Progress in Preventing Unwanted Cats and Dogs in New Zealand
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Abstract

It appears the number of unwanted companion animals in New Zealand may still be on the rise. But there is evidence of progress, as fewer kittens and dogs have arrived at the Auckland SPCA over the last few years. In 2008 a 10 day desexathon at the Auckland SPCA saw nearly 600, mostly owned, cats desexed. But with the percentage of owned cats that are desexed increasing, the focus for "Desex and the City" this year was on promoting "owned" animal desexing by private vets while the Auckland SPCA targeted the more difficult to get at cats (where I believe the welfare dollars should be going). A national SPCA adoptathon was linked to Valentines Day entitled "Second Chance for Love". The Auckland SPCA also had several "sales" and adoptathons to control overcrowding in the adoption areas. As always, all these cats and dogs were desexed and micro chipped to help reduce the number of incoming animals in the future.

Article

The following is primarily an update of my presentation from the "2007 Pet Overpopulation Conference" (as detailed in the 2007 proceedings) with the 2007 comments and opinions removed or revised and new ones added.

Organisations Currently Managing Stray and Abandoned Animals: (source; Tom Didovich, RNZSPCA, August 2009).

- 73 Territorial Authorities (TAs) (i.e. Local Government) enforce the dog control and stock control legislation.
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), NZ Police and SPCA enforce the Animal Welfare Act
- The SPCA has 48 branches and member societies. These receive stray, injured, surrendered and uplifted (by inspectors or police) animals.
- Another approved organization is the Animal Welfare Institute of New Zealand (AWINZ) which operates in city.
- In addition there are numerous rescue groups (e.g. Lonely Miaow, Auckland Cat Rescue, K9 rescue) scattered throughout the country.

To summarise: Enforcement of animal control and welfare legislation in New Zealand is undertaken by 73 TAs, 48 SPCA, 1 AWINZ operation, 7 MAF inspectors plus the NZ Police. There are a total of 121 official shelters and pounds (i.e. related to legislation). Rescue groups operate, often independently, throughout the country.

A good source of contact information for these organisations can be found online at www.petguide.co.nz

Statistics

Previously there was a question in the New Zealand national census regarding pet ownership but it is no longer included. Also, as far as I have been able to find out, no one is doing the research, not even pet industry suppliers. The last numbers I have been given are from 2005. They reported 900,000 pet cats and 530,000 pet dogs in New Zealand with ownership of both on the decline (there was also an estimated 150,000 working dogs).

The Department of Internal Affairs is **still** establishing a database to keep all TA dog enforcement information including impounding data, dog bites and complaints.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, I had not received data from the TAs so cannot include a comparison with that presented 2 years ago.

I have received the following national SPCA data (source; Tom Didovich, RNZSPCA) and made a comparison with that from 2 years ago. The combined euthanase plus re-home figures do not equal the received figures due to some animals still being in care (cats 3306, dogs 742);

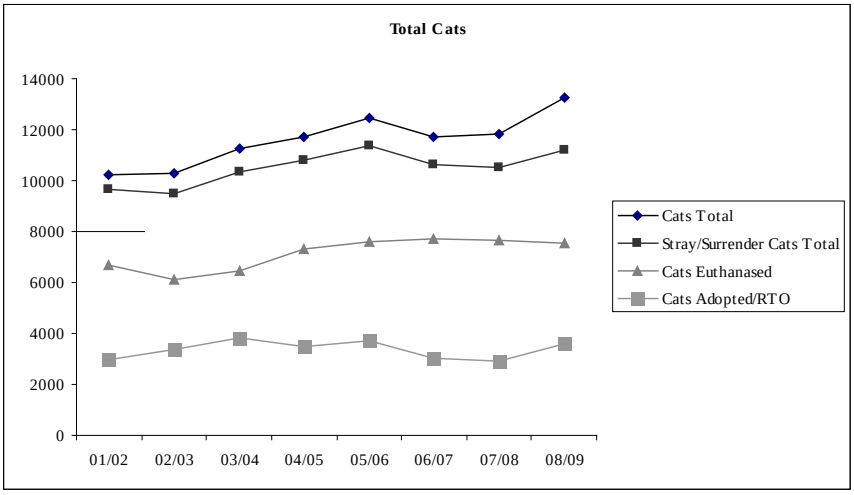
Received by Shelters	**2007**	**2009**	**% change**
Cats	41818	42044	**0.54**
Dogs	11771	11588	**- 1.58**
Rehomed or Returned to Owner			
Cats	19881	18330	**- 8.46**
Dogs	6390	5881	**- 8.65**
Euthanased			
Cats	21937	20408	**- 7.49**
Dogs	5381	4965	**- 8.38**

