



## Introducing...

Dr Arnja Dale is a Senior Lecturer in Animal Welfare and is the Programme Director of the Animal Welfare Investigations programme at Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. She is the Chair of the New Zealand Companion Animal Council and is on the SPCA Auckland Board of Directors.



## The comparative welfare status of owned, managed stray and unmanaged strays cats

Stray cats are an extremely polarising issue in New Zealand drawing regular media attention often with reports of reduced welfare. With the aim of collecting empirical data to investigate this, we developed and validated a 5-point objective visual welfare scale comprising of a body condition score (BCS, Purinatm); coat condition; nasal &/ocular discharge; ear crusting; and injury score. This welfare scale was used in combination with a subjective Quality of Life (QoL) score to assess: managed stray cats (n=210); unmanaged stray cats (n=253); and owned cats (n=213). The BCS did not differ between owned and managed cats ( $p=0.68$ ) (BSC5), but was lower (BSC3-4) for unmanaged cats ( $p<0.0001$ ). Managed and unmanaged cats showed increased nasal &/or ocular discharge and ear crusting ( $p<0.0001$ ), but of a mild nature. 7% of cats were recorded to have injuries ranging from mild (4.1%) to severe (0.6%) with no difference in prevalence amongst the groups ( $p=0.06$ ). Coat condition and QoL scores were highest for owned (excellent-good), followed by managed (good), and lastly unmanaged (fair-good) cats ( $p<0.0001$ ). Comparatively, unmanaged cats had slightly lower welfare, whilst managed and owned cats showed relatively similar welfare states.