



New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

54th Parliament

July 2026

Petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust: Mandate the Desexing of Dogs in NZ Except to Registered Breeders

**Petition of Melinda McGregor: Councils need clear
guidelines of required actions following a dog
attack**

**Petition of Tracey Clark: Change the laws
pertaining to dog ownership in New Zealand**

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Petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust

Petition of Melinda McGregor

Petition of Tracey Clark

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the:

- Petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust: Mandate the Desexing of Dogs in NZ Except to Registered Breeders
- Petition of Melinda McGregor: Councils need clear guidelines of required actions following a dog attack
- Petition of Tracey Clark: Change the laws pertaining to dog ownership in New Zealand.

The committee recommends that the House take note of its report.

Requests regarding dog control

The petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust was signed by 2,519 people. It was presented to the House by Hon Nicola Grigg on 20 July 2023. The Petitions Committee of the 53rd Parliament began considering the petition. We resumed consideration in the 54th Parliament. The petition requests:

That the House of Representatives mandate the desexing of dogs in NZ except to registered breeders.

The petition of Melinda McGregor was signed by 2 people. It was presented to the House by Hon Matt Doocey on 18 February 2025, and requests:

That the House of Representatives amend the Dog Control Act to require all councils to have clear guidelines to follow after a dog attack, including responses to victims.

The petition of Tracey Clark was signed by 1,547 people. It was presented to the House by Dan Bidois on 27 January 2026, and requests:

That the House of Representatives make substantial changes to the dog ownership legislation, and urge the Government and local governments to change relevant policies, rules, and bylaws, in order to end the problem of roaming dogs in New Zealand.

We initially considered the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust and the petition of Melinda McGregor separately. This included inviting separate written and oral submissions on these two petitions. In January 2026, a third petition concerning dog control, the petition of Tracey Clark, was presented to the House. Parliament's Standing Orders allow us to

group together petitions on similar topics. We decided to group the three petitions, and to consider them together.

Our report organises comments by topic, rather than by following the chronological order in which we received each petition. The matters we discuss in this report cover the following topics:

- review of the Dog Control Act
- responses following dog attacks
- the size of the dog population in New Zealand
- desexing of dogs.

We heard from the three petitioners and the following organisations:

- Department of Internal Affairs
- Ministry for Primary Industries
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)
- New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA)
- Dogs New Zealand
- Auckland Council
- Taituarā | Local Government Professionals Aotearoa
- The New Zealand Institute of Animal Management (NZIAM)

The evidence we received contributed to our consideration of all three petitions.

Background

These three petitions concern the behaviour and welfare of dogs.

The Dog Control Act 1996 sets out the legal obligations for dog ownership. The primary aims of the Act are to regulate the control of dogs and minimise potential harm and nuisance to the public. Territorial authorities (city and district councils) are responsible for administering, implementing, and enforcing the Act. The Act sets out the offences under which councils can prosecute dog owners and provides councils with enforcement mechanisms for managing dogs through their own dog control policies and bylaws.

The Animal Welfare Act 1999 sets out responsibilities of animal owners for the welfare of animals. The Ministry for Primary Industries and the SPCA are jointly responsible for enforcing the Act. Under the Act, codes of welfare are developed for different types of animals. The Code of Welfare: Dogs is one of these codes.

Review of the Dog Control Act

Each of the three petitioners, and most of the submitters we heard from, said the Dog Control Act needs to be reviewed and updated.

Tracey Clark said the 30-year-old legislation no longer protects public safety within communities. She told us that, because of fears of roaming dogs, people are too afraid to walk, work, and play outside in their communities and children are afraid to walk to and from school. Melinda McGregor said the Act needs to provide consistent, national guidelines that

councils should follow after a dog attack. She told us the present legislation leaves victims of dog attacks disregarded and “unsafe dogs left to cause further trouble in communities”. The Chained Dog Awareness New Zealand Charitable Trust (Chained Dog Awareness) said the Act does not work because there are so many unregistered dogs.

Animal welfare organisations also told us that the legislation needs to be reviewed. The NZVA said the current legislative framework does not go far enough in supporting councils to effectively and consistently manage dog attacks or to promote responsible dog ownership. It said the Dog Control Act and associated regulations are now outdated and need a comprehensive review to reflect best practice and community expectations. The SPCA said the Act is not fit for purpose, and that systemic changes are needed to reform the Act to bring it into line with current evidence and best practice. It said this is essential to protect public safety, improve animal welfare, and support responsible dog ownership.

Taituarā were unique in saying that the current system is fit for purpose, but said it could benefit from a wider review. It said wider consultation is needed with the sector before any legislative changes are made.

