For the convenience of the members of the Committee I am writing with evidence which was omitted during answers to their questions on 21 November 2019. I appreciate this is a complex subject with dual aspects, of welfare and conservation, and not all facts can be easily marshalled on the spot. However, some of this overlooked evidence is crucial to understanding the situation so I trust it will be helpful for me to pull it together into one place here.

1. **WELFARE.** There is evidence that un-neutered cats of the domestic species are ubiquitous across the UK including Scotland, that the numbers are high and increasing, and that cat over-population as a result of lack of neutering causes serious welfare problems. (1,2,3,4,5)

The first issue to make clear is that the figures I have provided in my Submissions A, G and N are based on valid evidence from credible sources 1,2,3,8 and use the same methodology to calculate trends as the respected RSPCA Cat Crisis Report. 9 My calculations have been checked and confirmed by senior academic research staff in Veterinary Studies at Edinburgh University, by experienced frontline cat workers and agreed by the SSPCA* My figures are a reliable prediction of trends based on actual numbers – like the law that predicts the sun will rise tomorrow. No one disagrees that we are in a grave situation regards the issue of cat over-population and that neutering is good for cat welfare 4,5,6,7 Since I started this petition in 2017 there is further confirmatory evidence of high and accelerating numbers of un-neutered cats across Scotland; the world expert IUCN Cat Group has amplified the message with its own report on Scotland’s un-neutered cat population. 12

To repeat – the situation we have is that 10% of owners who keep un-neutered cats are causing the domestic cat population to more than double every four years, at a time when available homes are level or on the decline. This situation is stubbornly stalled despite huge charitable efforts, funds and educational messages being directed at it for over 20 years now. There is plentiful evidence that neutering is good for cat welfare at both the individual level and the population level. Experts other than me have carried out extensive trap-neuter-return and confirm that the present approaches to promoting lasting change in responsible cat ownership are not working and new measures are necessary as soon as possible. 9, 10, 11, 12

*personal communication

The second issue to make clear is that from a welfare point of view it isn’t the “feral” (un-socialised) state, it’s the un-neutered state that’s important. The domestic cat reproductive rate is high and un-relenting (they have 2-3 litters a year with an average of 5 in a litter). As a territorial species the individuals have to find their own territory, food and shelter from around 4 months of age. Juveniles are therefore highly mobile and quickly lost to being under human control. Fertile by the age of 14-16 weeks, domestic cats increase in numbers faster than trap-neuter-return work can keep up; areas are re-colonised by the influx of more un-neutered cats from the domestic population. Urban-born cats will disperse 10 miles or more to secure food and shelter, often ending up on waste, industrial and agricultural facilities where they
quickly add to the flow of excess un-neutered cats into the environment. Eventually saturation point is reached, and cats and their kittens die following a short life of serial pregnancies, starvation, cold (as a hot climate species, the domestic cat is not adapted to a cold damp climate), diseases, untreated injuries and persecution by those for whom their presence is seen as a nuisance (conflict occurs because of fear of feline and zoonotic diseases, fight injuries caused to pet cats, nuisance to neighbours and unwanted activity on waste and other industrial sites); for those caught up in these tragedies enormous distress is caused.

The third issue to adopt a definition of responsible ownership which enables a more proactive approach to solving the cat population welfare issues. On the basis of four decades of experience in clinical psychology I have an in-depth understanding of behaviour, I am confident in saying that the behaviour of un-neutered cats is almost wholly and un-relentingly under the control of hormonally mediated territorial and reproductive drives. The positive impact of neutering is to relax the hormonally driven behaviour, making space for the establishment of relationship bonds with humans which in turn increases the chances of a high welfare life for the cat and a satisfying experience for its keeper. A wide range of others agree with me—experts in veterinary epidemiology, veterinary medicine, cat welfare, cat behaviour, behavioural ecology, genetics, and domestic cat population management. The third issue is that there is plenty of evidence that shows that suffering is caused to individual cats by the overpopulation crisis. Other countries have already acknowledged the problems and have introduced or are planning legislation to support high welfare keeping of cats by requiring owners to neuter and microchip their cats. States and city legislatures in Canada and the USA apply hefty penalties and/or breeder’s fees (some areas imprisonment is possible) on owners keeping a cat un-neutered or allowing it outdoors. There, the mandatory spay-and-neuter laws are reported as resulting in a significant reduction in the number of cats that have to be taken into shelters. Belgium has legislation requiring cat and kitten neutering prior to point of transfer (whether given or sold) cost to be borne by the giver/breeder. Spain and France have legal requirements for registration, training, inspection and tax for breeders and keepers of cats, and mandatory microchipping. Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia have implemented or are planning nationwide legislative requirements for de-sexing and microchipping of cats and kittens, in some areas a ban on keeping cats, and a nationwide high welfare strategy for reducing the population of homeless and feral cats which localities are obliged to implement.

