



# 2025 Dog Policy Recommendations



# SPCA's recommendations to improve dog welfare and control in New Zealand

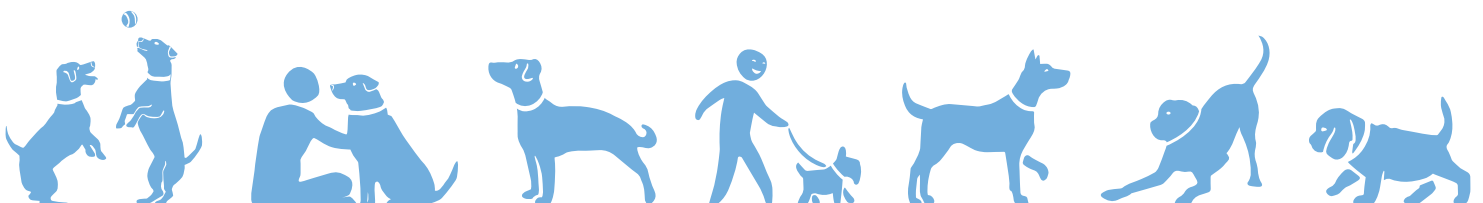
SPCA is the preeminent animal welfare and advocacy organisation in New Zealand. The Society has been in existence for over 150 years with a supporter base representing many tens of thousands of New Zealanders across the nation. The organisation includes 28 Animal Welfare Centres across New Zealand and approximately 60 inspectors appointed under the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

As the oldest and largest animal welfare charity in New Zealand, SPCA drives positive, progressive change to end animal cruelty, improve animal protection and promote the humane treatment of all animals.

Dog roaming, stock worrying, dog bite incidents and pressure on shelters have become increasingly concerning. SPCA's Inspectorate and Local Councils face limitations when trying to address these issues with current regulatory tools. This can increase public frustration and the risk of 'vigilante' action.

SPCA created the following recommendations as a guide to action to simultaneously improve the welfare of dogs and reduce roaming dogs and dog bite incidents in New Zealand. If you are interested in discussing any of these recommendations in more detail or if any further information is required, the Society is happy to discuss this matter further.

**These recommendations will create a better New Zealand for all dogs**



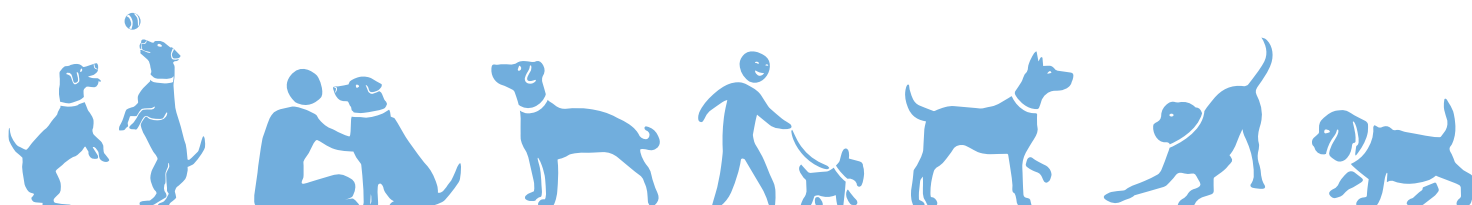


# SPCA's Top 10 Recommendations



These are the highest priorities for SPCA and are highlighted throughout the text.

Ban the importation, sale and use of electric collars used for the training and control of dogs	pg. 4
Introduce a regulation preventing permanent confinement (caging) of dogs	pg. 4
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Fund national dog safety education in every school across New Zealand	pg. 7
Authorise animal welfare inspectors to disqualify dog owners for multiple Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations breaches	pg. 8
Establish a database of registered rescues and regulatory framework for data collection (e.g. shelter statistics)	pg. 9
Give approved organisations power to rehome or euthanise seized animals within reasonable time frames where return to the owner is unsafe	pg. 9
Ban the private sale and use of fireworks in New Zealand	pg. 11



# Dog specific legislation

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of companion animal ownership in the world and about a third of New Zealand households are home to a companion dog. There is strong public pressure for policies that promote responsible pet ownership and address common welfare issues.

