

**ANNEXURE H**  
**STANDARD CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF**  
**CAT COLONIES - PROTOCOL**



**Standard Care and Management of Cat Colonies Protocol**

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that the physical, health, and behavioural needs of cats in 'colonies' are met in a manner that is in accordance with both –

- Good practice; and
- Scientific knowledge

Physical health and Behavioural Needs are defined in Section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act:

- Proper and sufficient food and water:
- Adequate shelter:
- Opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour:
- Physical handling in a manner which minimises the likelihood of unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress:
- Protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or disease, as appropriate to their species, age and stage of development.

## 2. Introduction

Ongoing colony management, combined with a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programme, will promote harmony between cat colony carers, neighbours, and property owners and allow for the colony to diminish naturally over time. It is important that the following guidelines be followed to ensure that the colony is being properly managed. Failure to follow these guidelines puts the cats at risk by increasing the chance of the colony becoming a public nuisance.

For the purpose of this protocol:

A **Carer** is defined as “a person who provides food, water and shelter for a colony of unowned, free-roaming cats.”

A **Colony** is defined as “any number of unowned, free-roaming cats that frequent an area seeking food and shelter.”

**Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)** programme is “a humane management technique in which free-roaming stray/community cats are humanely trapped, desexed, identified (ear-tipped/micro-chipped) and then returned to their original habitat where their presence is approved and arrangements made for their ongoing care.”

### 3. Assessment of Colony

Assessment of existing colonies of unmanaged cats is essential in the planning of their management. Factors to be considered include:

#### 3.1. Location

This assessment should include ease of management, safety factors and public / owner / authorities' acceptance. Shelter is also of importance with escape areas where cats can safely hide / reside.

Assessment should include:

- Danger, i.e. proximity to busy roads, heavy traffic or excesses of weather.
- Adverse community pressures.
- Availability to ensure ongoing care.
- Impact on wildlife.
- The support and approval of the land owner/tenant/occupier and / or local council is essential in the interest of the on-going safety of the cats.

In addition the safety and security of carers is an aspect of the site that should be assessed.

#### 3.2. Numbers in Colony

Are the numbers manageable? Are there kittens and what are their ages? (Kittens under 6 weeks of age should be uplifted, fostered and rehomed when sufficiently mature.)

The capacity of any area should be based on the size and nature of the area, the available resources, the number of available care-givers, in addition to the number of cats.

It is recommended that records be kept with details of the numbers in the colony with suitable descriptions of each together with historical details.

#### 3.3. Health

Where healthy cats reside in reasonable numbers management can commence. Additionally less healthy cats suffering only through lack of care are manageable and respond to good nutrition, care and veterinary assistance over a defined period.

Where health status is considered sub-standard with deformities, cancers, chronic diseases etc, humane euthanasia may be necessary in the interest of the cats. Such situation requires veterinary input and assessment.

Some carers test for FIV and where it is generally felt such cases are manageable veterinary advice is also suggested.

## 4. Assessment of Colony

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### 4.1. Communication

The first essential element in any cat colony management situation is communication.

An approach to the landowner or tenant of the property is necessary providing details and seeking permission to be actively involved. Permission will often include conditions (i.e. reduction of numbers where applicable, cleanliness etc.).

Such communication should include surrounding properties, however the key person should be targeted and kept informed at all times. Additionally it is preferable that each colony have one key spokesperson.

As members of the Auckland SPCA Cat Coalition, identification of such is provided and will be of assistance in gaining the confidence of land owners or officials. Difficulties may be reported and where possible support and assistance will be provided.

### 4.2. Trapping

Before you begin trapping, you need to be fully prepared (i.e. which vet will you use, where will the cat/s recover, how will you pay for the desexing surgery, etc.). It is also imperative that signs and informative leaflets be provided to neighbours and residents to allow them to confine or identify their own cats.

A humane trap must be used. This is an animal trap designed to contain an animal without injury. It is basically a wire cage, with the door held open by means of a catch. Food is placed beyond a trip plate inside. When the animal steps on the trip plate, it releases the catch, which causes the door to drop down enclosing the animal inside.

SPCA designed and approved traps and the customized water proof trap covers may be purchased from Eagle Wire and/or SPCA Auckland.

Once a cat has been trapped once, it is unlikely the cat will go into a trap again; therefore it is essential that every cat that is trapped is transported to a Veterinary Clinic for desexing / consultation / vaccination / flea treatment etc. It is important however, to avoid trapping a nursing female, as her kittens can die from exposure and/or starvation in her absence.