2. **CONSERVATION** Nowhere is there spatial separation between existing or future wildcat ranges and places people live – which is where un-neutered domestic cats come from. Evidence is now available indicating that nowhere are existing or future wildcat ranges far from places people live which is where un-neutered domestic cats come from. The evidence-based recommendations for wildcats to survive and extend into their natural ranges in future, are that new effective measures are necessary namely legislative requirements for responsible cat ownership i.e.
neuter and microchip domestic cats (with exemptions) to achieve a progressive and sustainable reduction in the numbers of un-neutered domestic cats. The experts agree that for welfare reasons the legislative requirement for cat neutering applies equally across all of Scotland.13,14,15

Human habitation is scattered in Scotland; we have houses in woods, forests and remote areas; nowhere are human settlements, many of significant size, far from existing wildcat priority areas or future wildcat ranges (natural wildcat habitat is now understood to be low altitude woodland edge). Our situation is different from mainland Europe which has retained, in some areas, sufficient spatial separation between residual wildcat and human populations. Nor can this situation be changed. We are a small island with a widely dispersed high density human population. Even if we undertake woodland restoration to extend natural wildcat habitat this will involve areas where people live.

3. COSTS

Welfare. Survey figures indicate c. 80,000 owned cats would need to be neutered or spayed in the event of new legislative requirements. To put this in perspective, in one year (2016) in Scotland, Cats Protection funded the neutering of 16,000 cats, one-fifth of that needed in one year. A rough reckoning is that 16,000 neuters represents c. £800,000 and to fund five times this number represents c.£4 million - diminishing exponentially year on year as neutering achieves real reduction in numbers (instead of the present skimming off the top which fails to dent the baseline numbers).

The costs of NOT neutering are considerably greater. To continue to neuter 16,000 cats a year for a decade represents c. £8 million and rising every decade because this level of neutering (skimming) achieves no effective reduction in baseline numbers of un-neutered cats.

The choice is between a spend of £8 million every decade in perpetuity versus a one-off investment of £1,280,000* which will make a lasting difference with diminishing costs year on year.

* Calculated at an average of £50 subsidy per neuter. Research shows that 16% of owners state cost as the reason for not neutering their cats so 16% of £8 million = £1,280,000.

Conservation. As pointed out in Submission J on 11 June 2018 “Public and charitable bodies are currently investing considerable funds in conserving the wildcat, and there is little purpose in doing this indefinitely if the influx of domestic cats, their genes and disease into wildcat populations cannot eventually be turned off at source. We would like to see a future where domestic cats, starting within areas like National Parks, are under ownership, neutered, vaccinated and microchipped. We believe this is best for the welfare of those domestic cats and the future survival of wildcat population.” 20

As wildcat recovery progresses and woodland habitat restoration increases as a result of climate crisis mitigation measures the wildcat ranges may prove to be more
resilient at lower altitudes across Scotland. Their recovery is not envisaged as being limited to specific boundaries. 21, 12

Charitable and public bodies have just secured considerable funds to progress wildcat recovery in a new project to start in 2020. This expenditure and work will be for nothing unless the influx of un-neutered cats from the domestic population is stopped at source in a lasting way; only that way can hybridisation be prevented without need for expensive and arduous trap-neuter-return or other control in perpetuity. The evidence shows that localised trap-neuter-return does not achieve sustainable change unless the flow of un-neutered cats is stopped at source i.e. all owned cats are neutered. 22

SNH require Cats Protection to have a licence under Non-Native Species legislation to release neutered cats into the environment, and to adhere to the limiting conditions. There are many more situations in which people release un-neutered cats into the environment. I have proposed that the sensible interpretation is that un-neutered cats should all be considered as "not under human control" and accordingly that anyone keeping an un-neutered cat will require a licence. The licence could be issued to eligible breeders, and those whose cats have certified medical conditions.

