The responses have provided valuable insights into how the pet and vet organisations see the cat population problem and their own primary responsibilities. I have met/communicated with SSPCA and other respondents to help me better understand. I see three outstanding issues (1) widespread mis-understandings concerning wildcat conservation aims (2) everyone agrees with my statistics (chart attached) but no one has addressed them head-on (3) everyone agrees with my goals, but the voluntary approach is simply not working. **A new assertive approach to cat neutering** (‘neuter all cats/ deliberate opt-in to breed’) will send out a clear message and that is what’s needed. To clarify conservation issues, I strongly suggest seeking further submissions from Professor Anna Meredith Professor of Zoological and Conservation Medicine, Associate Dean International, Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh\(^A\) in person and the Partner organisations of Scottish Wildcat Action\(^B\)

**Issue 1 – Does the cat population have a much lesser impact on their surrounding environment and the public than other pet species e.g. dogs?**

Think of filling a bath but leaving the taps open. It fills up and spills over (homes for cats are full up yet new cats are still being produced). A bit of the overspill is absorbed by carpets but then pushes outwards and spreads indefinitely (cat rescue centres are water-logged so don’t want more). Until the taps are turned off (assertive neutering measures) the flood will only get worse (rescue centres chronically over-burdened; overspill cats exposed to atrocious welfare problems we would not want for our own cats at home; predator and hybridisation burden on wildlife). At current levels the pet cat population is more than doubling every four years, at a time when available homes for cats are decreasing. That situation is unsustainable (see chart attached). The figures published by polls are a snapshot of only one portion of the domestic cat population not the whole cat population\(^1,2\). The extent of the unwanted cat population already poses actual nuisance to people and the environment, in the form of territorial fight injuries, colonisation of neighbours’ homes and outbuildings, costly intrusion into industrial premises, grave impacts on bird and small mammal populations locally, spread of feline diseases (FIV has been found in a wildcat), and as carriers of bovine TB and toxoplasmosis. One problem is that much of this suffering goes on unseen. Our animals are vulnerable and it’s we who are responsible for keeping them, and our environment, safe. None of this mess is the cats’ fault.

**Issue 2 – Conservation goals**

The problem when a conservation project is ambitious, exciting, well-run and has the highest level of support is the tendency for all of us to think ‘job done’. On the contrary, saving our wildcat can’t be done alone by the SWA partners, the project or the government. Changes in behaviour towards the domestic cat are necessary. These changes in civic society can’t be achieved by charities or vets alone. Wildcat/small mammals/bird/amphibian conservation\(^3\) all require radical improvements in our wasteful habits with domestic cats. Welfare and conservation share the same goals - a situation where ‘every cat has its needs met’ and the wildcat is free from the threat of hybridisation. Turning off the taps (‘neuter all cats/ deliberate opt-in to
breed) will allow the flood of feral cats to stabilise (be neutered and die off naturally). Once we get the populations of overspill cats down there will be no need/ no excuse for shooting cats. Time is of the essence. Australia took action too late – as a result, domestic cats are culled continuously, wildlife has been decimated, and people suffer draconian bans on keeping pets. As a free-roaming species, wildcat conservation can’t be considered in terms of designated sites. The hybridisation threat has to be effectively addressed Scotland-wide. New areas are likely to provide better habitat for the wildcat in future and could include woodlands in SW Scotland.

Cats of the domestic species are highly mobile. Like Caspar - a feral kitten from a farmyard in Fife, sold and taken to Braemar where she escaped (un-neutered) through an open window. Like Bonnie – living with 30 other cats at a scrapyard in rural Aberdeenshire, chronically mal-nourished, weakened by serial pregnancies, on the move over a 20-mile area in search of prey and shelter, produced her own 30 offspring within two years, shot for straying into ‘the wrong place’, took 2 days to crawl back to her kittens which had already died. Trapping and neutering programmes are a valid tool in bringing the feral cat population under control but only work if combined with stopping new cats overflowing from the pet population.

Distance between pet cat populations and the current surviving wildcat populations is not relevant in the bigger picture.