## A. Ban the importation, sale and use of electric collars used for the training and control of dogs

Electric shock collars deliver an electric current, through contact points on the dog's neck, which cause pain and/or distress to the dog. Electric shocks must be sufficiently painful or distressing to cause a change in behaviour. Using these training techniques can lead to aggression, anxiety, and other behaviour problems. There are more effective and humane alternatives to electric shock collars. A Select Committee Report (2025) recommended Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) undertake a review of the use of these devices in New Zealand.

## B. Establish a dog fighting taskforce

The infliction of pain, distress, fear and/or suffering on any animal for sport or entertainment is unacceptable. It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (the Act) to knowingly own, possess, keep, train, or breed an animal for the purposes of having that animal participate in an animal fighting venture. Despite the existence of this offence provision, SPCA still receives complaints relating to dog fighting events. Activities in which animals are induced or trained to fight other animals or humans are intolerable and must not be permitted in society. A specialised dog fighting task force within MPI, Police, or a cross-agency team is needed to strengthen investigations and prosecutions.

## C. Introduce a regulation preventing permanent confinement (caging) of dogs

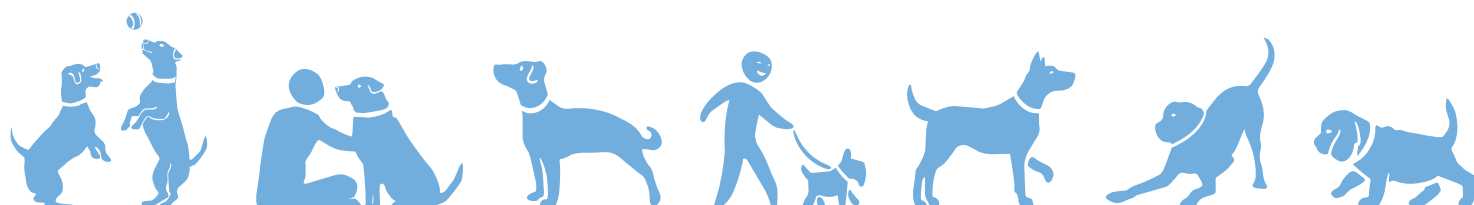
The issue of perpetually confined dogs is one of the most common welfare compromises encountered by SPCA inspectors. The negative welfare impact on the animal is often moderate to severe, with some dogs being subject to years of continual physical and mental suffering. The Act as it currently stands requires the collection of evidence of a fairly complex quality to have any chance of a successful conviction (e.g. If a confined dog is provided with food, water and shelter, is difficult to prove the Act has been breached). Regulating the reasonable confinement of dogs would allow inspectors to take appropriate steps to reduce animal suffering in a more effective and efficient manner. There is strong public pressure for this issue to be addressed.





## D. Reform the Dog Control Act

The Dog Control Act 1996 is nearly 30 years old and overdue for reform to reflect current evidence and best practice in reducing dog bite incidents and nuisance behaviour. A 2025 petition before the Select Committee is calling for this outdated legislation to be updated. SPCA supports a comprehensive review of The Dog Control Act 1996 and recommends several key changes, including reforming the destruction requirements, clarifying menacing and dangerous classifications using evidence-based criteria, and removing breed-specific legislation which has proven ineffective and unscientific. We also support introducing desexing requirements for dogs that are repeatedly found roaming and financial incentives for desexing.



# Dogs within our communities

Dogs are part of our communities. Initiatives which facilitate socialisation, desexing and restrict over-breeding improve the welfare of dogs and the safety of our communities.

## A. Ban third party sales of puppies and kittens

New Zealand currently has no restrictions on who can sell puppies and kittens, allowing third-party sales through pet shops and online platforms with little oversight. This creates serious animal welfare risks and enables irresponsible breeding and impulse purchases. SPCA supports a ban on third-party sales of puppies and kittens, ensuring animals are only rehomed directly by registered breeders, rescues, or shelters, where welfare standards and informed decision-making can be better ensured.