Auckland Council told us the Act needs a “complete overhaul”. It said that the Act allows councils to react after an issue has occurred, such as a dog attack, but it does not enable councils to be proactive in keeping the public safe. Auckland Council said that there is not one “silver bullet” that would improve management of dogs. It seeks changes to the Dog Control Act, including:

- additional powers for dog control officers
- ability to set fencing standards
- review of infringement fees
- mandatory reporting of attacks
- reducing holding days in shelters.

NZIAM said that numbers of animals impounded and complaints received by local authorities continue to rise each year. It said this indicates a need for more proactive measures. It said a comprehensive review of the Act is needed, and that dog ownership in New Zealand must become a more responsible, regulated process.

The Department of Internal Affairs told us in October 2025 that the Act was “increasingly not fit for purpose in addressing the needs of our dog population”. On 21 March 2026, the Minister of Local Government announced that there would be a comprehensive review of the Dog Control Act.¹ This followed a number of significant dog attacks, including a woman killed by dogs in Northland.²

The department told us in April 2026 that the review of the Act would examine any barriers and hurdles that the Act places before councils, along with enforcement powers and desexing obligations. The exact scope of the review was yet to be determined. However, the

¹ [Government orders review of Dog Control Act | Beehive.govt.nz](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/news/government-orders-review-of-dog-control-act), 21 March 2026.

² [Kaihu community in mourning after woman mauled to death by a pack of dogs | RNZ News](https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/461111/kaihu-community-in-mourning-after-woman-mauled-to-death-by-a-pack-of-dogs), 18 February 2026.

department said that, in the meantime, the Minister had sent a letter to councils encouraging them to fully use their powers under the Act.

We are pleased that plans are under way for a comprehensive review of the Dog Control Act. We agree that one is needed. We think that the specific matters raised in the petitions, as discussed below, should be part of that review.

Requests for changes in council responses to dog attacks

Petitioners' experiences of dog attacks

Melinda McGregor started her petition after her mother was attacked by a dog.³ Her mother's finger was severed, and she also received bites close to the main artery on her arm and on her other hand. We heard that the bites went through to the bone. She said medical professionals described it as a "vicious" attack. Her mother was hospitalised for two weeks and then was in respite care for a further two weeks. Ms McGregor's mother has dementia, and we heard that the incident had set her back, and she is now in a dementia care home.

Ms McGregor said that Waimakariri District Council told her that, because of her mother's dementia, it would not pursue a case in court to have the dog euthanised. She said she was told that the case would not stand up in court because her mother was not able to describe clearly what had happened. The council classified the dog as dangerous, and it was desexed.

This was not a suitable outcome, according to Ms McGregor, given the severity of the attack. She said her thoughts were that "surely this incident shouldn't have needed to go through the court system at all". She felt that the victim's age or abilities should not have mattered when medical professionals had confirmed that serious injuries had occurred. She said this medical evidence should be enough justification for councils to act. Ms McGregor questioned what would have happened if the attack had happened to a small child, asking "would they expect the small child to stand up in court and relay what happened?"

Tracey Clark told us that she has been rushed at by intimidating dogs, and has experienced two "near vicious attacks" from roaming dogs. She said that taking walks within or outside her community had previously been part of her daily exercise routine, but she no longer has the confidence to do this because of her interactions with roaming, unsupervised dogs. She told us that since starting her petition she has received many stories from people sharing their stories of roaming dogs, rushing dogs, and dog attacks.

Ms Clark said that, on average, ACC receives 42 injury claims from dog attacks each day. Ms Clark told us that "New Zealand has a significant crisis on its hands". Chained Dog Awareness told us that around 27,000 dog-related injuries are reported every year, with just under 3,000 of those to babies and children under the age of 14. It said that ACC's costs increased from just under \$11 million in 2021/22 to \$15.8 million in 2022/23.

³ We note that the SPCA's written submission said that the term "dog attack" is not defined in the Dog Control Act, and the SPCA recommends use of the term "dog bite incident" rather than "dog attack". We have used the petitioners' terminology in this report.

