Views on concerns expressed in submissions from animal welfare and veterinary bodies, on potential unintended consequences of compulsory microchipping and neutering of owned domestic cats.

It is understood that the Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; a joint submission from the British Veterinary Association Scottish Branch, British Small Animal Veterinary Association and British Veterinary Zoological Society; and the Cat Population Control Group.

These organisations express a number of concerns with the petitioner’s proposals to compulsorily microchip and neuter owned domestic cats. These are, namely: that this is unnecessary in areas where there are no Scottish Wildcats; the cost to pet owners and associated concerns that this could lead to a greater number of abandoned domestic cats; the enforcement of any new legal requirements placed on owners of domestic cats; surgical risks associated with compulsory neutering; a reduced gene pool of domestic cats that may be bred from leading to adverse health implications; and the possibility of a need to cull non-owned cat populations. Scottish Government veterinary advisers fully share these concerns.

The Scottish Government hopes to shortly issue a public consultation on the licensing of dog, cat and rabbit breeding and this is expected to collect valuable information and views on the issue of responsible cat breeding and sale which may help to improve the welfare of our domestic cats.

Views on the suggestions from animal welfare and veterinary bodies, with regard to a co-ordinated public awareness and education campaign on responsible cat ownership.

The Scottish Government is supportive of any public awareness and education campaign which will improve the welfare outcomes for animals in Scotland. The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform wrote to inform the Committee on 24 January 2018 that the Scottish Government supports voluntary microchipping and neutering and that guidance is included in the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, approved by the Scottish Parliament on 27 January 2010.

The Scottish Government would endorse any campaign wishing to use the Code of Practice, which is freely available on the Scottish Government webpages and a number of printed copies could also be furnished for use. The Code of Practice informs cat owners of the many health and welfare benefits that can arise from voluntary microchipping and neutering. However, the Scottish Government is also aware of the concerns raised by the above organisations and does not support compulsory neutering or microchipping.

Hybridisation with domestic and feral cats poses the greatest threat to the Scottish wildcat. Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan Steering Group (SWCAP) believes that public campaigns about pet neutering are vital. SWCAP has identified six priority areas where they will be conducting an extensive Trap Neuter Vaccinate and Release programme. With the help of local vets and volunteers, they hope to reduce this threat considerably over the project lifespan.

The Scottish Wildcat Action launched ‘Generation Wildcat’ on 22 June 2018. The key message of this campaign is to encourage the wider Scottish public to contribute to wildcat
conservation through making their cats ‘Supercats’ by making sure they are neutered, vaccinated, and microchipped. Further information can be found on the Scottish Wildcat Action website at http://www.scottishwildcataction.org/latest-news/2018/june/be-proud-to-be-part-of-generationwildcat-were-their-last-chance/

A previous campaign to support wildcat conservation, along the lines of ‘Generation Wildcat’ called ‘Supercat’ was launched in January 2017. Although the campaign was promoted across the whole of Scotland, it particularly targeted cat owners in the Scottish Wildcat Action Priority Areas.

An update on the Scottish Government’s Scottish Wildcat Action programme, and whether the Scottish Government intends to publish any interim findings.

The SWCAP has produced a paper for the Scottish Government titled ‘Responsible Cat Ownership and Reducing the Threat to Scottish Wildcats’ which provides an update on the issues relating to the threat to Scottish wildcats and recommends new necessary measures. I understand a copy of this paper was recently submitted to the Public Petition’s Committee.

Another draft paper on Scottish wildcat conservation is currently being produced by Scottish Wildcat Action and is expected to be published shortly. The paper includes input from the Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies and Roslin Institute, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

I trust that this information is helpful, and if you require any further information please let me know.