be identified with a microchip<sup>xv</sup>. Given microchipping is compulsory for dog owners, few cat owners will be put off by the imposition of the cost of microchipping to ensure the protection for their companion animals.

**Forest & Bird proposes the compulsory requirement to de-sex cats**

16. Forest & Bird suggests Dunedin City Council would be lagging behind other councils if it did not include the requirement to de-sex cats in this bylaw review. Tararua, Palmerston North and Whanganui District Councils all included de-sexing in their recent Keeping of Animals Bylaw reviews.
17. The reproductive potential of a single female cat is estimated at 300 kittens in her reproductive lifetime. The potential for a male cat is far beyond that. The Ministry for Primary Industry's Code of Welfare: Companion Cats states puberty can occur from four months of age. Responsible cat ownership includes having cats desexed at or before puberty. Forest & Bird would support the provision of targeted funding towards voluntary de-sexing and the establishment of an education programme teaching responsible cat ownership.
18. If Council Officers or Councillors have any further questions about the contents of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me.



**Kimberley Collins**

Co-chair, Forest & Bird Dunedin

[dunedin.chair@forestandbird.org.nz](mailto:dunedin.chair@forestandbird.org.nz)

021 049 1436

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/dunedin-city-council-cat-management-proposal-passes-vote/NW4I22U5KC6JUBPI57OOUX3MBQ/>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/services/other-animals>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://zslpublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1017/S095283690200328X>
- <sup>iv</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320709004133>
- <sup>v</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/117263362/lone-tabby-on-its-way-to-wiping-out-second-generation-of-dotterels>
- <sup>vi</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/10056562/Cats-will-damage-your-mind-Morgan>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/diseases/toxoplasmosis-and-hectors-and-maui-dolphin/>
- <sup>viii</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261836844\\_Four\\_Cases\\_of\\_Fatal\\_Toxoplasmosis\\_in\\_Three\\_Species\\_of\\_Endemic\\_New\\_Zealand\\_Birds](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261836844_Four_Cases_of_Fatal_Toxoplasmosis_in_Three_Species_of_Endemic_New_Zealand_Birds)
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00480169.2016.1230526>
- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/2018770798/cats-costing-billions-each-year-by-spreading-diseases>
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5532564/>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://www.whanganui.govt.nz/files/assets/public/consultations/keeping-of-animals-poultry-and-bees-by-law/keeping-of-animals-poultry-and-bees-by-law-2020-statement-of-proposal-and-by-law.pdf>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://wellington.govt.nz/your-council/plans-policies-and-by-laws/by-laws/wellington-consolidated-by-law-2008/part-2-animals#four4>
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://www.selwyn.govt.nz/news-and-events/news/new-rules-agreed-for-keeping-animals-in-selwyn-towns>
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://www.agriculture.govt.nz/dmsdocument/1413-Companion-Cats-Animal-Welfare-Code-of-Welfare>