The reduction in euthanasia figures is encouraging and once many of those still in care are rehomed the rehoming rate should lift.

The above trend, particularly relating to dogs, is supported by the following local data.

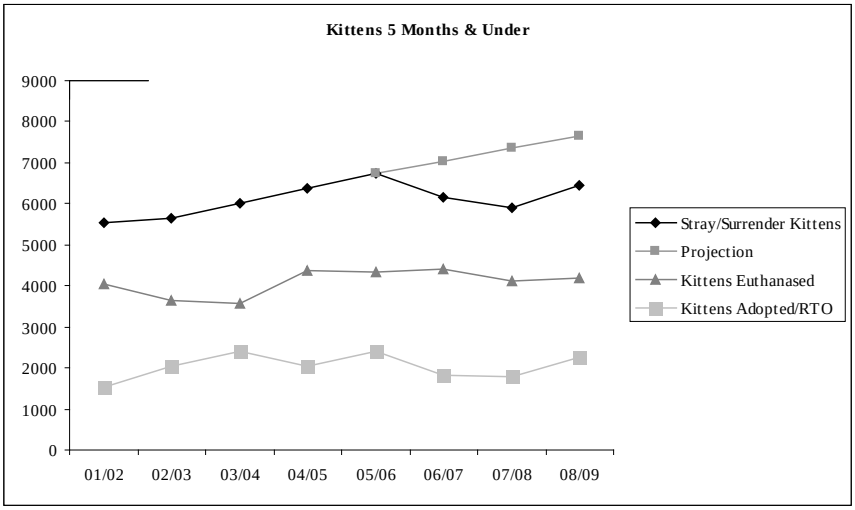
<u>Auckland SPCA Statistics.</u>

The following graphs represent data from the Auckland SPCA and are based on year to 30th June figures from 2001/02 to 2008/08.

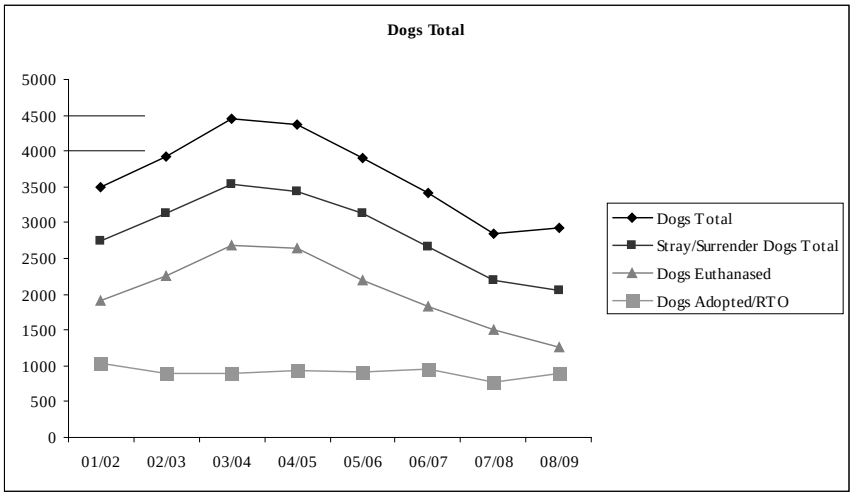


The widening gap between total cats and stray/surrendered cats reflects an increasing percentage of owned cats including TNRs passing through the SPCA.