## B. Establish central government funding for dog desexing

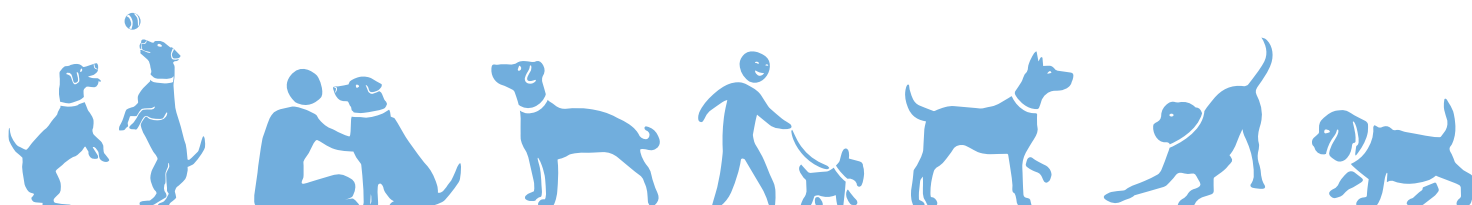
The 2016 national desexing fund allocated \$850,000 to support the desexing of menacing and high-risk dogs. To help reduce dog roaming and aggression, central government funding is required. Desexing is a proven way to lower the risk of attacks and prevent irresponsible breeding, particularly for dogs repeatedly found roaming. Funding would support public safety, promote responsible ownership, and improve animal welfare outcomes nationwide.

## C. Introduce greater protections for victims of domestic violence

Update the Family Violence Act 2018 to include preventing a victim to buy pet food or access veterinary care for their pet as an example of financial abuse. This would bring New Zealand into line with other jurisdictions that formally recognise that control of a person's financial situation, impacting their ability to care for a pet (limiting access to food, veterinary care), constitutes economic abuse, a form of domestic abuse.

## D. Introduce regulations to address irresponsible breeding of companion animals

Irresponsible breeding of companion animals is an animal welfare issue in New Zealand. Welfare challenges for dogs, cats, and rabbits are significant and increasing. These include issues like uncontrolled breeding, inappropriate confinement, genetic disorders, roaming animals, and hoarding situations. There have been multiple parliamentary petitions signed by thousands of New Zealanders calling for action to address unregulated breeding and the impacts of over population and roaming companion animals. Regulation of companion animal breeding would ensure adherence to animal welfare standards and allow animal welfare inspectors to intervene before problems escalate to the level requiring a prosecution.





## **E. Fund national dog safety education in every school across New Zealand**

National evidence-based dog safety education for both children and adults can contribute to safer communities. Dog safety education must address interactions with both dogs in the household and unknown dogs, and provide information on avoiding and safely managing risky situations.

## **F. Promote pet-friendly communities**

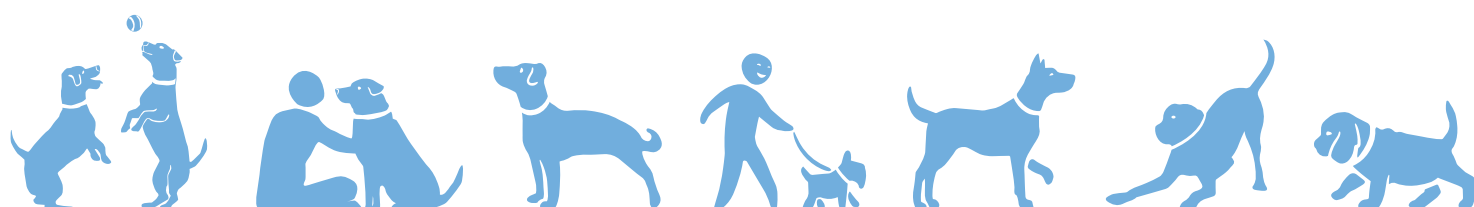
Initiatives that make our communities more accommodating to dogs, including pet-friendly public transport, workplaces, and housing are needed. Many New Zealanders face significant barriers in securing pet-friendly rental properties, accessing transport options with their animals, or arranging care during work hours. These challenges contribute to the surrender of companion animals to shelters across the country. Legislative reform is necessary to reduce systemic barriers and enable more pet-inclusive communities. Public transport providers, landlords, property managers, and businesses (such as hotels) should adopt policies that reflect the important role animals play in people's lives.

