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26 January 2026

Whare Kaupapa Atawhai/
Conservation House 18
Manners Street Te Aro,
Wellington

6011

doc.govt.nz

Ref: OIAD-5950

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 11 December 2025 requesting information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) about (1) measures to avoid harm to companion and stray/community cats following the inclusion of feral cats in Predator Free 2050, (2) legal methods for trapping and killing feral cats and how DOC enforces those, and (3) DOC's approach to determining whether a trapped cat is feral prior to dispatch and the compliance regime in place.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA).

1) Measures to avoid, remedy or mitigate the risk of harm to companion or stray/community cats

DOC uses the definition of a feral cat as outlined by the National Cat Management Group. Feral cats are defined as "...cats which are unowned and unsocialised. They often have no relationship with or dependence on people and live in the wild."

Furthermore, DOC aims to ensure public messaging and guidance distinguishes feral from stray and companion cats and emphasise that only feral cats have been added to the Predator Free 2050 target species list.

2) Legal methods of trapping and killing feral cats, enforcement, and reporting of cruelty

Legal methods

All activities undertaken by DOC must comply with the Animal Welfare Act 1999, and any Vertebrate Toxic Agents (VTAs) used must be registered under the Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Act 1997 and applied in accordance with MPI registration conditions and permissions.

DOC employs a range of approved methods, including kill traps that meet National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) humane performance standards and are installed and operated according to DOC performance standards and current agreed best practice. Live-capture cage traps are checked daily, with humane dispatch carried out where it is lawful and appropriate. The use of toxins is determined on a case-by-case basis, subject to MPI registration conditions and DOC operational controls, and when VTAs are used, planning includes bait and carcass caution periods, appropriate signage, and compliance monitoring.

Enforcement of methods

DOC ensures adherence to Standard Operating Procedures and best-practice standards through staff and contractor training, contractor accreditation and audits, field supervision, trap-check and incident reporting, and post-operational reviews.

Suspected cruelty or non-compliance is not DOC practice and—where observed or reported—DOC would refer the matter to MPI (Animal Welfare compliance) or the SPCA for investigation and potential prosecution under the Animal Welfare Act.

Where activities occur on public conservation land by a third party, DOC may also take compliance action under relevant conservation legislation or permissions if conditions are breached.

Public guidance on animal welfare and trapping is available at: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/predator-free-2050/community-trapping/trapping-and-toxins/animal-welfare-and-trapping/>

3) Determining whether a trapped cat is feral before dispatch; enforcement and compliance monitoring regime

Assessment before dispatch

Contextual indicators in the planning phase, such as location and operational context (for example, remote backcountry sites targeted for feral cat control) are used to minimise the likelihood of encountering companion cats. Staff and contractors follow DOC best practice guidance which include recommendations to use live capture cage trapping in domestic and urban areas where companion cats are likely to be present.

DOC's best practice for feral cats refers staff, contractors and community groups to the publicly available document - *Feral And Stray Cats Monitoring And Control, A Preliminary Guideline Towards Good Practice*, which outlines considerations for identifying captured cats as feral. This can be accessed here: <https://www.bionet.nz/assets/Uploads/A11-Feral-and-Stray-Cats-minor-revisions-2020.pdf>

Compliance monitoring

Mandatory trap check schedules, such as daily checks for live capture devices are adhered to by DOC staff and contractors. DOC can conduct operational audits to verify adherence to standard operating procedures and current agreed best practice standards.

DOC staff and contractors undertake predator control training covering animal welfare, lawful methods, and monitoring and reporting requirements.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on DOC's website.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Reddiex".

Ben Reddiex
Director National Programmes
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai