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**Committee** Rural Services and Wairarapa  
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## Cat Management Programmes

### 1. Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update on three cat management programmes currently underway in the Region.

### 2. Background

Feral and free-roaming cats have long been recognised as a significant threat to New Zealand's native wildlife and rank second only to stoats in this regard. Feral cats are targeted as one of the main pests within Greater Wellington's Key Native Ecosystem operational areas. It is an ongoing battle as cat numbers tend to remain constant while other predator populations decrease. There is no doubt that cat dumping is a major factor in increasing the feral and stray cat populations. Controlling reproduction and humanely euthanasing unwanted cats is a means of keeping the population at manageable levels.

### 3. Feline Spaying and Neutering Programme

In April this year, the Biosecurity Department entered into agreements via Memorandums of Understanding with the Wellington SPCA, Wairarapa SPCA, and Wairarapa veterinarians to subsidise the cost of three independent feline spaying and neutering pilot programmes to reduce the number of felines being born in the Wellington Region.

Support for each programme had a financial limit with the actual sum calculated on an agreed cost for each feline desexed plus agreed costs associated with the promotion and administration of the campaigns. Books were also provided for prizes to cat owners chosen by the service providers.

One of the programmes has been completed with the other two in progress. The programmes, which are targeted towards feline owners who will provide the most benefit to the campaign objectives, have been fully subscribed with an estimated 320 cats being registered for treatment. The number of cats that

could be desexed is only limited by the amount of funds and goodwill available.

Now that the pilot programme is going smoothly it is intended to discuss with our MOU partners the possibility of repeating the programme in August 2005. A plea will be made for funding assistance from Territorial Authorities, Department of Conservation and others.

Whilst recognising the positive benefits to people owning and caring for companion animals there is a need to help and encourage cat owners to act responsibly and help avoid adverse pressures on native wildlife. Education will be a key factor in raising awareness and understanding of the threats that unwanted cats pose to our native wildlife.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The three pilot spaying and neutering programmes have been strongly supported by the respective SPCA's, veterinary practices and the cat owning community. There is a desire by the organisations involved to have these programmes become an annual fixture. The main limitation for expanding the programme is financial. However, the participants believe that opportunities exist for other organisations to provide funding support in the future.

The benefits of these programmes are likely to be significant in the medium to longer term. The costs are minor compared with undertaking extensive feral cat control programmes and the impacts ferals have on native species.

#### **5. Communications**

The pilot programmes have attracted considerable media coverage to date. It is proposed to issue media releases once the programmes have been concluded. A summary of the programme will be included in a future Rural Services newsletter.

#### **6. Recommendation**

*That the report be received and the information noted.*

Report prepared by:

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