Request for a standard process following a dog attack

Ms McGregor feels that council practices should be standardised, so that a consistent and predictable process is followed after a dog attack. She believes this would be clearer for victims of attacks, council staff, and dog owners. She would like a standard process for council responses to dog attacks, based on the Dog Bite Scale developed by Dr Ian Dunbar of Berkeley, California.⁴

Ms McGregor said a New Zealand scale should be developed in collaboration with the NZVA, the SPCA, and New Zealand dog experts and medical professionals. This table summarises Ms McGregor's description of each step on the scale, and the response that she believes should be required after bites at each level:

Level	Description	Petitioner's proposals
1	Dog snaps in the air, no contact.	Owner advised to undertake accredited dog training.
2	Dog bite makes contact with the skin, but does not break the skin.	Owner advised to undertake accredited dog training.
3	Bite breaks the skin, leaves bloody marks, punctures are shallower than the length of the dog's canine teeth.	Owner required to undertake accredited dog training, and required to desex and muzzle the dog.
4	Dog bite clamps down, punctures deeper than the length of the canine teeth, shaking of the head may occur. Leaves serious wounds, severe bruising, the skin may tear.	Councils given the power to euthanise the dog immediately without court action, and owner liable for fines.
5	Multiple, aggressive bites.	Councils given the power to euthanise the dog immediately without court action. Owner liable for fines, and council liable for prosecution if it had prior knowledge that the dog was dangerous.
6	Lethal attack.	Councils given the power to euthanise the dog immediately without court action. Owner liable for imprisonment, and council liable for prosecution if it had prior knowledge that the dog was dangerous.

The Supreme Court ruled in 2024 that a conviction is a precondition to an order for the destruction of a dog under section 57(3) of the Dog Control Act. Ms McGregor believes that, as a result of this ruling, councils may be more cautious about seeking euthanasia for

⁴ Further information about the Bite Scale developed by Dr Ian Dunbar is available on the [Dunbar Academy website](#).

offending dogs. She said that using guidelines based on the Dunbar scale would take away the “guesswork” for council officers. She proposes that council officers be given the power to euthanise dogs instantly without court proceedings for attacks causing bites rated levels 4–6.

Request for increased penalties for dog owners

Ms Clark’s petition requests increased penalties for dog owners who allow their dog to roam and dog owners whose dog has rushed at a person. She would like to see a “strike system” established for dogs caught roaming three times, which would permanently remove the dog from its owner, and ban the owner from owning any future dogs.

Comments from animal welfare organisations

The NZVA and the SPCA support the introduction of a nationwide, stepped approach for managing dog bite incidents. The SPCA commended the petitioner for advocating an evidence-based, proportionate response to dog bites. The NZVA said that a tiered framework that classifies dog bites according to their severity would be a vital component of such an approach. The SPCA also said that an evidence-based tool, such as the Dunbar bite scale, should be part of a framework.

The SPCA and the NZVA agreed with Ms McGregor that current responses are inconsistent. The NZVA said they result in different decisions in different districts and leave victims navigating an uncertain process. The SPCA said that similar dog attacks can be treated very differently depending on where they occur. It said this is stressful for victims, confusing for dog owners, and undermines public trust.

The NZVA said the current framework leans too heavily on labels and too lightly on behaviour, context, and risk. Current definitions in the Act lack nuance, and focus too much on breed and appearance, according to the NZVA. It said that the classification of dogs after an attack must be grounded in objective behaviour assessment. It said that clear, enforceable guidelines would help to eliminate subjectivity in decision-making.

The NZVA does not agree with the petitioner’s proposal that dog bites classified at level 4 should result in immediate euthanasia. It said that level 4 bites indicate a dog is a serious risk; however, it believes professional assessment is needed to determine whether a dog can be saved. The NZVA agrees with Ms McGregor that councils should be given authority to euthanise immediately after a level 5 or 6 bite attack, when supported by veterinary or medical evidence. It said these dogs are extremely dangerous and that delaying action could endanger public safety.

The SPCA said using a dog bite scale would help decision-makers understand the risk that a dog will bite again. It said that as puppies interact with litter mates, other dogs, and people, they learn not to bite too hard. We heard that once a dog has learned bite inhibition, even if it bites, it will not usually cause injuries at the severe end of the scale. The SPCA said a dog that has bitten at level 5 is very dangerous because it has not learned bite inhibition. The SPCA does not rehome dogs that have bitten at level 5.

The SPCA said that, while it recognises the need to retain some local flexibility, a nationally consistent, evidence-based approach is likely to provide more timely, proportionate, and humane resolution after serious cases.

Comments from the Department of Internal Affairs

The Department of Internal Affairs said that responding to dog control issues is the responsibility of local government, and each council has its own council bylaws and policies to do this. However, unless a dog owner voluntarily surrenders their dog, the destruction of a dog after it has caused serious injury happens only through the judicial system.

The department acknowledged that prosecution of serious offences can be long and costly and that delays can potentially add to a victim's distress. However, it said it is important that investigations are thorough and that due process is strictly observed. Without due process, serious errors could be made affecting dogs, and owners who may face convictions. The department said that councils may reserve action in the judicial system for the most serious cases, due to the costs and time required for prosecution.

The department said that the dog bite scale is useful. However, it said that making it mandatory, in the way the petitioner proposed, would leave little discretion for council judgement or for a right of appeal to the courts.