We were pleased that adoptions this year increased to almost match the increased incoming numbers therefore keeping the number of euthanasias only slightly above last year.

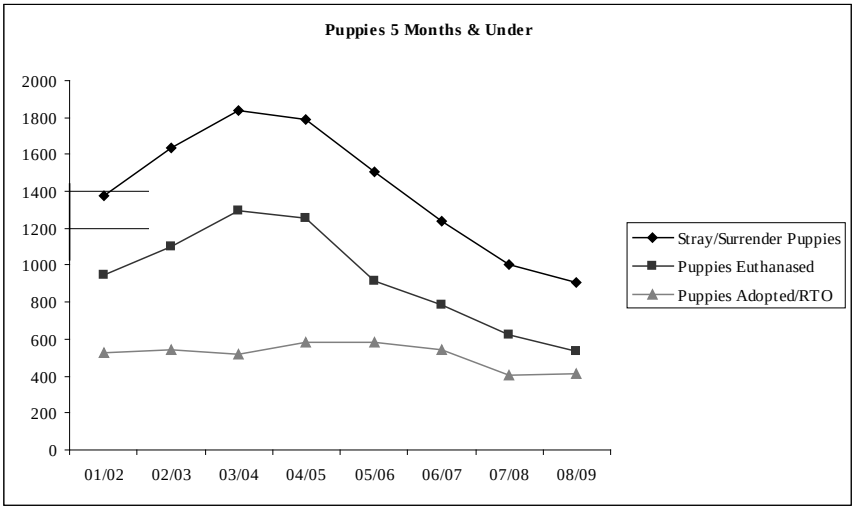


The decline in incoming kitten numbers through 06/07 and 07/08 was taken as sign of progress. The increase this year is hopefully due to the recession and not another upswing. This hope is supported by the fact that many of the kittens were older when they arrived and anecdotal evidence of reduced pet shop sales and people being less able to give away unwanted kittens. Only time will tell.



The following graphs show a dramatic drop in incoming dog numbers. Also, adoptions have remained relatively stable leading to an equally dramatic drop in canine euthanasias at our facility (53% over the last 5 years).

If this trend were repeated throughout the country then that would be great news for dogs but as TAs deal with most of the unwanted canines, this may not be the case. We will only know once accurate records can be compiled from across the nation.



It is also worth noting that the percentage of incoming dogs that are 5 months and under is declining (from 52% through 02/03, 03/04 & 04/05 to 44% this year).

Legislation and Government Policies

There have been no significant changes in legislation over the last 2 years although the usefulness of, or even place of, "Codes of Welfare" within legislation receives comment at the end of this section.

Information can be found at www.legislation.govt.nz (an interim website of New Zealand legislation), under "statutes".

"Animal Welfare Act 1999"

The purposes of this Act are to reform the law relating to the welfare of animals and the prevention of their ill-treatment. It also repeals the "Animals Protection Act 1960"

In particular it aims to;

- require owners of animals, and persons in charge of animals, to attend properly to the welfare of those animals
- specify conduct that is or is not permissible in relation to any animal or class of animals
- provide a process for approving the use of animals in research, testing, and teaching
- establish a National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) and a National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee
- provide for the development and issue of codes of welfare and the approval of codes of ethical conduct

"Dog Control Act 1996"

The purposes of this Act are to make better provision for the control of dogs, to make better provision in relation to damage caused by dogs and repeal the "Dog Control and Hydatids Act 1982" and its amendments.

In particular it covers;

- functions, duties, and powers of Territorial Authorities
- Dog Control Officers and Dog Rangers
- bylaws
- probationary owners
- disqualification of owners
- dangerous dogs
- registration and registration fees
- obligations of owner
- infringement offences
- custody of dogs

"Dog Control Amendment Act 2006"

One of the main purposes of this amendment to the Dog Control Act was to introduce compulsory microchipping of dogs. This is being phased in by having it apply to new registrations. It also applies to dogs impounded for the second time and those defined as "dangerous".

"Codes of Welfare"

The Animal Welfare Act provides for the development and issue of codes of welfare and the approval of codes of ethical conduct. These codes aim to establish minimum standards and promote best practice for people owning or looking after animals. But currently, people can not be prosecuted for breaching a Code.