**Issue 3 – Potential unwanted effects e.g. increase in abandoned cats with ‘neuter all cats’**

Animal welfare organisations have to think in terms of protecting their staff, resources and reputations from increased demand. Not introducing new measures will not mean no change, in fact things will get worse. In addition, more cats will suffer alone ‘out there’ and perish unseen and uncounted. Like Hero’s kittens, caught by the baler and crushed – with only the farm worker to witness their terrible fate. The adult approach is to tackle the challenge head-on. Keeping our heads down and hoping will only cause more kittens like Hero’s to suffer traumatic fates and cat centres to be over-run. Some pet charities fear a ‘neuter all cats’ approach might encourage ‘extreme’ pedigree breeding and loss of the gene pool. This is to sacrifice the welfare of many cats like Hero and Bonnie in return for the welfare of a potential few. There is a case that ‘neuter all cats/ deliberate opt-in to breed’ would open up more opportunities and ensure diversity.

**Issue 4 - Who would enforce the new measures and operate a register/licencing system?**

All laws rely on self-enforcement. That doesn’t mean people won’t break the law on occasions but that is never a reason to abandon laws. When new legal guidance is introduced people change their behaviour through a combination of being guided and following the example of others e.g. when smoking restrictions were introduced. There are no ‘cat police’ in my proposals. While it’s important to learn from the dog ID chipping experience, the reasons for chipping cats are different and the situation is urgent, so delay would be unhelpful. With cats the main negative impacts come from the over-population, so the primary reason for ID chipping is rapid in-the-field identification as to whether a cat is already neutered. If already neutered (or ear-tipped) the cat can be released immediately so avoiding un-necessary uplift and containment which currently holds up Trap Neuter Return work. Similar measures are being discussed and enacted in a growing number of countries including Belgium, Switzerland, France, Sweden, South Australia, many States and city
legislatures in the USA and more. In Belgium a 3-stage model was used – (1) all adopted cats neutered (2) all cats sold or given for free neutered or the costs paid by the seller (3) all cats neutered (unless opt-in for breeding accepted). It would be helpful to learn from their experience. Ear-tipping is a universally accepted and valid measure for ensuring that already neutered unhandled-able cats are protected from unnecessary capture, sedation and containment. This is essential to welfare and can't be substituted by ID chipping.

Issue 6 – The NNS route or the AHW route
My reference to the Code of Practice on Non-Native Species is to prevention of further spread and is specific to the domestic cat species (p 24). There is no scope for mission creep into ‘eradication’. On the contrary an assertive approach (‘neuter all cats/ deliberate opt-in to breed) is the only way to reduce numbers of overspill cats and so reduce their exposure to harm. The Code gives provision to use guidance, advice and example to enact behaviour change. More structured tools include Species Control Agreements and Orders. The focus is prevention, the mode is a guided plan of action, the means is self-enforcement, and the goal is lasting behaviour change towards simple clear objectives (neuter, return). The NNS “polluter pays principle” is pragmatic and simple which is helpful for behaviour change. Domestic cats are territorial animals hence welfare needs dictate they should go back to site (with exception for clinical reasons/ threat to life / if lost and owner found; but they should not be held if owner cannot be found). With a smoother neutering pathway, cat welfare will benefit – they can be neutered and go straight back to the life they know. The AHW route is associated with cruelty so can be highly emotive. Strong negative emotions are barriers to behaviour change. Targeting people for ‘doing things badly’ is not as effective for behaviour change as showing by example ‘how to do things right’.