The department has previously issued enforcement guidelines to support local authorities in their dog control work. In August 2025, it told us that the Minister of Local Government had agreed to refresh those guidelines in partnership with councils. The department said this would support more effective and consistent enforcement of the Dog Control Act across New Zealand.

Dog control is a challenging area for council staff, the department said, especially when vulnerable people or serious injuries are involved. We heard that councils are often stretched for resources, and face staff shortages in this area of work.

In response to Ms Clark's specific requests about increased penalties, the department said the upcoming review of the Act could potentially consider stronger penalties, changes to enforcement powers and escalation pathways, and disqualification of ownership provisions.

Comments from Taituarā

Taituarā is a membership organisation for professionals working in and for local government. It said that, under the Dog Control Act, councils operate within strict legal boundaries. Taituarā said that every decision to prosecute must meet evidentiary standards and follow the Solicitor-General's prosecution guidelines.

In the case outlined by Ms McGregor involving her mother, Taituarā told us that the Waimakariri District Council has classified the dog as dangerous. We were told that the council required the owner to desex the dog, and imposed conditions on the owner that removed any further risk to the public. We heard that, as a result, the dog has not reoffended.

Taituarā does not support a mandatory dog bite scale under the Dog Control Act. It said that tools like the Dunbar scale can help in behavioural assessments, but that a mandated scale would limit councils' enforcement options. It explained that councils must consider broader factors such as history, compliance, and community risk. It believes councils need to be able to investigate dog attacks on a case-by-case basis. It does not support penalties for councils following dog attacks, as proposed by Ms McGregor.

We heard that prosecution of dog owners may be warranted, even in minor bite cases. We were told about a successful prosecution in Christchurch, where the dog attack on another animal was relatively minor, but the dog had a significant history of aggressive behaviour. Taituarā said that operating strictly within a dog bite scale would have limited the council's ability to initiate a prosecution where a dog posed a significant public safety risk.

The size of the dog population in New Zealand

In considering these petitions, we wanted to understand the size of the dog population in New Zealand and how this is recorded and measured. We heard quite different perceptions about dog numbers and how this is changing.

Chained Dog Awareness told us that New Zealand's dog numbers "are soaring". It said that the growth in the dog population is outstripping growth in the human population as, in 2020, dog numbers grew by 2.4 percent compared with human population growth of 0.2 percent. It estimates that there are over a million dogs in New Zealand, and that many are not registered.

The NZVA and the SPCA did not agree with Chained Dog Awareness that New Zealand's dog population has reached one million. The NZVA said that the best available data on dog numbers is provided by the Companion Animals New Zealand survey. This survey estimated the dog population to be around 850,000 in 2020, but reported a slight drop to 830,000 in 2024.⁵ The NZVA said the National Dog Database, which tracks all registered dogs, shows an increase of only 2,900 dogs between 2021 and 2023, an increase of 0.5 percent in two years.⁶ It said that it is important to base policy on sound data, and believes the data does not support the claim that there is explosive growth in the overall dog population.

The SPCA noted that the estimates of the dog population from the Companion Animals New Zealand survey are consistently higher than the numbers of registered dogs reported by the Department of Internal Affairs. However, it acknowledged that it is difficult to know the exact numbers of unregistered dogs, as "by their very nature, they're not being counted".

Auckland Council provided a local perspective on these numbers. On 30 June 2025, Auckland's known dog population was 131,123. However, the council said that the unknown dog population is extensive and presents a significant safety risk to Auckland residents and visitors. In 2024–25, the council investigated over 39,000 dog-related complaints. Since 2020, the council said, dog attacks had increased by 82 percent, while dog complaints increased by 60 percent. These increases are disproportionate to growth of 17 percent in the known dog population, which the council said indicates that the unknown dog population is expanding at a significantly faster rate.

NZIAM said there is a lack of consistent, reliable data about dogs. It would like a unified, cross-agency system for reporting and managing dog data to be established. It said that, while councils currently provide information to the National Dog Register, it would like to see

⁵ Companion Animals New Zealand, [NZ Pet Data Report 2024](#).

⁶ Information about the National Dog Database is available on [the Department of Internal Affairs website](#).

this requirement extended to agencies such as the SPCA, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), and registered dog rescue groups.

In April 2026, the Department of Internal Affairs told us that it is working on improving the quality and consistency of the reporting of dog-related data. It said this would provide better insight into dog control trends and activities.

We think better data would assist decision-making about dog control. We think that, by its nature, formal information captured through surveys and registration records provides a good picture of the known dog population. However, there is less visibility of the unknown dog population, which includes owned but unregistered dogs as well as dogs that are unowned. We think it is possible that there could be “explosive growth” in the unregistered dog population, as described by Chained Dog Awareness.