For guidelines on trapping procedures see 'Humane cat trapping protocol'

The following table highlights some **Do's** and **Do Not's** with regards to trapping:

DO	DO NOT
Post flyers in the neighbourhood to inform residents of your intentions to trap and in so doing allow them time to confirm or identify their cats	Trap without prior communication and/or liaison with the neighbours about your trapping plans
Trap with another person	Trap on a hillside.
Cover trap with towel/blanket or customised cat trap cover	Trap in extremely hot or cold weather
Organise a feeding schedule ahead of time, and do not feed the day before trapping.	Withhold food for more than 48 hours.
Tie your trap to a tree or fixed structure if you need to leave your trap unattended for a period of time.	Ever leave traps unattended.
Plan your trapping session ahead of time with your veterinarian so cats can be transported to the vet ASAP after trapping.	Attempt to touch a conscious scared colony cat.
Bring lots of smelly food (cans of fish are ideal).	Feed chicken or other bones
Cable tie the trap door to prevent cat from escaping during transportation to vet clinic	Release an unsterilised cat that you trapped involuntary.
Keep records of cats that have been trapped and desexed.	Return a desexed female cat on the same day it has been trapped.
Thoroughly clean all used traps using use a solution of one part bleach to 10 parts water to scrub off all the surfaces. Allow the bleach solution to remain on the trap for 10 minutes before being rinsed off with water.	Use dirty traps. Even traps that appear clean will carry the scent of the cat previously trapped which can deter other cats from entering.

In returning to a managed colony situation the first concern must be the support the principle carer receives from those who have offered to assist. A colony must have consistent attention and this requires a commitment from those who have undertaken the task. These support people must be trained and should accompany the principle carer on rounds prior to attending on their own or as back-up.

### 4.3. Veterinary intervention

All the cats in the colony, even those that visit sporadically, must be desexed, ear-tipped for identification and returned to their familiar habitat. We also recommend micro-chipping of all your cats in your care, as this helps to identify the carers.

Be sure that any new cats observed in your colony are promptly desexed. When cats are not desexed they will display offensive mating behaviours which can quickly become a nuisance to a neighbour. They include spraying, yowling, fighting, constant litters of kittens and roaming the neighbourhood.

Carers must have a close relationship with their selected veterinarian. Obviously a sympathetic vet must be chosen, and particularly one that is equipped both mentally and physically to handle colony cats.

The Community Cat Coalition can recommend veterinarians who have indicated their willingness to support colonies and their carers both professionally and at reasonable prices. SPCA Auckland provides vouchers at established prices to assist with desexing, vaccination and other areas of care.

Essential to the comfort and welfare of the cat is the continuing need to keep the cage covered and to have a plentiful supply of water available for the cat whilst it awaits treatment.

It is likely this will be the only visit the cat gets to the Veterinary Clinic so it is essential you make the most of this situation. All cats must have a thorough 'vet check' and ideally vaccination and flea treatment. Veterinary advice should be sought in respect of the correct vaccine that will ensure the long-term cover for a colony cat.

Cats that are injured or ill must receive prompt treatment. Indicators that a cat may be sick/injured include:

- weight loss
- not eating or drinking
- lethargy
- discharge from nose and eyes
- Hair loss
- Not putting weight on a leg
- Visible wound
- Pawing at mouth or dribbling

Contact your Veterinarian for advice if you are concerned about the health of any of your cats. It is not humane to allow any animal to suffer through severe ill-health.

If a cat is trapped and is found to have medical or physical problems that pose any welfare threat to the cat, they should be euthanased as treatment/management is unlikely to be a realistic option.

#### 4.4. Identification

The most common internationally acceptable method for identifying colony cats that have been desexed is to tip the top of the left ear.

Immediate visual identification is necessary in order to:

- Show that the cat has been desexed and is part of a managed colony.
- Assist the carers in managing the colony.

Ear-tipping is the removal of the distal  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the ear, which is a maximum of 1cm in an adult and proportionally smaller in a kitten. This should always be a straight cut on the left ear to enable easy identification from a reasonable distance.

Ear-tipping is performed while the cat is already anaesthetised for desexing surgery. This procedure is simple (clamp – cut – cauterise – release clamp) and should be a standard ID procedure for all managed colonies.

Because it is difficult to get close to these cats, the sterilisation ID must be obvious from a certain distance. ***Tattooing is not effective. Collars are not safe or practical*** for colony cats because as the cat grows and gains weight, the collar will tighten and could strangle him.

