

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS CAT MANAGEMENT IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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## A Māori-centred literature review

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### Abstract

Cats occupy a complicated space in Aotearoa New Zealand. Domestic cats are valued companion animals. In contrast, feral cats are recognised as one of the most damaging invasive species nationally and internationally. Given this duality, it is important to understand how all New Zealanders perceive and value both feral and companion cats. This literature review explores contemporary Māori attitudes and values towards cats, as documented in academic and grey literature, as well as iwi and hapū management plans. Insights drawn across these sources suggest that most Māori consider feral cats to be pests, and efforts to implement feral cat control or eradication are generally supported, with some reservations about the methods used to achieve this. Most iwi or hapū management plans include some reference to management of pest mammals, and just under a quarter cite feral cats specifically. Māori attitudes towards management of companion cats are poorly documented.

### Keywords

pest management, feral cat, companion animal, invasive species, Predator Free 2050

### Introduction

Invasive mammalian predators are some of the primary drivers of the worldwide crisis of biodiversity decline, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand (Doherty et al., 2016). A recent meta-analysis found that eradication, control and management of invasive species had the largest positive impact of any conservation action investigated (Langhammer et al., 2024). Nonetheless, techniques used to manage or eradicate pest mammals are frequently controversial (see,

e.g., Warburton et al., 2021). A sizeable effort has therefore gone into researching the attitudes and values of contemporary New Zealanders towards pest mammals and techniques to manage them. This has become increasingly important since the government's adoption in 2016 of the Predator Free 2050 mission (PF2050), which aims to completely eradicate rats, mustelids, and possums from the entire country by 2050 (Murphy et al., 2019). In November 2025, the government announced the addition of feral cats—unowned cats that live

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completely independently of humans—to the list of species targeted under PF2050, after overwhelming support for this measure was demonstrated in public consultation (Potaka, 2025).

A number of studies have explored the impacts of demographic and non-demographic factors on attitudes to pest management in Aotearoa, including gender, age, personal values, and underlying worldview, among others (e.g., Bassett et al., 2020; MacDonald et al., 2020; J. C. Russell, 2014). The attitudes of some special interest groups, such as conservationists and pet owners, have also been interrogated (e.g., Farnworth et al., 2011, 2014; Harrod et al., 2016; Heimann & Medvecky, 2022; Mercier et al., 2024).

The views of Māori on pest management issues have sometimes, but not always, been addressed. Some surveys did not ask respondents for ethnicity information (e.g., Farnworth et al., 2011, 2014; Sheppard & Urquhart, 1991), while others did record respondents' ethnicity but did not present the views of Māori independently of others (e.g., Kaine et al., 2024; K. J. Russell et al., 2017). Frequently, Māori are under-represented in survey populations (Ingham et al., 2023), limiting the opportunity for specific discussion of the views of Māori respondents.

In contrast to the comparably rich literature on New Zealander's attitudes to pest mammal control in general, there are few examples that are focused on feral cats in particular (Kannemeyer, 2017). This is despite serious impacts of feral cats, including predation on native fauna (Glen et al., 2023) and acting as the definitive host for *Toxoplasma gondii*, the parasite which causes toxoplasmosis and is linked to health impacts in pregnant women (Khairullah et al., 2024), abortion in sheep (Dubey, 2009), and deaths of native birds and dolphins (Roberts et al., 2020; Roe et al., 2013). Nevertheless, managing feral cats as a pest is sometimes controversial in Aotearoa, largely because domestic cats are highly valued pets: there are an estimated 1.2 million companion cats in the country, and 40% of households own at least one cat, making them the most popular pet (Companion Animals New Zealand, 2024).

Some stakeholders and commentators have advocated for the inclusion of feral cats in the PF2050 strategy (Gower, 2023; Rouco et al., 2017; Southern Lakes Sanctuary, 2023), and some predator eradication projects are already targeting feral cats (e.g., Parkes, 2022). The topic has also received attention in popular media, with journalists documenting the viewpoints of stakeholders, including the Society for the Prevention

of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and conservationists (Newshub, 2023; Page, 2023). However, there has been little discussion of the specific views of Māori on the inclusion of feral cats in PF2050, either in popular media or more formal sources. For example, a report produced by the National Cat Management Strategy Group (2020) makes no mention at all of Māori, iwi or hapū in its discussion of stakeholders concerned with cat management.