As for companion animals; the Cat Code is law, the Dog Code has been written and is now before the minister (likely to be approved before the end of this year), and the Code for the Temporary Housing of Animals is in the final consultation phase (likely to be with NAWAC before the end of this year).

After talking to inspectors, who enforce the Animal Welfare Act, and lawyers, involved in taking cases to court, I believe the Codes are good educational/practical tools but are currently of little legislative use. The Codes have seldom if ever been used in court by either the prosecution or the defence. As it stands, the breach of a Code is evidence but there needs to be a link between the breach of the Code and a breach of the Act. Generally inspectors and lawyers resort directly to the Act.

Also few people even know of the Codes exist. It appears the only group of people truly conversant with the relevant Code and applying it well are those involved in Rodeos.

One lawyer suggested this situation could be improved by attaching an infringement (e.g. a fine) to a breach of a Code or having a breach of a Code becoming a breach of the Act.

New Initiatives and updates

"One of the Family"

"One of the Family" (www.oneofthefamily.co.nz) is a RNZSPCA initiative involving SPCA Auckland's Education Officer, Shelly Ryan, and Norm Hewitt (ex All Black and winner of New Zealand's first "Dancing with the Stars"). Norm Hewitt is driving this in response to New Zealand's unacceptable rate of family violence. He chose this vehicle when he heard of research that linked family violence to animal abuse and that teaching children kindness and empathy towards animals shows them how to treat each other.

The target audience is Intermediate age children (10-13 years).

The campaign was launched 3 years ago and since that time the pair has visited more than 160 schools throughout New Zealand delivering the empathy message to more than 40,000 students.

Although this is primarily about reducing family violence I believe a secondary benefit will be promotion of animal care including desexing.

"Desex and the City".

As part of the 2008 "Desex and the City" campaign, a 10 day desexathon at the Auckland SPCA saw nearly 600, mostly owned, cats desexed. Many of these were from a local caravan park where our inspectors have had ongoing welfare concerns. Our efforts were helped by the owner of the park making it mandatory for all pets kept by residents to be desexed. Also, one person rounded up 25 cats from their neighbourhood and, with their owners' consent, they were desexed.

In that year we also had the highest number of private clinics joining in with two thirds of them offering incentives to desex.

With the percentage of owned cats that are desexed increasing, the focus for "Desex and the City" this year was on promoting "owned" animal desexing by private vets while the Auckland SPCA targeted the more difficult to get at cats (e.g. strays & colony cats). One of the goals of this exercise is to develop a program that can be continued long term.

SNIP (Spey and Neuter the Islands Pets)

Waiheke Island is a 35 minute ferry ride from Auckland city. It covers an area of 92 sq kms and has a permanent population of around 8,000. The local SPCA runs a free desexing service for the islands pets (SNIP). A few years ago those running the SPCA's shelter on the island were contemplating building a larger shelter but now the old one is often empty.

This service is locally funded from the proceeds of an op shop. The shop has become a hub of social activity and its turnover has risen from $35,000 to $100,000 over the last few years.

A secondary benefit of this program is that the SPCA's relationships with the local Forest and Bird Society and conservation groups have improved dramatically.

Adoptathons and sales.

Throughout the last two years Auckland SPCA has had several sales and adoptathons. These were normally run in response to overflowing adoption areas and were generally successful in alleviating the problem. Obviously reducing the cost of adoptions reduces income but with more animals rehomed the total income from adoptions was about the same as previous years. This year, possibly because of the recession, we have had more sales than ever. Hopefully this will not be an ongoing necessity.

We also participated in the national Valentines Day "Second Chance for Love" adoptathon which is the subject of another presentation.

Off site Adoptions

SPCA national office has received funding for a mobile adoption vehicle. It has yet to be built so a report on its impact will have to wait.

A Desexing Clinic within an Animal Control facility.

One of Greater Auckland's Animal Control facilities (as opposed to a Welfare facility) has had a surgery built on site and is employing a local veterinarian on an hourly basis to desex its animals before they are rehomed.