Requests to require desexing of dogs

The petition of Chained Dog Awareness requests the mandatory desexing of dogs, except to registered breeders. The petition of Tracey Clark also requests mandatory desexing of dogs, among other changes sought to the Dog Control Act.

Explanation of terms

Desexing of animals refers to the surgical removal of animals’ reproductive systems to prevent breeding. Other words for desexing include spaying, neutering, altering, castration, and sterilisation.

Previous petitions requesting the desexing of pets

Two other petitions concerning the desexing of pet animals have been considered and reported back in 2023 and 2025.

The Environment Committee of the 53rd Parliament considered the petition of Erica Rowlands, which requested that the House require registration and desexing of all domestic cats.⁷ In August 2023, the committee recommended by majority to the Government that legislation be developed to implement a national cat management framework based on the principle that cats should be registered, desexed, and microchipped. In December 2024, the Government presented its response to the House, saying that the development of a nationwide cat management framework was not a priority at that time.⁸

The current Environment Committee considered the petition of Casey Regtien, which requested that the House require that pet cats and dogs be desexed, unless there was a medical reason or the owner was a registered breeder.⁹ In May 2025, the committee reported to the House on the petition. The report noted the Government response to the petition of Erica Rowlands, and said that most of the committee members agreed with the Government that the issue was not a priority at that time.

⁷ [Petition of Erica Rowlands: Mandate the registration and desexing of pet cats and kittens.](#)

⁸ The Government response to the report of the Environment Committee on the petition of Erica Rowlands is available on [the Parliament website.](#)

⁹ [Petition of Casey Regtien: Require desexing of pet cats and dogs.](#)

We consider that matters have moved on since these earlier petitions. We think that, due to recent dog attacks, addressing desexing of dogs is now a higher priority for the Government and many New Zealanders than it may have been previously.

Comments from the petitioners

Chained Dog Awareness said that there are over 260 dog rescue groups in New Zealand. It said that, as numbers of unplanned dog litters rise, these groups “are drowning”, and that dog pounds are also overwhelmed. It believes there are over 300,000 un-desexed dogs in New Zealand, and that the lack of desexing of dogs and irresponsible ownership are the main reasons for the growth in dog numbers. Chained Dog Awareness believes mandatory desexing would reduce dog numbers. It said that a dog which is not desexed is more aggressive and more likely to roam, and that desexing of dogs is crucial to improving animal welfare.

Chained Dog Awareness seeks registration of dog breeders, with a formal register and a requirement that breeders desex puppies before they are homed. It said many unregistered dogs that have not been desexed are in low-income communities, and that mobile desexing units with incentives for desexing are needed. It said that other parts of the world, including South and Western Australia, now have formal desexing requirements.

Comments from Ministry for Primary Industries and Department of Internal Affairs

MPI said that the desexing of dogs has benefits for dogs, dog owners, and the wider community. The Code of Welfare: Dogs recommends the desexing of all non-breeding dogs as best practice. The ministry considers that mandatory desexing of dogs could reduce the number of unwanted companion animals that experience poor animal welfare outcomes.

However, the ministry said that neither the Animal Welfare Act nor the Dog Control Act have a population control purpose. The Animal Welfare Act provides a legislative framework for the welfare of an individual animal, not a group or population of animals. The ministry told us the current legislation could not be used to mandate desexing, because desexing is not required to meet the physical, health, or behavioural needs of an animal.

Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council have introduced bylaws requiring owners to microchip and desex pet cats.¹⁰ The ministry said that local authorities can make bylaws requiring cats to be desexed, because there is no overriding cat legislation. However, it informed us that the Dog Control Act would need to be amended to provide for similar bylaws about dogs.

The Department of Internal Affairs said councils were struggling to respond to the increase in dog numbers, and that desexing more dogs could be quite helpful in managing the dog population. However, it said that requiring desexing faces legal and practical constraints.

Dogs are private property, and, for many New Zealanders, they are beloved family members. The department said that while, for many dog owners, desexing is the right

¹⁰ Further information is available on the websites of the [Nelson City Council](#) and the [Tasman District Council](#). There are exceptions for some breeders and for medical reasons.

choice, other dog owners do not want to desex their dogs for a range of reasons. These may include objections on ethical, cultural, or personal grounds.

A formal mandate that required desexing of dogs would need to include exemption criteria, and a system for granting and recording exemptions. The department noted that medical factors need to be considered before desexing particular dogs. It noted that the cost of desexing a dog could be a barrier for many households, and that further regulation of dog ownership could limit who may be able to own dogs.