The objective of this literature review is to synthesise existing published information about the views of contemporary Māori on cat management in Aotearoa, thereby contributing to a highly topical public conversation around the status of cats as both pets and pests. While the primary focus was on feral cats, issues of companion cat management are intertwined and were also investigated. This literature review forms the first step in a wider research programme that will explore this topic in further detail.

## Methods

The scope of the literature review included written documents, published in a publicly accessible location (not in confidential documents), and within the following categories: iwi and hapū management plans; academic journals; theses; and grey literature, including institutional or government reports and websites. For the purposes of this literature review, the “contemporary” period was defined as the past 40 years, so perspectives pre-dating 1985 were considered out of scope.

### *Iwi and hapū management plans*

Iwi and hapū management plans (IHMPs) are environmental planning documents that are prepared by iwi and hapū to express their values, concerns and aspirations in the context of managing the environment and resources within their rohe (Ministry for the Environment, 2024). IHMPs were sourced from the websites of the 16 regional councils/unitary authorities, iwi and hapū authority websites, and via Google Search.

Each IHMP was reviewed manually to determine its relevance to the scope of this review. Excluded documents included those not publicly accessible online, those that were not focused on the terrestrial environment (e.g., IHMPs that were exclusively focused on marine or freshwater environments), and superseded versions (i.e., where a more recent version of the IHMP was available).

After excluding out-of-scope documents, keyword searches relevant to pest mammal management were used to identify relevant sections

of each IHMP to read in full. The keywords used were “pest”, “preda\*”, “feral cat”, “stray cat”, “wild cat”, “exotic”, “invasive, tox\*”, “pois\*” and “1080” (where \* represents a wildcard). If a document was not searchable, it was read in its entirety to identify relevant content. For each IHMP, a record was kept of whether it contained any reference to pest mammal management, and any reference to cats specifically. Any appendices associated with IHMPs were also reviewed following the above process, and relevant information from these was included in the record for the main document.

**Academic journals and grey literature**

A variety of academic databases, journal archives, and grey literature repositories were searched for relevant information between 13 September

2024 and 18 March 2025, as listed in Table 1. For each resource, an initial search used highly specific keywords to find resources highlighting Māori views on cats, as illustrated in Table 2. If the initial search produced no results, the search was repeated with fewer keywords.

This sourcing process found no articles that addressed Māori attitudes to cats as the primary focus. Search results were therefore assessed for more general relevance, based on article title and abstract (where available). Articles were retained for further analysis if they appeared to align with one or more of the following key themes: (1) social attitudes towards pest mammal management in Aotearoa; (2) social attitudes towards cat management in Aotearoa (including feral and domestic cats); and (3) Māori-led or Māori-supported feral cat management in Aotearoa.

**TABLE 1** List of repositories included in the literature search process

- Academic journal databases
- Google Scholar
- ProQuest Science & Technology
- EBSCO portal database
- NZ Research – DigitalNZ
- Journal archives
- MAI Journal: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship* archive
- AlterNative Journal: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* archive
- Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* archive
- New Zealand Journal of Ecology* archive
- Grey literature repositories
- Te Tira Whakamātaki reports and articles archive
- Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research Digital Library
- Predator Free New Zealand Trust: Our Research
- Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment archive
- Department of Conservation Science Publications archive
- Local Government Magazine* archive

**TABLE 2** Keyword search terms used during the literature search process

AND →			
OR →	Māori	Feral cat	Attitudes
	Maori	Stray cat	Values
		Cat	Control
		Predator	Management
		Pest	Eradication

*Note:* Depending on the search functionality available at each repository, the initial search was sometimes broken into multiple searches (e.g., if Boolean operators AND and OR were not available).

This approach was intended to find information on Māori attitudes towards cats that may have been reported within more generalised discussions (e.g., surveys of the general public that reported some ethnicity data) and to inform contextual discussions around the role of Māori in cat management in Aotearoa.

Further relevant articles were identified from the reference lists of articles that were read during the literature review process (a snowballing approach) and during peer review of this manuscript. References deemed out of scope included those with a focus on non-mammalian pest species or countries other than Aotearoa, as well as discussions around tikanga, animal welfare, and/or ethics where these did not directly refer to modern cat management.

