

International Declaration of Responsibilities to Cats



Cat welfare is a complex subject and the responsibility for implementation of good welfare for cats falls to a number of organisations as well as to individuals within a country.

Good welfare requires an understanding of the issues and good collaborations.

As cats are sentient beings, they are entitled to protection from unnecessary suffering. This responsibility falls to:

- **Central governments setting welfare law and tone**
- **Local and central government authorities implementing law and population management**
- **Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals undertaking cat welfare work including population management**
- **Individuals owning cats**
- **Those living alongside street and community cats**
- **Individuals breeding and selling cats**
- **Veterinary professionals treating cats**

Living alongside cats

The domestic cat exists in a wide range of habitats across the world, is highly adaptable and can reproduce prolifically. Cats and people coexist in most of these places.

In many countries there are laws to prevent dogs living on the streets. However, street or community cats are common the world over.

The relationship between people and cats lies on a spectrum of 'closeness'. The extremes of this spectrum are the pet cat living completely indoors in a human home, relying on its owner for all of its needs, and the cat that lives totally independently of people, avoiding human contact where possible. These extremes would be termed **indoor only pet cats** (many pet cats have free access to the outdoors) and **feral cats** respectively.

Between them on the spectrum are pet cats with outdoor access, and cats that live alongside people but not in their homes, are friendly/interactive to various degrees, and are fed or cared for to various degrees. This latter group would be termed **street** or **community cats**.

Stray cats are pet cats that are no longer in a home (either by their choice or because they have become lost or abandoned) and live alongside the street or community cats.



Problems caused by cats

Local authorities are often asked to deal with problems associated with street, community or feral cats – some live in large groups which may cause noise, smell or health nuisance problems to people. Both local and visiting people may be distressed to see large numbers of kittens dying of disease or malnutrition, issues which are inevitably present when large numbers of reproductive cats are trying to survive. Cats can be considered as vermin in some places. In others there may be additional issues of predation on endangered species.

Welfare of cats

Cats are sentient beings and experience pleasure and pain. Welfare is not just about physical issues; emotional wellbeing is equally important. Being 'owned' as a pet cat does not necessarily mean that there are no welfare issues for that cat, as the owned cat's environment and lifestyle can impact on welfare. Likewise, a cat living successfully on the street may not necessarily have welfare issues.

We do know that street, community or feral cats can suffer because of cruelty or persecution, problems caused by the stresses of reproduction and disease, lack of good nutrition, injuries from accidents, being preyed upon by other animals, or by inhumane methods of population control carried out by local authorities (inhumane trapping/catching, destruction or holding facilities). Street cats do not usually have access to veterinary care, either emergency or preventive. Neutering cats removes reproductive stresses and prevents overpopulation and many of the problems that go with it, such as public nuisance.

Pet cats may have welfare problems associated with the stresses of living with people who do not understand or fulfil their needs (this can be excesses as well as deficiencies, eg, obesity) or where veterinary care for cats is not as good as it could be. Creating certain looks through breeding has also resulted in cats suffering with serious health problems.

International Cat Care has developed this 'International Declaration of Responsibilities to Cats', to provide a clear framework to help different entities work together and play their part to protect and improve cat welfare. The declaration will help those responsible for cat welfare to understand how to ensure that all cats, owned and unowned, are protected from suffering and are given the opportunity to live a good life.

We are asking people to support this Declaration by signing it. The more signatures we have, the better able we are to show the world how many people care about cats and want their welfare to be improved. **To sign the Declaration, go to: goo.gl/Ef6qq4.**

Government responsibility



- To develop (using appropriate expertise) and provide a legal framework for good feline welfare and to encourage and enforce it.
- To support local government, police forces and NGOs in implementing the law properly.
- To support (not necessarily monetarily) the work of good NGOs in their cat welfare work, including population management.
- To encourage responsible pet ownership (neutering, microchipping and registration, and preventive health care).
- To encourage responsible breeding and selling of cats.
- To recognise the position of, and to protect, feral cats within the cat population and the law.
- To ensure identification of street/community/feral cats that have been neutered (ear tipping rather than notching is the method of choice at present), and to ensure ear tipping is not considered a mutilation under law.
- To outlaw declawing and other cosmetic surgery.
- To encourage responsible (re)homing of abandoned or relinquished pet cats.
- To recognise animal hoarding as a human issue and to encourage collaboration between cat and human welfare organisations.
- To collaborate and share best practice and experience internationally.