The department said that council dog controllers are already stressed and having trouble responding. Additional resources would be needed to enforce any new desexing requirements. It also noted that it was unclear whether the veterinary workforce would be able to support a significant increase in demand for desexing.

Comments from organisations caring for and working with dogs

The SPCA agrees that there is an urgent need to address irresponsible breeding of companion animals. It broadly supports the mandatory desexing of dogs, with exemptions for registered breeders. It said desexing initiatives that target irresponsible breeders, animal shelters, and roaming dogs would have the greatest effect.

Dogs New Zealand noted the problem of high numbers of unwanted, dumped, abandoned, and abused dogs and their subsequent litters of puppies. It said that the core reason is irresponsible dog ownership and unconsidered and indiscriminate breeding. However, it said that the mandatory desexing of dogs could have unintended consequences. It proposed alternative ways of managing the dog population, such as offering incentives to owners who desex their dogs. We discuss some of these alternatives below.

The NZVA does not support the proposal to mandate desexing of all privately owned dogs. It supports the principle that dogs not intended for breeding should be sterilised, but said that desexing decisions should be tailored for individual animals.

Rates of desexing

The SPCA told us that desexing rates are already high in New Zealand, with the Companion Animals New Zealand survey reporting that 85 percent of companion dogs are desexed. It noted that the survey does not provide information about the age that dogs were desexed, and said some people allow their dog to have one litter of puppies before desexing. Dogs New Zealand agreed with the SPCA that most dog owners get their dogs desexed.

Medical benefits and risks of desexing

Dogs New Zealand said that desexing dogs too early can negatively affect their health. For example, it said that desexing of large breed dogs under two years of age could lead to joint disorders.

The NZVA told us that surgical sterilisation is one of the most effective tools to prevent unwanted litters and, when timed appropriately, can contribute positively to a dog's health and welfare. However, it said that while sterilisation before puberty is appropriate in some cases, such as for dogs in shelters, it is not suitable for most dogs.

The NZVA acknowledged that sterilising dogs can have negative health effects in certain situations. We heard that most dogs are desexed by removing their ovaries (in a female dog) or testes (in a male dog). When these are removed, a source of hormones is also removed. The NZVA said there is growing evidence that hormone imbalances contribute to some specific health problems in some desexed dogs. It said that desexing should be done “at the right time for the right reasons”, which requires a conversation between an owner and their veterinarian.

The SPCA said that medical benefits of desexing include an increased lifespan, prevention of false pregnancies, and elimination of reproductive infections and cancers. It said that unregulated and irresponsible breeding of dogs affects dog welfare, and that desexing is an important “piece of the puzzle”.

However, the SPCA acknowledged that, because there is a wide variety of breeds, shapes, and sizes of dogs, determining a single mandatory desexing age for dogs is not straightforward. It told us that some veterinarians may not wish to desex dogs until the age of 18 months. The SPCA considers that any legislative framework should have flexibility based on the individual circumstances of the dog. It supports deferred desexing or exemptions from desexing on the basis of written veterinary advice.

Affordability

Dogs New Zealand is concerned that mandatory desexing could mean more pet owners would surrender their dogs if they could not afford the cost of desexing, potentially increasing the burden on shelters. It said that a mandatory dog desexing regime could increase costs unnecessarily for responsible dog owners and breeders.

The SPCA said there can be financial and accessibility barriers to desexing dogs. It said that unless access to desexing services is geographically and financially accessible, mandatory desexing could disproportionately affect low-income groups and rural dog owners. The SPCA and Auckland Council launched a pilot programme in June 2025 providing free dog desexing services in high-need communities.¹¹ The NZVA also supports community level desexing initiatives, particularly in high-need or low-income areas.

Registration or licensing of breeders

Dogs New Zealand believes in controlled dog breeding “by people who know what they are doing and keep their dogs well”. It maintains two registries of dogs and promotes a Breeders Code of Conduct for its members. Dogs New Zealand said that no general register of breeders—as proposed by Chained Dog Awareness—currently exists, and questioned how the criteria for such a list would be developed and policed. It favours a breeder licensing programme, rather than the registry proposed by Chained Dog Awareness. It said that licensing would be a first step to gaining visibility of how many dog breeders there are and what they are doing.

¹¹ SPCA and Auckland Council launch landmark initiative to tackle roaming dog crisis, SPCA New Zealand, 5 June 2025.

The SPCA said that companion animal breeder regulations would help address some of the issues that its inspectors see daily. It said that breeder licensing programmes have been effective in other countries, such as England, Wales, and Scotland.

The NZVA recommends that permits be required for all breeders. It believes that regulating dog breeding would be a more effective measure to address dog overpopulation than mandatory desexing. It said that unregulated backyard breeding, which often contributes the most to shelter overflows, must be brought under control.

