

## Chapter 3: Trap-Neuter-Return

### 3.1. Definition of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)

**Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)** 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 or their ongoing care.

The aim of TNR is to manage populations of stray cats in a humane manner, leading to an eventual decrease in numbers, with T-TNR extending to communities.

### 3.2. History of TNR:

TNR has been practised for decades and was introduced to Europe, including Britain and Denmark, during the 1950s. It was also brought to America around that time, however, stayed largely underground until the cat advocacy group Alley Cat Allies was formed in the 1990s (Berkeley EP, TNR Past present and future: A history of the trap-neuter-return movement, 2004, Bethesda, MD: Alley Cat Allies). It is now widespread in America.

To date, in New Zealand, TNR programmes are used to control the population, health and welfare of cats living in colonies through the use of voluntary cat caregivers with community targeted trap-neuter-return (T-TNR) currently being introduced.

### 3.3. Benefits of TNR

There are numerous benefits for both the cat and the community. They TNR benefits are:

- Stabilising the population by halting reproduction
- Reducing the number of kittens being born unwanted
- Improving the quality of life for stray cats
- Reducing the number of kittens suffering on the streets with nowhere to live.
- Fewer homeless cats and kittens living in the neighbourhood.
- Less smell and noise as de-sexed cats are less likely to display territorial and mating behaviour.
- Reducing the number of nuisance behaviours displayed by neighbourhood cats such as yowling, noisy fights in the night and Tom cats spraying urine to mark their territory.

### 3.4. Survey of Auckland Cat Colonies

The health and welfare benefits of managed stray cats using the TNR method are clearly illustrated in a 12- month study in 2013/14 in Auckland undertaken by a team of 10 researchers. **The Colony Cat Audit results** of this independent survey is contained in Annexure D, which also includes the **Cat Welfare Assessment Criteria** used during this audit.



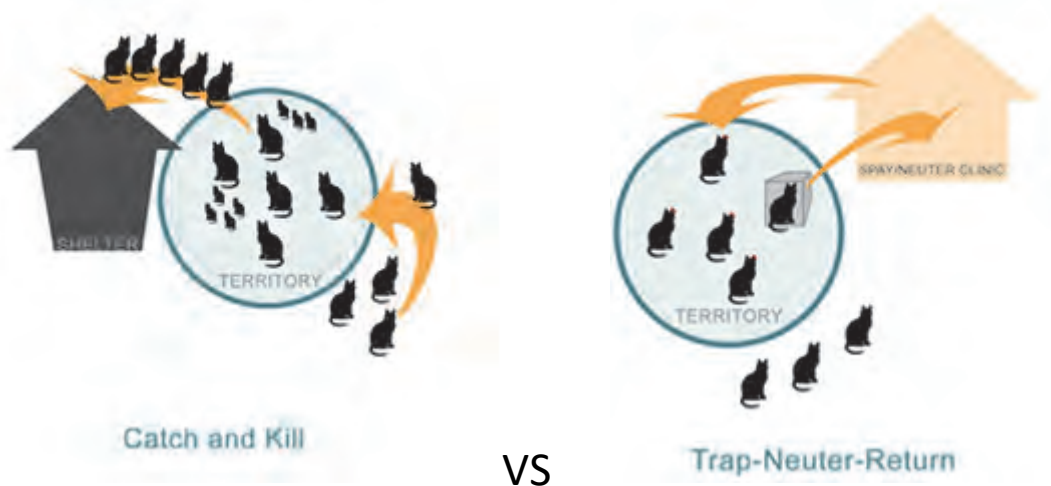
### 3.5. Why not just relocate or eliminate?

Catch and kill is cruel, inhumane, and creates a vacuum, as do attempts to “relocate” cats to other areas.

Cats play a complex role in local ecosystems and cannot simply be removed from any environment without unwelcome consequences. The scientific phenomena—“compensatory predation”, the “mesopredator release effect”, and the “vacuum effect”— illustrate why removing cats is harmful to the entire habitat, and why Trap-Neuter-Return is truly the best approach. (Refer to **Scientific phenomena** - Annexure E).

### 3.6. The Vacuum effect

The **vacuum effect** is a phenomenon scientifically recognized worldwide, across all types of animal species. Well-documented among biologists, the vacuum effect describes what happens when even a portion of an animal population is permanently removed from its home range. Sooner or later, the empty habitat attracts other members of the species from neighbouring areas, who move in to take advantage of the same resources that attracted the first group (such as shelter and food).



Killing or removing the original population does nothing to eliminate these resources; it only creates a “vacuum” that will inevitably draw in other animals living nearby.

**A habitat will support a population of a certain size. No matter how many animals are removed, if the resources remain, the population will eventually recover.** Any cats remaining after a catch and kill effort will produce more kittens and at a higher survival rate, filling the habitat to capacity. As one study found, “populations greatly reduced by culling are likely to rebound quickly.” Over time, the number of cats in an area where a cat colony has been killed or relocated will simply recover and return to its original size.



### 3.7. Ear tipping

**Ear tipping** is an effective and universally accepted method to identify a spayed or neutered stray/community cat. It is the removal of the distal one-quarter of a **cat's left ear**, which is a maximum of 1 cm, in an adult and proportionally smaller in a kitten.



This procedure is performed under sterile conditions while the cat is already anaesthetised for spay or neuter surgery. There is little or no bleeding, it is relatively painless to the cat, and the ear tip does not significantly alter the appearance or beauty of the cat.

Ear tipping is the preferred method to identify spayed or neutered stray/community cats, because it is difficult to get close to these cats, and therefore the identification must be visible from a distance.

No other method of identification has proven to be as safe or as effective as ear-tipping. The CCC however, recommend also microchipping all the community cats as a long-term identification method that is recorded and registered. This helps to identify carers and/or adopted new owners.

### 3.8. Veterinary protocol

A **Veterinary protocol** (refer to Annexure F) has been developed in consultation between SPCA Auckland and the NZ Veterinary Association. This document clearly outlines the responsibility for all participating Vet clinics with regards to the assessment of the community cats, the resulting treatment and interventions (i.e. desexing surgery and/or humane euthanasia) as well as the subsidies that can be claimed from SPCA Auckland.

The participating Vet clinics also receive a copy of the **Ear tipping protocol: Stray Cat Fact Sheet** (Annexure G) which clearly demonstrates the correct manner to ear-tip a cat while still under anaesthetic during the desexing surgery.