## Results

### *Iwi and hapū management plans*

After applying exclusions, there were 92 unique IHMPs that were within the review scope. The IHMPs in the final dataset spanned a publication date range from 1991 to 2023 (and three undated documents), with a median publication year of 2016.

Many of the IHMPs reviewed were pitched at a high level and dealt mainly with expectations for managing relationships with council, government agencies, developers, and so on, in a resource management context. A frequently stated aim was to provide a basis for understanding iwi and hapū values related to natural resource and environmental management (e.g., Nga Potiki a Tamapahore Trust, 2019; Te Roroa Whatu Ora & Mana Whenua Trusts, 2019; Te Runanga o Ngati Kahu, 2011).

Of the 92 IHMPs reviewed, 74 (80%) contained some reference to pest mammal management. This ranged from a brief mention of pest mammals as an issue (e.g., Ngaati Whanaunga Environmental Services Department, 2019; Ngāi Tamawhariua, 2014; Ngāi te Ahi Hapū, 2013; Te Runanga o Ngati Kahu, 2011), through to thorough treatment of the subject, including detailed iwi and hapū objectives and policies relating to pest mammal control (e.g., Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku/Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2008; Ngāti Mutunga, 2019; Taranaki Iwi, 2019; Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura Inc., 2009). Twenty-one IHMPs (23%) specifically noted feral cats as a problem.

### *Academic journals and grey literature*

A total of 61 articles aligned with at least one of the key themes. These included 13 articles that were

aligned with more than one key theme (Table 3). Articles that were rejected during the literature search phase were not quantified, nor were those that did not align with a key theme.

The key theme present in the largest number of articles related to social attitudes towards cat management in Aotearoa; 36 relevant articles were found, of which 14 (39%) included some information that was specific to Māori. Thirty-two articles were found that aligned with the key theme related to social attitudes towards pest mammal management in Aotearoa, of which 17 (53%) included information about Māori. There were only a handful ( $n = 6$ ) documents that reported on Māori-led or Māori-supported feral cat management (Table 3).

## Synthesis

This synthesis brings together information drawn from all the sources reviewed to outline contemporary Māori attitudes towards cat management in Aotearoa, as they are currently documented.

### *Cats in iwi and hapū management plans*

Just under a quarter of IHMPs specifically noted feral cats as a problem. In the majority of these ( $n = 12$ ), feral cats were simply listed among other examples of pest mammal species having negative impacts on native biodiversity, mahinga kai, or other cultural values. In these plans, issues and objectives relating to pest species were often presented in a generalised way. For example, the Taranaki Iwi Rautaki Tiaki Whenua: Reserves Management Plan 2019–2029 states that “an ongoing trapping regime, including annual control with bait-stations, will be implemented and maintained on all our properties” (Taranaki Iwi, 2019, p. 51), with feral cats having been listed among pest species present in the reserves earlier in the document.

Some IHMPs ( $n = 9$ ) went into more specific detail about the threat posed by feral cats and/or management of this pest species. The two most common themes ( $n = 3$  IHMPs each) were that domestic (in addition to feral) cats were recognised as a threat (Kāi Tahu ki Otago, 2005; Korowai Kāhui o Te Patuwai Tribal Council, 2011; Taranaki Iwi, n.d.), and concern about the impact of feral cats on tītī, an important traditional food resource (Korowai Kāhui o Te Patuwai Tribal Council, 2011; Ngāti Kuri Trust Board, 2018; Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu, 1992). Two IHMPs pointed to a lack of feral cat control and monitoring in the area covered by the plan (Kāi Tahu ki Otago, 2005; Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura Inc., 2009), while another