## **G. Reform the Emergency Management Act**

With the recent consultation on strengthening New Zealand's emergency management legislation, this is an important opportunity to address current gaps relating to animal welfare. SPCA supports changes to ensure animals are explicitly included in emergency rescue and relief efforts, and that the law clearly allows animal welfare agencies to alleviate suffering and access properties to rescue animals left behind during emergencies.

## **H. Set a date for pet bond provisions to come into effect**

The announcement of pet bonds by the Government in 2024 was celebrated by SPCA as a step towards increasing the availability of rental properties that allow animals, while ensuring property protection for landlords. However, a date is still to be set by Order in Council for when these provisions will take effect. This means that charging a pet bond is currently prohibited. We regularly hear from people faced with surrendering their animals due to lack of pet-friendly housing and call for a date for these provisions to be set.



# Improving Compliance

New Zealanders depend on SPCA and MPI to jointly enforce the Animal Welfare Act. However, the public are often surprised to find out that these enforcement functions do not receive the governmental support they need to fulfil this critical role and are frustrated by the limitations of current legislation which hamper enforcement.

## A. Authorise animal welfare inspectors to disqualify dog owners for multiple Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations breaches

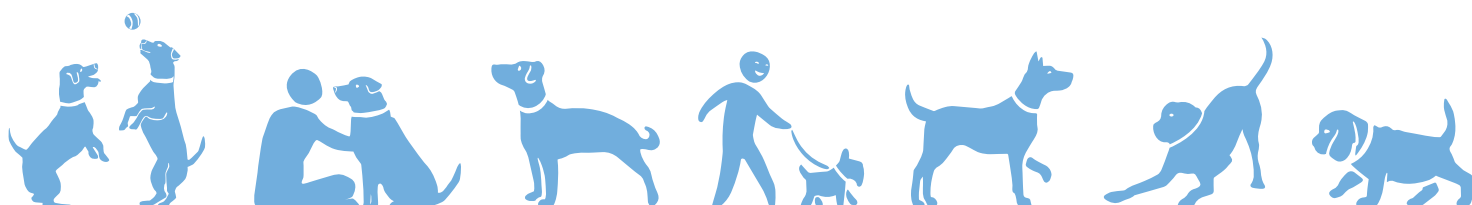
The Dog Control Act 1996 includes the provision that local authorities must disqualify a person from being an owner of a dog if that person commits three or more unrelated infringement offences within a 24-month period. Insertion of a similar clause under the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations would allow SPCA inspectors the ability to disqualify a person from being the owner of a dog where they receive three infringement notices.

## B. Authorise inspection of animal environments and equipment by animal welfare inspectors

Currently, Section 127 of the Act only allows inspectors to enter a property to look at the animals themselves and not the things around them. An animal's welfare also depends on their environment, such as things like food and water containers, shelter, fencing, collars, and access to food. While inspectors can ask owners to fix or improve these things, they don't have the legal power to go back and check if the changes are actually made unless they get a search warrant. This limitation also applies when illegal traps are set and found (or for sale in shops), as if they haven't caught an animal, SPCA Inspectors can't remove these traps without a search warrant. Changing Section 127 to clearly allow re-entry to check on animal environments and equipment would make the law more effective and help ensure animals are properly cared for.

## C. Create an infringeable offence for failing to comply with a Notice of Instruction under s130 of the Animal Welfare Act

Under section 130 of the Act, inspectors can issue written notices to animal owners or carers, requiring them to take action to prevent or reduce an animal's suffering. These notices are meant to hold the person responsible for the animal accountable, rather than shifting that responsibility to SPCA. However, if someone ignores the notice, the only current option is to take them to court, which is often not practical unless more serious charges are involved. This means that people can typically breach these notices without facing any consequences, even if an animal suffers as a result. SPCA advocates for introducing a fine for ignoring these notices. This would make them more effective and help protect more animals from harm.





## **D. Establish a database of registered rescues and regulatory framework for data collection (e.g. shelter statistics)**

Facilitation of standardised, accurate and comprehensive data collection amongst shelter and rescue organisations in New Zealand will provide understanding of the risk factors and allow implementation of national strategies to address overpopulation and euthanasia rates.

