Petitioner submission of 15 June 2022

PE1938/B: Introduce compulsory microchipping of cats in Scotland

We thank the Scottish Government for their submission, and feel it a positive response and are very satisfied that this adequately addresses the issue of mandatory microchipping in Scotland's cats. We very much look forward to the conclusion of working with other UK administrations on this issue, as well as considerations upon completion of the current DEFRA proposals.

The recent PDSA paw report shown that 46% of UK cats were not microchipped, rising to 68% in 2018 and 71% in 2019. Regardless of relentless campaigning by many organisations, including our own, unfortunately there is now an evident stagnation in the numbers of cats being microchipped. Cat Protection figures reveal that 42% of cats in Scotland (290,000 cats) are not microchipped. The UK average was 32%. Cats that are owned, but are not microchipped, place strain on charity resources, veterinary practices, local authorities and, most importantly, the cats lives are at stake and owners risk a lifetime of heartache not knowing where their cat is and never being afforded closure for a lost/deceased beloved pet. Vets are only obliged to administer pain relief, and we have heard of many cases where cats have sadly been euthanized following a road accident with minor cuts and bruises, simply because no owner could be traced/came forward. As highlighted under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, owners have a legal responsibility to make sure that their cats welfare needs are met, whatever the circumstances. Owners cannot ensure this is the case if they are untraceable in the event of an emergency. Also, at a time when shelters have gone far beyond breaking point, some having hundreds of cats on waiting lists to enter the rescue, strain would be taken off by introducing mandatory microchipping. During our meetings as stakeholders for the English legislation, we learnt that many rescues feel a large chunk of cats in their care do have homes with owners searching for them. Without being identifiable, space has been taken leaving rescues unable to help genuine strays and ferals.

In terms of the second part of our petition regarding the scanning of microchips, and urging official 'best practice' guides be explored, as well as consideration for mandatory scanning, we would like to give further

evidence and would appreciate a response also on this issue specifically. We fully understand the recent DEFRA consultation surrounded scanning and the databases themselves, and that they are yet to publish results and their intention on this, but we feel this is an issue Scotland could look into in the meantime.
Our work with local authorities since 2017 has seen all of Scotland's LAs introduce a form of scanning cats found. However, this has been a voluntary action and, although almost all local authorities have continued to maintain a good system whereby cats are routinely scanned and, where a microchip is present, owners are notified, there are those where standards fall below what is expected of residents.

To scan cats found actually saves locally authorities money, which we would have thought would be much appreciated incentive in the current climate should a council not have an effective procedure regardless because it is the right and decent thing to do. During our research for DEFRA, data revealed that local authorities pay between £6.71 - £30 per cat for the uplift and disposal of. It varies due to the type of procedure they have in place. Our research working with official council data swiftly became clear that there is a financial burden on councils when a cat is not microchipped. Although this was a small scale study for the benefit of the microchipping research for DEFRA, we were able to combine these findings with previous findings from a larger scale study in partnership with the London Assembly which focused on 4312 cats collected from 28 councils. Being able to combine both sets of data, we were able to conclude that London councils alone spend around £129,390.00 on the disposal of cats that are not microchipped. Applying this to all councils in England shown that a little over £44 million could be saved in a 3 year period. DEFRA are in receipt of the details of this, and we are happy to disclose further detail to yourselves if you require. Although England data, we would expect very similar in each of the devolved nations due to our knowledge of very similar operations, exact in many cases, in all parts of the UK.

We acknowledge that scanning, and potential updates to the database system, is ongoing with DEFRA and, at the time of writing this, DEFRA have not yet published proposals on new polices in this area. However, regardless of whether Scotland ultimately decides to align policies on this with England at a later date, we would urge work to be done in the meantime to aid cat owners and local residents' concerns. The reasons for standards falling short in some areas is not necessarily due to a lack of will to have an effective system, but a lack of resources or understanding on the process. Issues, we have found, tend to fall into the areas of reporting, storing and equipment. We have come across

many cases where refuge workers have a lack of understanding of how to use the scanning equipment and no training has been given. One example would be that, one council believed that the number that appears on the microchip scanner indicated that no chip had been found. What this actually means is there is a chip and that is the identifying number. That particular council did not understand that they required vet codes to access owner details from that code to notify owners. A very simple and honest mistake which greatly upset cat owners and the staff themselves. There is currently no official guidance for councils to adhere to, and at very least we urge Scotland to introduce this to help guide councils on the correct and right thing to do. We are happy to send further details on this while all await DEFRAs conclusion on mandatory scanning.