**TABLE 3** Alignment of articles reviewed to key research themes

Reference	Key theme			
	Social attitudes to pest mammal management	Social attitudes to cat management	Māori-led or supported feral cat management	Information specific to Māori
Aley & Russell (2019)				
Bassett et al. (2020)				
Black et al. (2022)				✓
Blackstock (2024)				
Chamberlain et al. (2024)				
Companion Animals New Zealand (2020)				✓
Companion Animals New Zealand (2024)				✓
Department of Conservation (2021)				✓
Department of Conservation (2023)				✓
Dickie & Medvecky (2023)				
Dowsett (2024)				✓
Farnworth et al. (2011)				
Farnworth et al. (2014)				
Fitzgerald et al. (2007)				
Forrest, Awawdeh, et al. (2023)				✓
Forrest et al. (2019)				✓
Forrest, Pearson, & Awawdeh (2023)				✓
A. Fraser (2006)				
W. Fraser (2006)				✓
Gates et al. (2019)				✓
Hall et al. (2016)				
Harper (2022)				✓
Harrod et al. (2016)				
Heimann (2018)				
Heimann & Medvecky (2022)				
C. Horn & Kilvington (2002)				✓
S. R. Horn et al. (2022)				✓
Hughey et al. (2019)				✓
Kaine & Wright (2022)				
Kaine et al. (2024)				
Kannemeyer (2017)				✓
Kannemeyer et al. (2019)				✓
Kikillus et al. (2017)				
Kirk et al. (2020)				
Linklater et al. (2019)				
Macaskill et al. (2025)				
MacDonald et al. (2015)				
MacDonald et al. (2020)				
MacDonald et al. (2024)				
Mercier et al. (2024)				✓
National Cat Management Strategy Group (2020)				
Nguyen et al. (2022)				
Niemiec et al. (2017)				
Ogden & Gilbert (2011)				
Ogilvie et al. (2006)				✓
Ovenden et al. (2024)				
Palmer & Thomas (2023)				
Peltzer et al. (2019)				✓
Predator Free NZ Trust & Fresh Perspective (2022)				✓
Predator Free NZ Trust & Spring (2024)				✓
Predator Free Rakiura (2023)				✓
Russell (2014)				
Russell et al. (2017)				
Saunders et al. (2021)				✓
Sheppard & Urquhart (1991)				
Te Tira Whakamātaki (2024)				✓
J. K. Walker et al. (2017)				✓
Warburton et al. (2021)				✓
Wilkinson & Fitzgerald (2014)				✓
Woodhouse (2021)				✓
Woolley & Hartley (2019)				

identified the need to develop a pest management and biosecurity strategy, with feral cats specified as a target species (Tūpuna Maunga o Tāmaki Makaurau Authority, 2022). Only one IHMP described feral cat trapping currently in place in wetlands and riparian areas and maintained by Fish & Game New Zealand (Ngāti Tahu–Ngāti Whaoa, 2018). A unique observation was made in Ngāti Tahu ki Murihiku/Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu (2008), which discussed feral cats in the context of possum control using 1080 toxin and described by-kill of feral cats as an advantage of this pest control method.

With regard to pest mammal management more broadly, some IHMPs expressed a preference for eradication rather than suppression (Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura Inc., 2009; Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2013), and the importance of monitoring pest management outcomes was also stressed in several IHMPs (Ngāti Tahu ki Murihiku/Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2008; Ngāti Kuta Charitable Trust, 2005; Te Rūnanga o Kaikōura Inc., 2009; Te Ūkaipō Iwi Environmental Management Unit, 2022).

Thirty-four IHMPs (46%) expressed some view on the use of vertebrate toxins to control pests. These views ranged from opposition to any use of toxins (Nga Uri o Tahinga Trust, n.d.; Pirirakau Incorporated Society, 2017; Te Upokorehe Hapū, 2012) to specific opposition to aerial sowing of toxins (Ngāti Pūkenga Iwi ki Tauranga Trust, 2013; Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whare Trust, 2011) to support for best-practice use of toxins based on the benefits to native biodiversity (Ngāti Tahu ki Murihiku/Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2008; Ngāti Mutunga, 2019; Taranaki Iwi, 2019). However, the most commonly expressed views were in the middle ground, with qualified support for responsible toxin use. For instance, some IHMPs stated a preference to minimise toxin use in favour of non-toxic means of control like trapping, while not presenting a blanket opposition to toxin use (Maniapoto Māori Trust Board, 2018; Ngā Hapū o Ahipara, 2023; Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board Inc., 2014; Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2013). Support for research into non-toxic means of control was noted in several IHMPs (Ngāti Tahu ki Murihiku/Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2008; Ngāti Tahu–Ngāti Whaoa, 2018; Ngāti Tama ki Te Waipounamu Trust, 2018; Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Tahu, 2013; Te Runanga o Ngāti Takoto, 2017; Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Whare Trust, 2011).