If not fully utilised, such a facility could, for example, be used for TNR.

Early Age Desexing in Private Practice.

In response to more shelters desexing animals before adoption more private clinics are requesting information on, and presumably performing, early age desexing.

There was a panel discussion on this subject at last years New Zealand Veterinary Association Conference which generated more discussion. The Auckland SPCA also sponsored one of the Auckland Veterinary Society meetings which gave us a 15 minute speaking slot which was used to promote early age desexing.

There is now at least one private multi-practice group routinely performing bitch speys at 4 months of age.

My feeling is that it is becoming accepted and practiced by more private veterinarians.

Veterinary Student externship training at the Auckland SPCA.

Auckland SPCA has always hosted veterinary students seeing practice. We, in association with the Massey University Veterinary School, are now in the process of starting an externship program as part of the formal training of final year veterinary students. This year 17 students are spending a week with us, either on their own or in pairs.

Next year this will be extended to 50 students (half the class), two students per week for 25 weeks.

The plan is for them to spend a day on the road with an inspector, half a day with the education team, be involved in dog training and witnessing canine assessments, have discussions with our operations manager and CEO, and have the rest of their time with the hospital team.

They will also receive a lecture or two at the end of this year to prepare them.

This should lead to more welfare aware new graduates that have also had direct exposure to early age desexing.

The Cat Coalition

This is a group of cat colony carers coming under the SPCA umbrella. This will allow sharing of expertise, the setting of protocols, practical support, along with other advantages that will hopefully improve the management of colonies. This is in the consultation phase at the time of writing so a report on its effectiveness will have to wait.

The following is as example of what is possible with consultation and effective management of a colony. It is a highly edited selection of points from a report written in 2006 by one of the lead colony carers. The full document and two others relating to this colony can be requested from me. I personally do not agree with everything in the documents but they provide plenty of food for thought and the end result has been very positive so far. Also, they highlight the level of commitment required, and in this case given.

Rawene Road Car Park Cat Colony Birkenhead (2006)

> In North Shore City, the Rawene Road car park cat colony has been established and managed for over 15 years. It comprises 35 cats and the numbers have been stable for the past 10 years. The colony is contained in a defined area. Regulated feeding in clean feeding areas is by volunteers. Desexing, veterinary care, re-homing and adoption of kittens and stray cats occur. There is an on-going willingness to work professionally and long-term with North Shore City Council to continue to manage the colony in a safe and healthy manner. A North Shore City Council/Rawene Cat Colony management group has been established.
>
> In July 2005 Rawene Cat Colony management group met with North Shore city staff to discuss complaints North Shore City Council had received about the cats from nearby businesses in regard to cat faeces. This led to a management plan being drawn up by the Rawene Cat Colony management group and agreed to by North Shore City Council. With the help of the Parks Department of North Shore City Council and Customer Services Manager, many of the general nuisance issues addressed and resolved. In a December 2005 meeting positive feedback was given to the Rawene Cat Colony management group on progress.
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> In February 2006 a health notice was served on the Rawene Cat Colony management group by North Shore City Environmental Health. An on site meeting with the interested parties occurred. On 20th April 2006 an e-mail was received by the Rawene Cat Colony management group stating that North Shore City Council will be ending the colony and to indicate the cats would be trapped starting immediately (including any further cats that try to

establish themselves). Removing the colony had been singled out by North Shore City Council as the only solution to the “health situation”. The rationale behind the North Shore City Council stating that the culprits were solely the colony cats was disputed by 3 animal behaviorists. The same reasons the colony started are relevant today. Intense “discussion” followed and the Council did not go ahead with removal.

The above, severely abridged version, can not do justice to the work done by some very determined people. The threat of removal brought about a more concerted effort to manage the colony, especially in regard to desexing but also in other areas e.g. the regulation of feeding, removing faeces etc. It took several years to finally TNR the last cat but it has been done. The colony population in August 2009 was 17.

There are suggestions that the number of cat colonies within North Shore City has increased from 150 to 180 over last few years!