Local authority responsibility

- To consider the interests of cats, humans and other animals when making decisions that affect cats, including those made on public health grounds.
- To implement welfare laws.
- To make decisions on population management of unowned cats based on ethical and humane approaches. Management should be planned, targeted and effective, and consider all potential sources of cats. Practices such as using poison or gas to kill cats are totally unacceptable. Where euthanasia is required, authorities must ensure this is done humanely by trained and competent persons.
- To ensure that population management is done humanely. Trap, neuter, vaccination and return (TNVR) is currently the humane method of choice for population management of cats and authorities should follow best practice. Neutering should be undertaken under anaesthesia by vets trained in the techniques with suitable equipment and drugs.
- To collaborate with good NGOs in sorting out the best approach to the problems caused by unowned cats.
- To ensure that euthanasia is a legitimate welfare option for some cats where significant and or sustained physical or emotional suffering exists or is known to be imminent. Failure to administer euthanasia to a cat when needed can be a major welfare issue.
- To collaborate and share best practice and experience internationally.



Responsibility of NGOs or individuals undertaking cat welfare work including population management

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may undertake both trap, neuter, vaccination and return (TNVR) work with unowned cats or provide a place where cats can be kept in order to find them new homes if appropriate. Those keeping cats in order to find them homes are referred to as homing centres (rather than rescues, sanctuary, adoption centres etc) as they should not simply store cats, but actively try to find them homes or alternative environments rather than confine them for long periods of time. Confinement is highly stressful for cats and may not be in the cats' best interests.

- To collaborate with local government and veterinary authorities, local communities and other organisations to recognise and understand the needs of people living in the community as well as the welfare needs of cats. Aim for a consensus with stakeholders.
- To try to differentiate between the different types of cat (pet or stray vs street/community or feral cats) and deal with their needs appropriately.
- To undertake best practice on TNVR for street/community or feral cats and work with local authorities where possible. Neutering should be undertaken under anaesthesia by vets trained in the techniques with suitable equipment and drugs. TNVR should be undertaken in a strategic, carefully coordinated and sustainable way, eg, local people and vets trained to do TNVR.



- To try to differentiate cats which are street/community or feral (and therefore will not be suited to going to a pet home) from those which are likely to live closely with people/communities without undue stress or distress and to provide alternative outcomes for street or feral cats – eg, TNVR, relocating to a farm/working cat location.
- Where cats are taken into homing centres, it is the responsibility of the centre to ensure the five welfare needs of the cat are met:
 - The need for a suitable environment
 - The need for a suitable diet
 - The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
 - The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease
- To provide facilities in homing centres that minimise stress/distress and maximise the control of infectious diseases. Measures should be in place to ensure that a cat does not leave a homing facility appreciably less healthy (physically or psychologically) than when it arrived.
- To ensure that all cats and kittens are neutered before they are (re)homed.
- To provide cats and kittens with appropriate preventive care (which may include vaccinations and parasite control).
- To microchip cats before they are homed where there are systems in place in that country for chipping and registration.



- To target resources appropriately to home as many suitable cats as possible with the shortest possible length of stay and an adequate quality of life.
- To place a suitable cat in an appropriate home, taking into account the needs of both the cat and the new owner.
- To encourage neutering and microchipping of owned cats in the community and promote good health care and welfare.
- To understand that human intervention is not always in a cat's best interest, eg, a feral cat will not want to live alongside people in a home.
- To ensure that euthanasia is a legitimate welfare option for some cats where significant and or sustained physical or emotional suffering exists or is known to be imminent. Humane euthanasia may be the most appropriate option for an individual cat although that decision should never be taken lightly and alternative options for healthy cats should always be explored. Failure to administer euthanasia to a cat when needed can be a major welfare issue.
- To work with human welfare organisations on cases of cat hoarding to find more successful solutions.
- To collaborate and share best practice and experience internationally.