Enforcement

The SPCA said that the mandatory desexing of dogs would require robust enforcement, but it could be difficult to ensure compliance. It said owners with unregistered dogs may not follow the law. Dogs New Zealand also said that it could be difficult to enforce a mandatory desexing requirement. It noted that additional resourcing would be needed for enforcement of new rules.

Workforce capacity

The SPCA noted that there is a veterinarian shortage in New Zealand, especially in rural and underserved areas. It said that many veterinarians already have limited availability due to their existing workloads. If mandatory desexing was introduced with a deadline for compliance, it said, the capacity of the veterinarian workforce to meet that deadline would need to be considered.

Other approaches

The NZVA said Switzerland and Sweden are often cited as models of successful dog population control; however, routine surgical sterilisation is banned in those countries. It said they control dog numbers through education and regulation of breeding, rather than compulsory desexing.

The SPCA said that most other countries have some form of breeder registration or licensing, and animal welfare standards for breeders. A new draft of the dog code of welfare has been prepared by the SPCA and seven other organisations; its proposals include minimum welfare standards for dog breeding. The SPCA said the draft was delivered to the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) in October 2023 for consideration.

The SPCA would like councils to be given guidance on desexing dogs that repeatedly roam. It would also like dogs to be desexed before they are adopted or rehomed from pounds and shelters. The SPCA desexes all its dogs, unless a veterinarian advises that desexing for a particular animal should be deferred based on its medical needs.

As an alternative to mandatory desexing, Dogs New Zealand recommends that incentives be offered for owners who desex their dogs. For example, it suggested that councils could offer reduced registration fees for dog owners who voluntarily desex their dogs. It said that if mandatory desexing was introduced, increased funding would be needed for enforcement; however, it suggested that such resources be used instead to support dog owners to voluntarily desex their dogs.

Comments from Auckland Council

Auckland Council agreed with the petitioners that urgent intervention is needed to address increasing numbers of unwanted, roaming, and aggressive dogs, particularly those that are unregistered and not desexed. It said that there has been an increase in dog attacks in public spaces. People with low vision and students walking to school are among the vulnerable communities that have been affected.

The council increased expenditure for dog control, including compliance officers and shelters, by \$5.9 million in the 2024/25 financial year. It told us that, without major intervention, dog control issues will snowball and “we’ll get to the point where we’re really struggling to keep Aucklanders safe”.

The council said that, in 2024/25, a record 10,214 dogs were impounded across Auckland’s three main animal shelters, an increase of 23 percent. It said that 88 percent of dogs in its pounds are not desexed. Only 35 percent of impounded dogs were claimed. The council had euthanised 60 percent of impounded dogs, which is the highest it has ever recorded. The council believes a perception that dogs are easily replaced is among factors that contribute to the low rate of dogs being claimed.

Powers of territorial authorities

The Dog Control Act gives powers to territorial authorities (city and district councils) to classify dogs as dangerous (section 31) or menacing (section 33A). When a territorial authority classifies a dog as:

- dangerous, section 32(1)(c) requires the owner to neuter the dog (or provide certification that it is unfit to be neutered)
- menacing, section 33E(1)(b) requires the owner to neuter the dog if the territorial authority requires it (or to provide certification that it is unfit to be neutered).

Section 20(1) of the Dog Control Act provides that territorial authorities may pass bylaws in relation to dog control. Territorial authorities may make bylaws:

- requiring an owner to neuter their dog if it has, on several occasions, not been kept under control (section 20(1)(k))
- for any other purpose that from time to time is, in the opinion of the territorial authority, necessary or desirable to further the control of dogs (section 20(1)(l)).

Auckland Council’s view is that sections 20(1)(k) and 20(1)(l) do not empower councils to enact or enforce a bylaw that requires general desexing of dogs, or to desex a dog before it is released from a shelter. It also said that councils do not have adequate seizure powers. It said that, in many cases, owners of dogs that are required to be desexed ignore council or infringement notices.

The council would like the Dog Control Act to enable a mandatory desexing policy. It sees two options for this: either a national requirement, or for territorial authorities to be enabled so they can set localised desexing policies.

The council said a national approach would set clear expectations for dog owners around the country and would be simpler for people who move between territorial authorities.

Alternatively, it said enabling councils to introduce localised dog desexing requirements could allow them to respond to their own unique challenges. However, the council said that mandatory desexing of dogs would put council resources under pressure.

Comments from the New Zealand Institute of Animal Management

NZIAM supports the mandatory desexing of all pet dogs. It said that this would reduce the number of complaints about aggressive dog behaviour and would contribute to a long-term reduction in the dog population. It believes one outcome of mandatory desexing would be to lift the perceived value of dog ownership. It said that acquiring a dog “should involve more than simply accepting one from a friend”.

