



Committee Secretariat
Petitions Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

22 April 2025

By Email

Submission on the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust: Mandate the Desexing of Dogs in NZ Except to Registered Breeders - Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust

The New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe (NZVA) is the largest membership organisation representing veterinarians in New Zealand. We support members through leadership, education, standard setting and wellbeing support.

The Petitions Committee is considering the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust and has invited the NZVA to make a written submission commenting on the request and issues raised by the petitioner. The Companion Animal Veterinarians Branch of the NZVA (CAV) is making this submission on behalf of members. We appreciate the concerns raised in this petition and acknowledge the pressure that dog overpopulation places on animal shelters, welfare organisations and local communities.

The petitioner raises concerns that New Zealand's dog population is increasing and approaching one million, contributing to higher rates of abandonment and euthanasia. While we acknowledge the pressures faced by shelters and welfare groups, current data does not indicate a consistently rising or "soaring" dog population. Companion Animals New Zealand (CANZ) estimated the dog population at around 850,000 in 2020. In 2024, that estimate is slightly lower at 830,000, with a range of 780,000 to 885,000 depending on confidence intervals. When the temporary fluctuations during the COVID-19 pandemic are considered, the data suggests that dog numbers have remained relatively stable in recent years. Supporting this, the National Dog Database (NDD) shows only a small increase of 2,954 registered dogs between 2021 and 2023—a growth of just 0.5% over two years. This evidence does not support claims of an annual increase of 70,000 dogs or a population nearing one million, nor does it justify broad legislative measures based on assumptions of explosive growth.

Dog overpopulation continues to place considerable strain on animal shelters, welfare organisations and communities across Aotearoa. The NZVA shares the petitioner's concerns and agrees that more must be done to address the underlying drivers of this issue. Each year, rescue groups and shelters are faced with the challenging task of caring for large numbers of unwanted dogs, many of whom are ultimately euthanised due to limited space and resources. The NZVA is committed to supporting practical, sustainable solutions that ease these pressures and promote better animal welfare outcomes.

When considering Aotearoa New Zealand's dog overpopulation, the NZVA supports the principle that dogs not intended for breeding should at some time, be desexed (sterilised). Surgical sterilisation (surgical removal of ovaries or testicles) remains one of the most effective tools in preventing unwanted litters and, when timed appropriately, can also contribute positively to a dog's health and welfare.

However, when considering the individual dog, we do not support the introduction of legislation mandating desexing for all privately owned dogs. A more nuanced and evidence-based approach is required for this complex issue. The NZVA supports an individualised approach to sterilisation (surgical or chemical) for privately owned dogs. There is growing evidence that sterilisation of dogs can have negative health impacts in certain situations. While pre-pubertal sterilisation is appropriate in some cases, especially in shelters, it is not suitable for most dogs. For example, delaying sterilisation in large and giant breed dogs reduces the risk of orthopaedic disease and other health issues. The decision of when and how to sterilise should be informed by veterinary advice, considering the dog's breed, size, purpose, lifestyle, overall health, and the owners ability to manage its reproductive ability.

While we do not support a blanket mandate, the NZVA recognises that more can be done to reduce the number of unwanted dogs. We believe that strengthening the regulation of dog breeding would be a more targeted and effective measure. Breeding dogs should be subject to specific permits issued by territorial authorities, and we recommend that exemptions be granted only to those breeders who belong to organisations that uphold strict ethical standards that consider both the health and husbandry management of the breeding dogs and puppies.

Furthermore, we support the mandatory sterilisation of unowned dogs and puppies being rehomed through shelters, rescue groups and council facilities. These organisations already operate under significant pressure and play a crucial role in population control. Sterilisation in these contexts not only helps prevent further breeding but also increases adoption rates and ensures compliance with rehoming policies.

Countries such as Switzerland and Sweden, which are often cited as models of successful population control, have achieved this not through compulsory desexing laws but through the regulation of breeding and strong public education. In these countries, routine surgical sterilisation is a banned procedure. These countries have fostered a culture of responsible ownership in which dogs are seen as valued family members, and abandonment is rare. We believe Aotearoa can follow a similar path by focusing on education, access to veterinary care, and robust breeder accountability.

In conclusion, while we commend the petitioner's commitment to improving the welfare of dogs in New Zealand, we respectfully submit that mandating desexing for all privately owned dogs is not a matter best addressed through legislation of this kind. We believe the focus should instead be on strengthening regulatory oversight of dog breeding, investing in education on responsible pet ownership, and supporting targeted community desexing initiatives. These approaches are more likely to achieve meaningful and sustainable change.

References

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- Tasker L. *Stray Animal Control Practices (Europe) A report into the strategies for controlling stray dog and cat populations adopted in thirty-one countries*. London: WSPA and RSPCA International, 2007.
- <https://wsava.org/global-guidelines/reproduction-guidelines/>
- <https://www.companionanimals.nz/2024-a-good-life-survey>

Nāku iti noa, nā,



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