## **E. Give approved organisations power to rehome or euthanise seized animals within reasonable time frames where return to the owner is unsafe**

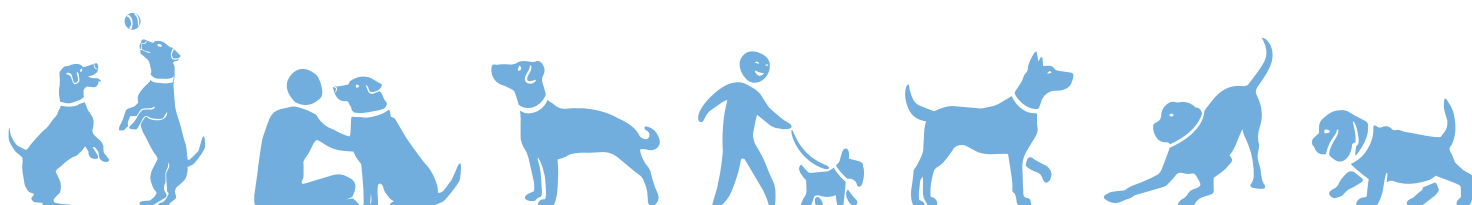
When SPCA removes animals from a property for welfare reasons, we must care for them until they can either be safely returned or legally rehomed. The current law only allows us to rehome these animals if the owner is unknown or a prosecution has been started. In many cases, neither of these conditions apply, meaning animals can remain in SPCA care for long periods, months or even years, which can compromise their welfare and place a huge financial strain on our charity. An amendment to s136A of the Act would allow SPCA to seek timely disposal of animals (i.e. to rehome, or euthanise) where it is not safe to return the animal to the owner, such as where this would place the animal at risk of harm. This would help ensure better outcomes for the animals and allow SPCA to use its resources more effectively.

## **F. Increase penalties for animal welfare offending and research reoffending prevention such as rehabilitation programmes**

People convicted of offences against animals can be disqualified from owning animals, but this provision is seldom used, and the ban periods are typically short. Reoffending rates are high for animal abuse offences but there are currently no proven effective methods for preventing reoffending.

## **G. Introduce independent review and auditing of Council pounds**

All pounds must comply with the Dog Control Act, Code of Welfare for Dogs, and the Code of Welfare for Temporary Housing of Companion Animals. Animal pounds are not currently subject to routine inspection to monitor compliance. The introduction of independent audits and oversight will ensure consistent animal welfare standards and greater accountability across all facilities involved in the care and rehoming of dogs.



## H. Require independent inspection and regulation of canine service providers

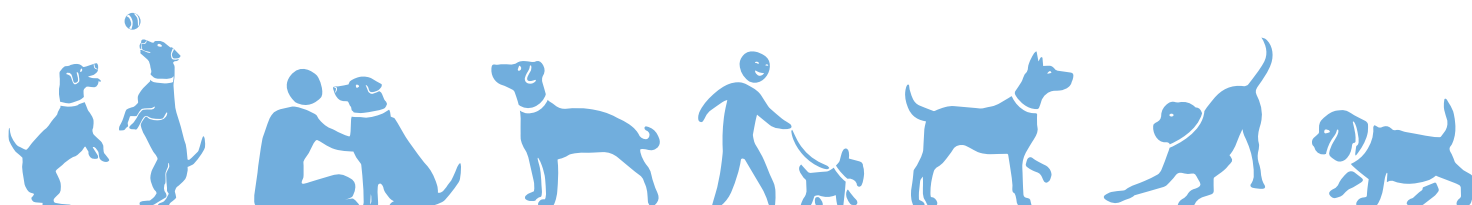
Mandatory independent inspection and regulation of all dog boarding establishments, daycares, and grooming facilities is required to ensure compliance with existing animal welfare legislation. While these services must adhere to the Code of Welfare for Temporary Housing of Companion Animals 2018 and Code of Welfare for Dogs, they are not currently subject to routine welfare inspections. Currently, these unregulated service providers require no minimum qualifications to operate and operate without consistent oversight. Robust inspection systems are required to uphold animal welfare standards across all facilities caring for companion animals.