Conclusions and recommendations

Through my petition I have presented evidence from serious academic and field sources that verify (a) the problem of cat over-population is severe and ubiquitous, and (b) there are untold numbers of cats suffering misery, pain and not having their basic needs met. I know it is hard to believe when you have not experienced this yourself, and I appreciate there is an emotional barrier to surmount (it is painful to have to believe it), but I would not have brought this matter to your attention without first spending 20+ years trying to resolve it using the current approaches, which are now not enough. However, the evidence is confirmed and cast-iron. Accordingly, I commend you as members of the petitions committee to come to the only conclusion possible – that further discussion is urgently needed within the Scottish Parliament and Government on the proposals to implement new stronger measures as soon as possible to prevent and ultimately halt the suffering.

The welfare benefits of neutering and reduction of numbers apply equally across all areas of Scotland, urban and rural.

So far, no one disagrees with my figures or my goals. I am not alone in proposing that the evidence shows that the current approaches are not working, and eminent scientists, veterinarians and the 3.5k supporters who have signed my twin petitions agree. I am not alone in proposing that the only effective measure to tackle the cat crisis is a legislative requirement on owners to neuter their cats (with exemption by licence for eligible breeders or by veterinary certificate for medical reasons).

I commend the members of the committee to recognise the success that is being achieved in countries that have implemented similar measures in legislation and are seeing a positive difference.
I commend the members of the committee to recognise that a legislative requirement to microchip all cats is crucial to any high welfare strategy to improve cat welfare across the board. For purposes of welfare a microchipping scheme should be considered as having a *permitting* purpose and not simply an identification purpose, so that for example ownership can be limited to those without animal welfare convictions, those who have a certificate of neutering, an exemption or a licence, or those who fulfil specified other conditions. The administration scheme for registration is the responsibility of local legislatures in most other countries, which seems commensurate with this kind of purpose.

I welcome the concerns that have been raised for attention so that these can be planned for and the problems circumvented. No one wants to see unnecessary suffering, but the baseline we start from is one of high levels of suffering and ineffective action is not an option. I would ask the members of the committee to recognise that I am putting cat welfare above human convenience and expect this may cause some resistance in some areas; however, cats regarded as objects in law is no longer acceptable when animal sentience is recognised. The time has come to value all cats’ lives (not just our cherished companions or working cats) which means stopping the over-production that results in high numbers of cats struggling to survive on the margins of human society. The committee should receive submissions of further expert evidence which will throw light on some of the concerns which have been raised and which we all want to understand fully.


2. Pet Food Manufacturers Association (2016) *Cat Population Detail*  
   [https://www.pfma.org.uk/cat-population-2016](https://www.pfma.org.uk/cat-population-2016)

3. Submission G PE 1674. Figures based on PFMA geographical ratio’s applied to YouGov/ PDSA survey figures 2016, for Scotland (personal communication 2017) and GWCT gamebag data  
   [http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202018/PE1674_G.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202018/PE1674_G.pdf)  

4. Cat Group *Neutering of kittens at four months. A summary of the evidence*  

5. Cat Group *Timing of Neutering*  

www.bva.co.uk/News-campaigns-and-policy/policy/Companion-animals/Neutering

7. BSAVA Neutering (2013)
   www.bsava.com/Resources/Veterinary-resources/Position-statements/Neutering


   https://www.facebook.com/bbcbreakfast/videos/2038305386183589/
   RSPCA Cat Crisis report (2014)
   http://www.kind.cats.org.uk/docs/RSPCA_Cat_Crisis_Report.zip

    “The single most important thing that we can do to save cats and dogs from all the suffering and death that overpopulation causes is to spay and neuter them. Spaying and neutering are routine, affordable surgeries that can prevent thousands of animals from being born, only to suffer and struggle to survive on the streets and be abused by cruel or neglectful people.”


12. Urs Breitenmoser, Tabea Lanz and Christine Breitenmoser-Würsten (February 2019) Conservation of the wildcat (Felis silvestris) in Scotland: Review of the conservation status and assessment of conservation activities. “hybridisation is considered the major threat to the survival of the wildcat in Scotland and recent data suggest that this threat is accelerating”

13. Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and the Roslin Institute, Scottish Wildlife Trust, The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, National Trust for Scotland, Forest Enterprise Scotland, Cairngorms National Park Authority, SWCAP Steering Group. Domestic cat neutering to preserve the Scottish wildcat, VET RECORD, 7 July 2018, 27-28
    https://www.bva.co.uk/professional-development/vet-record/articles/domestic-cat-neutering-to-preserve-the-scottish-wildcat/

“It is proposed that these additional measures are:
A clear and unambiguous definition of what constitutes ownership and control of a domestic cat, and the responsibilities of such ownership. These will include:

- Compulsory neutering of all* owned cats in Scotland to prevent hybridisation with wildcats or existing hybrids, and to minimise the threat from feline infectious diseases. *A licensed exemption scheme will allow continued responsible breeding of domestic cats.
- Compulsory identification of all cats by microchipping and their registration on an authorised commercial database.
- The proposed measures are applicable to the whole of Scotland. Restriction to the currently identified wildcat priority areas or other areas where Scottish wildcats may exist would be almost impossible to define and discriminate against cat owners within such areas. The additional significant benefits to domestic cat welfare and health (as defined in the Scottish Government Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/304647/0095598.pdf), and potentially other wildlife species, mean that these measures are equally applicable to all domestic cat owners.”

15. SWA Steering Group Paper (sent to SG March 2018)

“The Steering Group recommends that the broad recommendation set out in Anna Meredith’s June 2016 paper still applies namely compulsory legal measures across the whole of Scotland that would prevent ownership of pet domestic cats unless they were neutered/vaccinated/chipped (with some exceptions). As a minimum this should start as soon as possible within the Priority Areas and surrounding buffer zones up to 2025 and beyond, extending to the whole of Scotland after 2025.
This phase could be used as an opportunity to further monitor and learn more about responsible cat ownership and public attitudes. A coordinated, parallel programme of education and communication would be run prior to, and during, the launch of any change to the legislation. It is anticipated that over time the public will become more aware and supportive of the aims and benefits of responsible cat ownership measures to domestic cat welfare, and wildcat conservation.”

16. Cruel deaths suffered by homeless cats
https://catsliberation.wordpress.com/2019/08/08/cruel-deaths-suffered-by-wild-living-cats/
17. Statement of a cat welfare organisation in south Scotland (2018): “We are so infuriated by the ridiculously low neutering rates in this area. People are letting their cats breed way out of control. Almost all local cats we pick up and test are positive for FIV and are carriers for Cat Flu having never ever being vaccinated in their entire lives. Your unneutered cats mating with any passing cat is spreading these diseases throughout the entire local communities. Due to long-term breeding of unneutered cats in this area the occurrence of genetic defects is on the increase and nearly every litter we see in this locality at least 1 in the litter has a genetic issue stemming from inbreeding and over breeding. Rescues like us are bursting at the seams because you didn't check out costs before taking a pet, and your cat has had her 7th litter and you've run out of friends & relatives to take the kittens. It's time you take responsibility for your choices and decisions and stop expecting charities like us to pick up the pieces. People drop out of running rescues every week because they burn out from exhaustion and heartbreak and nothing ever changing. Things get worse despite all the neutering and reaching out we do. Volunteers are burning out and unable to carry on.”

18. Submission C PE 1674 What is the situation in other Northern European countries? (2018)
   http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202018/PE1674 C.pdf


20. Submission J PE 1674 RZSS
   http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202018/PE1674 J.pdf

21. Wheelhouse, P (30/07/13) Answer to question S4W-16207 in the Scottish Parliament
   http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%202017/PE1674 A.pdf page 6
   “Wildcats are a wide-ranging species and hence their protection does not lend itself to the designated site approach.”


23. Response to SG Consultation on cat breeding