NZIAM said that the volume of dogs being impounded and euthanised in local authority pounds is unacceptable. It said caring for dogs in pounds and witnessing or carrying out their euthanasia significantly affects the mental health of council staff. It supports amending the Dog Control Act to enable local authorities to introduce mandatory desexing through bylaws, rather than through a nationwide approach. It supports the introduction of a national register for breeders, and requirements that require rescue organisations, breeders, and rehoming agencies to register and desex dogs before on-selling or rehoming.

Other changes sought to the Dog Control Act

In addition to other matters already discussed, Tracey Clark’s petition also requests:

- fencing height requirements on properties where a dog resides
- a ban on dogs in Kāinga Ora properties.

Comments from the Department of Internal Affairs

The department said there was potential in the review of the Dog Control Act to consider fencing requirements for the purposes of dog control. The department said that the question of banning dogs in Kāinga Ora properties is one for Kāinga Ora to consider.

Our response to the petition

We thank the petitioners for bringing these petitions to Parliament. We acknowledge all New Zealanders who have been harmed in dog attacks. We appreciate Ms McGregor sharing her mother’s experience with us, which helped to put a human face on the issue, and we wish her mother well.

We see clear evidence of a need for an overhaul of the current Dog Control Act, which we all agree is deficient. We encourage the Government to proceed as quickly as possible with its review of the Act. In our consideration of these three petitions, we have perceived a strong desire among communities for this work to be done.

It is clear to us that no one knows how many dogs there are in New Zealand. As discussed on pages 10–11, we would like to see better data about dog numbers, both registered and unregistered.

We think that rules about the desexing of dogs must be addressed in the review of the Act. In general, we favour a national approach, with standardised rules that are enforced locally.

We encourage those undertaking the review to consider all the matters raised with us about desexing of dogs, which are outlined in this report.

We urge the review to pay particular attention to the views and experiences of Auckland Council. We found its evidence compelling because it clearly described the problems its people experience responding to the growth in the unregistered dog population. It is clear about the specific issues that need to be addressed, and about what changes need to be made for it to be able to respond.

We intend to send a copy of our report to the Minister of Local Government as the Minister responsible for the review of the Dog Control Act.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust was signed by 2,519 people on the Parliament website. It was presented to the House by Hon Nicola Grigg on 20 July 2023 and referred to the Petitions Committee of the 53rd Parliament, which invited the petitioner to provide a written submission. On 6 December 2023, the petition was reinstated with the Petitions Committee of the 54th Parliament. We met between 20 February 2025 and 2 July 2026 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Primary Industries, Auckland Council, Dogs NZ, the SPCA, the New Zealand Veterinary Association, and the New Zealand Institute for Animal Management. We received oral submissions from the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the Ministry for Primary Industries, Auckland Council, Dogs NZ, the SPCA, and the New Zealand Veterinary Association.

The petition of Melinda McGregor was signed by 2 people on the Parliament website. It was presented to the House by Hon Matt Doocey on 18 February 2025 and referred to us. We met between 13 March 2025 and 2 July 2026 to consider it. We received written and oral submissions from the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the SPCA, the New Zealand Veterinary Association, and Taituarā | Local Government Professionals Aotearoa.

The petition of Tracey Clark was signed by 1,547 people on the Parliament website. It was presented to the House by Dan Bidois on 27 January 2026 and referred to us. We met between 12 March and 2 July 2026 to consider it. We received written submissions from the petitioner and the Department of Internal Affairs.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)
Hon Andrew Bayly (from 1 July 2026)
Kahurangi Carter (until 11 February 2026)
Greg Fleming
Paulo Garcia (until 1 July 2026)
Celia Wade-Brown (from 11 February 2026)

Rachel Boyack and Dr Hamish Campbell also participated in our consideration of the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust.

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust are available on [the Parliament website](#).

Recordings of our hearings on the petition of Chained Dog Awareness NZ Trust can be accessed online on the Parliament website at the following links:

- [Hearing with the petitioner, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the SPCA, Dogs NZ, and the NZ Veterinary Association on 5 June 2025.](#)

- Hearing with the Department of Internal Affairs and Auckland Council on 9 October 2025.

The documents we received as evidence in relation to the petition of Melinda McGregor are available on the Parliament website.

Recordings of our hearings on the petition of Melinda McGregor can be accessed online on the Parliament website at the following links:

- Hearing with the petitioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, the NZ Veterinary Association, and the SPCA on 14 August 2025.
- Hearing with Taituarā | Local Government Professionals Aotearoa on 13 November 2025.

The documents we received as evidence in relation to the petition of Tracey Clark are available on the Parliament website.