## I. Establish Animal Welfare Courts

Animal cruelty and neglect are serious offences that deserve timely and informed handling within the justice system. Currently, animal welfare cases can take years to progress through the courts, during which time animals must remain in SPCA care which prolongs their confinement and places significant strain on SPCA. Dedicated Animal Welfare Courts, or fast-track mechanisms, would allow these cases to be prioritised and resolved more efficiently. In addition, judges and Crown prosecutors involved in such cases should receive training in current animal welfare science and animal sentience to ensure decisions are well-informed and reflect contemporary understanding. These reforms would lead to better outcomes for animals and a more effective, responsive justice system.

## J. Repeal regulations that have a tendency to undermine the purpose and function of the Act

Regulating some prohibited behaviours can adversely affect animal welfare outcomes. A number of activities that were regulated in the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018 have the potential to cause significant pain and distress to animals. An unintended effect of regulation is to minimise the impact of the offending on the animal as enforcement action through the criminal courts is made more difficult due to the offending also being captured by regulation. For example, the act of cutting off the ears of a dog (“cropping”) should be (and is) considered an act of ill-treatment under the Act, however the ability to obtain a conviction against an offender for an offence under the Act is made more difficult due to its inclusion in the regulations.



# Acknowledgement of Mental States and Positive Animal Welfare

The Animal Welfare Act is currently focused on minimising suffering and needs to be updated to reflect current understanding of animal welfare and a Five Domains approach.

## A. Amend the Animal Welfare Act to include a definition of sentience and an acknowledgment of both positive and negative mental states

The inclusion of sentience in the long-title of the Act, with no accompanying definition, makes the practical impact of its inclusion unclear. Animals are referred to as “it” throughout the Act, which objectifies animals and does not support the recognition of their sentience. Sentience is the capacity of animals to perceive by their senses and, thereby, to consciously experience both negative and positive mental states which are important to them and which influence their welfare. This range of mental states should be explicitly acknowledged in legislation.

## B. Ban the private sale and use of fireworks in New Zealand

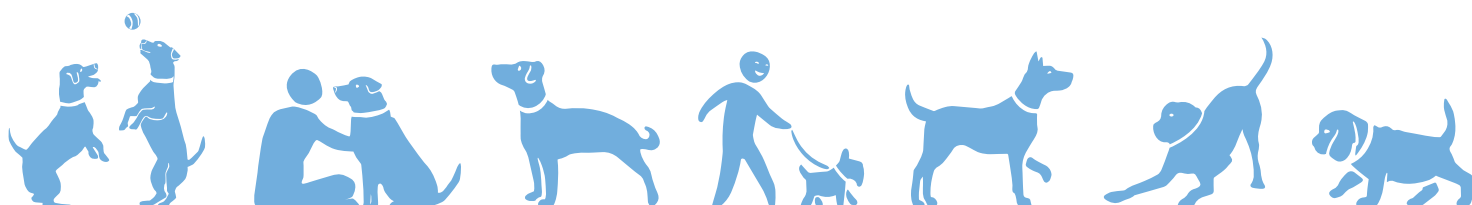
Firework noise has a serious negative impact on the welfare of many animals (including companion animals, wildlife, and farmed animals), causing significant fear and distress. Harms to animals from fireworks are preventable through the permanent prohibition on the sale and use of fireworks by members of the public. A 2025 petition signed by more than 90,000 people was recently handed over to parliament reflecting the strength of public support for a ban.

## C. Fund national animal welfare education in every school across New Zealand

National animal welfare education teaches learners - our future change makers - an ethical perspective, connection and a personal sense of responsibility coupled with a compassionate and caring attitude towards other animals and the environment.

## D. Redefine ‘physical, health, and behavioural needs’ in the Animal Welfare Act

The definition of ‘physical, health and behavioural needs’ is central to the function of the Act and the welfare of animals. However, the current wording is inadequate and insufficient to provide the required level of protection for all animals. Scientific understanding of animal behaviour, sentience and mental states has progressed markedly since the Act was drafted.