### ***Māori attitudes towards cat management in Aotearoa New Zealand***

This section synthesises information documented in academic and grey literature. It primarily consists of data from surveys or interviews where respondents of Māori ethnicity were identified, and their views on cat management were reported on and/or quantified. Under-representation of Māori in sampled populations was acknowledged by multiple authors (e.g., Forrest, Awawdeh, et al., 2023; Forrest, Pearson, et al., 2023; W. Fraser, 2001; Hughey et al., 2019; Kaine et al., 2024). Where more generalised information is included in the synthesis (e.g., attitudes of other ethnic groups), the intention is to provide comparative perspectives or context within which to interpret the Māori-specific data.

Although we reviewed articles falling under three broad themes, it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed synthesis of all information relevant to those themes. Instead, the focus is on integrating the information that was specific to Māori attitudes towards cat management in Aotearoa and placing these in the broad context of comparative perspectives.

In a survey of 1,015 Māori respondents, Black et al. (2022) found that the majority of Māori felt strongly about the importance of biosecurity, and that cats were identified as a priority animal pest species. Similarly, in focus-group discussions conducted by Wilkinson and Fitzgerald (2014), all groups, including one consisting of Ngāti Hine hapū members, identified feral cats as a pest species.

In most studies where Māori views on feral cat control were contrasted directly with those of New Zealand Europeans, there tended to be little difference in recognition of feral cats as pests, and general acceptance of a need to control them. Te Tira Whakamātaki (2024), for example, found that the views of Māori and New Zealand Europeans on the seriousness of feral cats as a threat were near-identical: 53% of each rated cats as a “very serious threat” and 27% of Māori (compared to 26% of New Zealand Europeans) rated cats as a “large threat”. Similarly, J. K. Walker et al. (2017) found that 87% of Māori respondents thought that action should be taken to control feral cats, compared with 89% of New Zealand Europeans. In contrast, Forrest et al. (2019) found that a higher proportion of Māori than other ethnicities responded neutrally when asked whether cats and dogs that have become feral should be put down (although noting that the inclusion of dogs in this question may have been influential). There is also

some evidence of differing views on appropriate methods of feral cat control, with one survey finding that Māori were less in favour of lethal methods of feral cat control (26% favoured) than New Zealand Europeans (50% favoured) (J. K. Walker et al., 2017).

In terms of companion cats, recent data show a slightly lower rate of cat ownership among Māori than New Zealand Europeans (40% vs 43% of households, respectively) (Companion Animals New Zealand, 2024). The results of previous surveys suggest that many New Zealanders perceive companion cats as an important threat to native wildlife, although typically less so than feral and stray cats (e.g., around 50% of respondents vs approximately 75%, respectively, in Hughey et al., 2019). Cat owners are also significantly less likely than non-owners to agree that companion cats pose a threat to wildlife (Bassett et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2016; Kaine et al., 2024; Woolley & Hartley, 2019). Those studies, however, did not examine the effect of ethnicity on this issue, so further research is required to ascertain if Māori attitudes regarding the biodiversity impacts of companion cats differ significantly from those of the general public.

There is some evidence of divergent pet management practices between Māori and non-Māori, although this is inconsistent across studies. In a survey by Gates et al. (2019), Māori respondents had significantly lower rates of de-sexing companion cats and dogs than New Zealand Europeans, but a more recent survey found no difference in de-sexing rates by ethnicity (Forrest, Awawdeh, et al., 2023). In another survey of pet owners, a lower proportion of Māori than non-Māori respondents strongly agreed with statements that companion cats should be de-sexed and microchipped, and a higher proportion stated that they were neutral on these practices (Forrest et al., 2019; Forrest, Pearson, & Awawdeh, 2023). Potential reasons for ethnicity-based differences in pet management practices were not explored in detail in these studies and require more research.

Chamberlain (2024) found that adoption of cat containment measures among New Zealanders was driven by cat owners' capability, opportunity and motivation; for example, cat owners were more likely to contain their cats if they were motivated by a belief that containment is beneficial for cats, had knowledge about how to perform containment, and the time and environmental circumstances permitted them to do so. Further investigation of how capability, opportunity and motivation vary by ethnicity may be enlightening.