Microchipping is recommended as a long-term identification method that is recorded and registered. This would be undertaken at the time of desexing. Although not mandatory for colony cats any cat rehomed must be microchipped and placed on the Animal Register in the name of the new owner.

#### 4.5. Food, water & shelter

The feeding regime must be consistent. Cats are creatures of habit and must be fed at the same time and in the same place daily. Cats must be provided with adequate food and water on a daily basis all year round. If you cannot feed the cats, for whatever reason, arrange to have someone else provide them with food and water on the same schedule.

To avoid attracting wildlife and disturbance from people / activity, feed cats in the early morning or late evening.

A sheltered safe place to feed should be determined and feeding dishes should be used as this has a better appearance, is more hygienic and is more generally accepted. Feeding areas should be kept neat and clean. Empty food cans and plates should be picked up promptly. Food that has gotten wet or spoiled should be discarded. Wet or spoiled food can cause illness. Give the cats' fresh water on a regular basis. Uneaten food left around can attract vermin and should be cleaned up.

If possible a small cat hut should be made in which food bowls are placed providing privacy and shelter for the cats.

Cats must be provided with adequate shelter. If you do not provide them with shelter they may seek it in areas where they are not welcome, for example under a neighbouring deck, shed or in a car motor which would put the cats at risk.

Cat shelters are provided by some carers, these provide security and safety as well as shelter keeping other animals, particularly dogs, at bay. Shelters can be boxes, dog kennels, sheds or garages. These must contain bedding of some material, straw or hay is good as it does not hold moisture. They must also be waterproof and easy to keep clean.

In the case of smaller shelters these should be secured in some way to avoid unwanted removal. Some form of identification on shelters is advisable.

#### 4.6. Records

While a full audit of colonies is an ultimate aim of the Coalition, it is good practice to maintain accurate records for all colony cats including new arrivals. The following lists some of the key aspects to record:

- Cat name with a description of colour and distinguishing features (which is useful for new feeders and other helpers)
- Gender and approximate age
- Desexed status, eartipped (Y/N) and microchip details
- Veterinary interventions (desex, treat, euthanase) with relevant dates
- Report number of kittens rehomed/adopted
- Report number of cats found dead or missing
- Report number of newcomers and ensure that this cat is managed as part of the colony

Good vet records allows one to show that the cats in your colony are healthy and desexed. These records can be used as a tool to educate neighbours that are fearful that the cats will pass a disease on to them or their pet cats.

#### 4.7. Ongoing Care

General maintenance of the colony is essential.

Evidence of “cat dumping” should be looked for, recorded and people reported to the SPCA if identifiable (e.g. car licence plate numbers). Cat abandonment is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act but unfortunately it can happen and people can use colonies as ‘dumping grounds’ for their own cats or litters.

Sick cats must be treated under veterinary supervision on site or re-trapped and taken to a veterinary clinic.

A continuing overview of the quality of life of the colony is also very important. Carers must be constantly alerted to any problems that may exist such as weight loss, coughing, sneezing, sickly disposition and visible external signs including discharging eyes, cancers etc. Frequent monitoring is essential.

If you are moving or can no longer adequately care for your colony you must find an alternate carer to take over the care and management of the colony. If you are unable to find someone to do this you are responsible for trapping and transporting all the cats to your veterinarian or to the SPCA.

#### **4.8. Adoption of tame cats and kittens**

Make efforts to place socialised colony cats into new homes or seek the assistance of other Cat Rescue organisations.

Kittens can be removed from mothers at the age of 6 weeks and will generally settle down quite quickly with lots of attention and handling. They must be fostered until they are of an age that they can be rehomed in addition to being desexed, vaccinated and identified by microchip implant.

#### **4.9. Colony - a nuisance or in danger**

If the colony becomes a nuisance it is important to talk things through with the land owner / tenant / occupier and / or local council to endeavour to come to a compromise. This compromise may include reducing numbers which will take time so ensure you get an adequate time frame to be able to do this in. If you need to reduce numbers, you are responsible for trapping and transporting all the cats to your veterinarian or SPCA Auckland. In troubled areas where pressure to reduce is being applied, approach the members within the Community Cat Coalition network or SPCA Auckland.

If the colony has or is going to be put in danger (e.g. imminent demolition or construction of buildings on property) it is essential that the colony is removed from danger. If you are unable to do this yourself, or the time frame available to you is such that you cannot do this, please use the network of the Community Cat Coalition and/or SPCA Auckland for assistance.