# Government Accountability for Animal Welfare

Animal Welfare is important. New Zealanders love our animals, have high expectations that animals in New Zealand are protected and provided with a Good Life, and rely on animals for a substantial part of our export earnings.

## A. Amend 127(5)(a) of the Animal Welfare Act from “willfully ill-treated contrary to section 28” to “ill-treated contrary to section 29(a)”

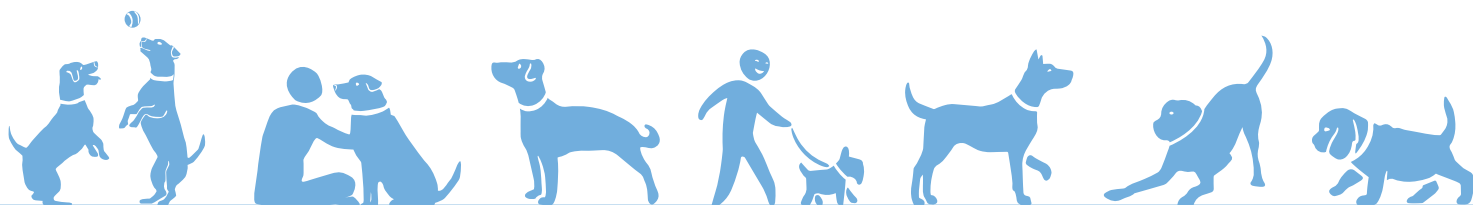
Section 127(5) of the Act is utilised by inspectors regularly to remove animals from properties without a warrant. Currently, if an inspector has reasonable grounds to believe that an animal has been ill-treated (such as by being assaulted), they may only remove the animal from the property if they can satisfy themselves that the act of ill-treatment was willful. Often at the stage of first inspection the inspector will have limited information and would likely not yet have spoken to the suspect. Forming a belief that an act of ill-treatment was conducted willfully with limited information is too onerous a threshold to reach to authorise removal of the animal. As a result, this subsection is very rarely used and animals may, as a result, be left at properties of risk until further information can be collected. Amending the threshold to that of s29(a) will allow an inspector to remove an animal which they reasonably believe has been ill-treated and keep that animal safe while further enquires are made.

## B. Increase government responsibility for funding enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act

New Zealand has 35 million farmed animals (cattle, sheep, deer and pigs) and over 63 % of New Zealand households are home to a companion animal. While the export of animal products earned approximately \$36 billion in the year ended June 2024, currently a tiny fraction of MPI’s budget is dedicated to animal welfare enforcement, education and policy. SPCA’s Inspectorate does not receive adequate government funding and largely relies on donations to fulfil its duties under the Act.

## C. Raise the profile of animal welfare within government through elevation of animal welfare into its own business unit within the Ministry for Primary Industries and by appointing a Commissioner for Animals

MPI serves a dual function of promoting growth of the animal agricultural industry while also safeguarding animal welfare, risking a conflict of interest. Animal welfare can and should be a core consideration of the primary industries, but there must be the appropriate authority and resources to administer the system effectively.



## D. Release a new Animal Welfare Strategy

The current animal welfare strategy hasn't been updated for 12 years. New Zealand has fallen from being one of the leaders in the world in our animal welfare standards, with a recent downgrade in the World Animal Protection (WAP) Animal Protection Index from an A to a C rating. This downgrade reflects concerns about the adequacy of current animal welfare protections, with the review highlighting significant gaps in legal protections. The government must provide a collaborative, modern vision and ongoing leadership to protect New Zealand's animals and improve our international standing.

## E. Review and update all codes of welfare within three years, and ensure they are kept up to date on an ongoing basis

Codes of welfare are issued under the Act to provide minimum standards, recommendations for best practice, and guidance for people in charge of animals. Many codes of welfare are over a decade out of date with current science and best practice, even though the government promotes codes as being 'flexible enough to be modified and improved as community expectations, good practice, scientific knowledge and technical advances allow'. Recent successful legal challenges against the codes have shown that they need urgent review. SPCA led work on three draft companion codes (two updated and one new) following an agreement with MPI, with all three being accepted into the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) work programme. Work to progress these codes has been paused without explanation.