Responsibility of owners of pet cats

- To select a cat as a pet that will not suffer from health and welfare problems because of its genetics, conformation and/or fearfulness of humans.
- To understand the needs of the pet cat in order to maximise positive welfare and minimise negative welfare. How this is done may depend on the individual cat. For owned cats the five welfare needs are the responsibility of the owner:
 - The need for a suitable environment
 - The need for a suitable diet
 - The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
 - The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease
- To neuter pet cats (or potentially use other accepted methods of contraception) to prevent unwanted kittens and the associated welfare problems. Neutering should be undertaken before the cat reaches puberty, between 4 and 6 months old.
- To microchip and register cats to help in identification of cats.
- To provide vaccination and other preventive healthcare for their cat(s).
- To take reasonable steps to prevent pet cats causing nuisance to neighbours.



Responsibility of those living alongside street and community cats

- To look out for the welfare of neutered community cats by feeding and providing shelter, and to collaborate with efforts by local authorities or NGOs to neuter and treat cats.
- To respect legislation to prevent cruelty to, or the abuse of, street cats.
- To feed responsibly and not create visual or odour nuisance by feeding animals. Feed alongside neutering programmes and ensure rubbish management.



Responsibility of those involved in breeding and selling cats

- Before entering into breeding cats, to become educated on the subject of feline reproduction including pregnancy, birth and kitten development, so as to possess the basic knowledge on how to breed cats and raise kittens responsibly.
- To only use *Felis catus* for breeding pet cats – breeding hybrids using wildcats brings ethical, welfare and environmental issues.
- To avoid the breeding of cats with inherited problems (either disease or conformational) that may have adverse welfare outcomes for the individual cats, and act on welfare and health issues before more breeding occurs.
- To work with veterinary professionals on healthy breeding.
- To follow best practice legislation or guidelines for breeding and selling cats and kittens.
- To ensure that the five welfare needs are met for cats and kittens in their care:
 - The need for a suitable environment
 - The need for a suitable diet
 - The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
 - The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease
- To manage and care for cats and kittens and their needs, whether accidental or purposeful breeding.
- To ensure the welfare of stud cats which may not be kept within the home.
- To produce healthy kittens which will not be stressed by living as pets – ie, a responsibility to ensure kittens are used to people and everyday occurrences in a normal home.
- To find responsible homes for the kittens they breed and sell through ethical channels.
- To neuter/vaccinate/microchip/provide preventive health care for kittens before they go to homes, and to pass on appropriate advice, including advice on proper care.
- Cat registration and showing organisations, cat clubs, breed advisory committees and judges must understand the problems associated with conformation or inherited defects detrimental to cat health and welfare, and hybrid breeding, and take all steps necessary to prevent these problems occurring and to ensure optimum welfare for individual cats and breeds.

Responsibility of veterinary professionals

- To ensure the five welfare needs are met for cats in their care:
 - The need for a suitable environment
 - The need for a suitable diet
 - The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
 - The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
 - The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease
- To refuse to declaw (or undertake other cosmetic surgery) in countries where it is still permissible under law, noting that ear tipping (to show that street cats have been neutered) should not be considered or treated as a mutilation.
- To provide facilities that minimise stress for cats when in the veterinary environment.
- To encourage owners to neuter, identify and provide preventive healthcare for their cats.
- To provide education on the cat's needs and understanding of cats.
- To work with breeders to produce healthy cats, and with prospective owners to select the right pet cat for them.
- To ensure cats are handled in an empathetic and safe manner.
- To provide pain relief when required.
- To strive to be as up to date as possible with information on cat care and treatment.
- To provide humane euthanasia.
- To work constructively with local authorities and/or NGOs and individuals on cat welfare issues including population management.