Issue 7 – Choice
Breeding with dogs, horses, and stock animals involves usually a deliberate decision - to choose a mate, make a placement, and have homes organised. With cats, as a result of their high reproductive capacity and young age of fertility, pregnancy occurs without any deliberate decision and so lacks the same sense of responsibility for the owner. Most people set out to get a companion ‘pet’ cat, not to be a breeder. Instead they get a breeding machine, stress and worry; for some it becomes a descent into chronic loss of control. A cat ‘fit for purpose’ as a companion is an already neutered cat. Pet organisations themselves enact compulsory neutering. The next logical step is to roll out assertive neutering (‘neuter all cats/ deliberate opt-in for breeding’ to all cats, including those sold and those given privately. Then anyone wanting to become an owner can get a cat ‘fit for purpose’ and anyone wanting to breed cats would be nudged to make a deliberate choice placing them on the same footing as other companion animal breeders. I strongly suggest that persisting with the current educational messages is only making things worse, as evidenced by the findings that the rates of vaccination and neutering in owned cats are already sliding back. People who resist voluntary appeals don’t comply with the volume turned up. They are more likely instead to wake up to a fresh approach – one that is simpler – if you don’t opt-
in to be a breeder (and you can) then you’re an owner and your cat gets neutered (except on veterinary welfare advice)
Clinical judgement by a veterinary professional would, as now, come first in individual cases to ensure welfare. Evidence shows a neutering procedure is much safer than serial pregnancy. 91% of vet professionals place lack of neutering as the most important problem needing addressed for cat welfare. There is therefore no reason to expect increased numbers of complex cases. 81 % of households don’t keep a cat and 87 % of people who do keep a cat in Scotland get their cats neutered. That’s 97% of the population who choose in favour of controlling the cat population by humane means. Despite the charities’ cautious approaches which are for their own reasons, the people ‘out there’ that I and fellow front-line cat workers meet every day are strong supporters of more assertive measures to limit the unwanted cat population. The people who signed my petition include ‘victims’ of cat overspill, cat-lovers, non-cat-lovers, frontline cat workers, people who work on the land (farming, game-keeping, rural businesses) as well as wildlife enthusiasts. They say the old ways have had long enough and that positive assertive measures are the needed now.


http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202017/PE1674_A.pdf


References
5. Wheelhouse, P (30/07/13) Answer to question S4W-16207 in the Scottish Parliament
Cat Population growth from Owned Cats Scotland - based on 13% un-neutered

Based on 13% of owned cats un-neutered - Scotland

- BASELINE
- GROWTH

Cat Population Growth from Owned Cats Scotland - based on 17% un-neutered

Based on 17% of owned cats un-neutered - more realistic

- BASELINE
- GROWTH

Cat Population Growth from Owned Cats Scotland - even if we reach 1% un-neutered

Based on 1% of owned cats un-neutered - cat pop still growing

- BASELINE
- GROWTH
OWNED PET CAT POPULATION – SHOWING FIGURES FOR SCOTLAND – CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE. BASED ON 1 LITTER PER YEAR, IGNORING OFFSPRING REPRODUCTION, AND NOT COUNTING FERAL CAT REPRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCOTLAND NOW</strong></td>
<td>Number of homes for cats is level/decreasing**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.88 million owned cats*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IF 13%*** ARE UN-NEUTERED = 114,400

13% is an under-estimate due to methodology

If half are female = 57,200

Cats kept unneutered can have 2 or 3 litters per year so this is an under-estimate

X 5 kittens per average litter = 286,000 kittens a year

Increases the pet cat population by a factor of X 2.3 every 4 years

Over 4 years (ignoring offspring reproduction) = 1,144,000 new cats

**IF 17% ARE UN-NEUTERED = 149,600

More realistic. 90 years to get here.

If half are female = 74,800

Cats kept unneutered can have 2 or 3 litters per year so this is an under-estimate

X 5 kittens per average litter = 374,000 kittens a year

Increases the pet cat population by a factor of X 2.7 every 4 years

Over 4 years (ignoring offspring reproduction) = 1,496,000 new cats

**IF 1% ARE UN-NEUTERED = 8,800

Unlikely to achieve without new approach

If half are female = 4,400

Cats kept unneutered can have 2 or 3 litters per year so this is an under-estimate

X 5 kittens per average litter = 22,000 kittens a year

Increases the pet cat population by a factor of X .10 every 4 years

Over 4 years (ignoring offspring reproduction) = 88,000 new cats

Need decrease in population.

Scope for licensed breeders

---

* based on PFMA geographical ratio’s applied to YouGov/ PDSA survey figures 2016

** based on PFMA annual surveys 2013 and RSPCA ‘Tackling the Cat Crisis’ report 2014.