I have recently been consulting cat loving members of the public about the proposal to neuter all pet cats. There are two commonly asked questions that I believe it would assist the members of the Petitions Committee to know about, as well as those who are following the debate.

**QU 1 Won’t we lose the moggie cat altogether and hand over breeding to pedigrees only?**

People would still breed moggies but the difference is they’d have to opt-in by registering and comply with the standards specified (as already happens in France among other countries). As things are, multitudes of kittens are produced with no vaccination, worming or basics of health care. Kittens are only so freely available and easy to get currently because there are surplus numbers, which means 7 in every 10 kittens born each year will face homelessness at some point in their lifetime\(^1\). We are all agreed about the statistics and that this is unsustainable and undesirable.

I acknowledge that for some years during the transition after mandatory neutering comes in there will be fewer kittens produced. Genuine cat-loving families wanting to adopt a feline into the family will understand that their love is needed by thousands of gorgeous deserving cats that are too often overlooked and will choose the shelters and rescue centres instead.

In the long term there will be more responsible moggie breeders than there are now. Moggie breeders would be aiming to produce as many new cats each year as are lost through the natural death rate among pet cats. That way every mum and kitten is happy, healthy and has a home for life.

The pet rescue organisations currently care for and put up for adoption kittens born to un-planned pregnancies at affordable fees, which demonstrates that it can be done. The cat organisations and centres are ideally placed, once kitten production shifts over to a planned basis only, to provide the training, guidance, information, and knowledge that will be needed.

**QU 2 Would the supply of kittens not reduce and breeders hike up prices, and so deprive people of adopting kittens?**

If we make the breeder financially responsible in law for the neutering, vaccination and microchip costs of each kitten they produce, then breeders may add these costs in at the point of sale and kittens will be priced accordingly. When we get a new car we don’t actually believe we are getting the first year of servicing costs “free”. Everybody knows we are paying for this servicing but accepts that the costs are packaged up in a way that offers peace of mind to us the buyer and saves us out of pocket payments for basic essentials in the first year. The same principle applies to kitten sales. Kitten prices will include a package that includes all the basic essentials of kitten care already paid for – a more reliable deal than as things are now.
Pet rescue organisations already operate this way throughout the UK including in Scotland (even though they are not required to by law) so the business model is well tried and tested. The costs are transparent and don’t put genuine adopters off. If the pet rescue organisations can offer acceptable fees using this model then moggie breeders can too.

Additionally, this model saves the adopting family the very considerable out of pocket costs they would incur if a kitten were to get pregnant or contract a virus which happens widely as things are.

Breeders can only hike up prices if people are willing to pay inflated prices. The way to tackle that is to educate the public to seek out an itemised breakdown of breeder costs (just like rescue organisations provide already) then they can judge for themselves whether to pay inflated prices. With so many gorgeous deserving cats in the shelters in need of homes there should be more than enough choice for people who are genuine adopters.

Another mechanism could be to place the financial responsibility in law on the buyer or receiver of a cat or kitten (i.e. the owner) for its neutering, vaccination and microchipping costs.

On its own ‘owner pays’ provides weaker regulation compared to ‘producer pays’ as it doesn’t place a brake on the over-production of kittens. This was tackled in Belgium by introducing breeder responsibility first followed a year later by owner responsibility.

The choices.

CHOICE ONE is that we could carry on with the mass of excess-to-requirements kittens produced each year (as now) – and possibly that provides consumers with choice and keeps prices down – but I am not convinced that it does when we look at the high prices some producers are asking for kittens that have had no vaccinations, worming or basic parasites treatments. The price of retaining that level of choice for the consumer is that 7 in every 10 kittens born now will be homeless – maybe not as kittens but later on in their life when they are displaced, left behind, shut out, or move on under their own steam to have kittens of their own.

CHOICE TWO is that we reduce the mass output of new cats to a level that matches the natural death rate in the pet cat population that have homes. There will be masses of loving deserving cats still looking for homes for years to come that at present sit in rescue shelters for far too long awaiting homes of their own and are overlooked in favour of easy to find kittens. As things are kittens are produced like cauliflowers. Cauliflowers that aren’t chosen by customers or that get old sitting on the shelf, get turfed out into the skip and condemned as waste. We humans seem to tolerate wasting a third of our food. We want cheap food but choice as well and that’s the price we pay - over-production and throw the waste away. If we decide cats need better protection than cauliflowers, we may have to tolerate a short-term reduction in the availability of kittens. To any responsible genuine cat-loving (and non-cat-loving)
person that is a small price to pay when the reward is protecting hundreds of thousands of cats and kittens from atrocious lifelong suffering as ‘scrap-heap’ waste.

After the transitional period, and sustainably into the future, there would be more responsible moggie breeders than there are now to match the death rate in pet cats with homes. There would be more, and more reliable, choice for consumers.

1. 880,000 owned cats in Scotland, 87% are neutered, 13 % not neutered, on conservative estimates 286,000 new cats are produced each year. Based on an average 10-year lifespan 88,000 die each year leaving 88,000 home slots available. Leaves 198,000 excess to the homes available each year (286,000-88,000=198,000) equivalent to 7 in 10 kittens born each year can expect to be homeless during their lifespan (198/286X100=69.2%)