It is notable that public views on companion cat management practices appear to be changing over time. Surveys by Companion Animals New Zealand (2020, 2024) show that rates of de-sexing and microchipping cats are increasing, with microchipping rates in particular growing very rapidly from 49% in 2020 to 72% in 2024. Furthermore, a survey undertaken by Predator Free NZ Trust in 2024 found an increase in support for national legislation requiring de-sexing of cats (from 50% to 57%) and for national legislation requiring cats be kept indoors (from 21% to 25%) compared with the results of a prior survey in 2022 (Predator Free NZ Trust & Fresh Perspective, 2022; Predator Free NZ Trust & Spring, 2024). These statistics did not take ethnicity into account, so further research is required to ascertain if Māori attitudes are following the same trends.

### **Review limitations**

The management of cats as both pets and pests is currently a hot topic in Aotearoa, and this review has aimed to contribute to the public conversation by synthesising documented information about contemporary Māori views on this topic. As such, the scope of this review was deliberately limited, and therefore so are the conclusions that can be drawn.

This review does not represent an exhaustive exploration of Māori perspectives on cats, or on management of pest species more generally. In particular, historical (pre-1985) perspectives, and in-depth discussions of tikanga and ethics as related to the management of pest species, are not examined. Review of some periodically produced reports was limited to the more recent publications in the series (e.g., the Companion Animals New Zealand surveys). While the author sought to conduct the literature review in a systematic and objective way, the outcome is still subject to reviewer effects and may reflect the author's experiences and perspectives.

### **Discussion**

The concept of kaitiakitanga is often understood simply as "guardianship" within a conservation context. However, the true meaning of the term embraces wider ancestral, social and environmental dimensions and encompasses identity, purpose and practice (Kawharu, 2000). Some key values underlying kaitiakitanga are those of whakapapa, tikanga Māori, rangatiratanga, mauri, mana, and manaakitanga (see McAllister et al. 2023 and Stewart & Birdsall 2025 for more detailed reading on these concepts). These values

come together in a worldview which prioritises a strong connection to place and the responsibility and authority to care for the environment and resources.

While rooted in traditional values, *te ao Māori* is highly relevant to contemporary challenges (Lambert & Mark-Shadbolt, 2021; E. Walker et al., 2024), including the management of invasive pest species (S. Palmer et al., 2020). For many Māori who participate in resource management or conservation-related activities, *te ao Māori* underpins their inspiration to do so. A recent survey found that, relative to their New Zealand European counterparts, Māori respondents reported a stronger influence of *whānau*, *tikanga*, and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* obligations on their motivation for protecting the natural environment, and they were also more likely to say that they were actively practising *kaitiakitanga* at place (Te Tira Whakamātaki, 2024). Most Māori agree that native species have greater rights than non-native species (Mercier et al., 2024), and removing invasive predators is considered to enhance *mauri* within the environment (Woodhouse, 2021). This is reflected in strong support for predator control and eradication, with 84% of Māori agreeing we should kill rats, possums and stoats to protect native species (Te Tira Whakamātaki, 2024). Māori also place strong importance on negative impacts on traditional resources, like *mahinga kai*, when asked to define what constitutes a pest (Wilkinson & Fitzgerald, 2014).

The review of academic and grey literature found no works that primarily focused on documenting contemporary Māori attitudes towards feral cats. However, evidence drawn from a range of sources indicates that most Māori consider feral cats to be serious pests, and they support efforts to control or eradicate them. Although slightly less than a quarter of IHMPs made specific note of feral cats as a pest, this may reflect the high-level resource management scope of most IHMPs, as well as changing awareness of the impacts of feral cats within the last 10 years, recalling that the median publication date of IHMPs was 2016. With the recent addition of feral cats to the PF2050 target species list, it seems likely that public acceptance of feral cat control, including by Māori, will continue to increase. More nuanced conversations around control methods are needed, and Māori will have unique perspectives to contribute. For instance, the results of this review suggest that monitoring the non-target impacts of toxin use, and advocating for ongoing research into alternative methods of control, are important ways in

which Māori are exercising *kaitiakitanga* and a holistic understanding of environmental wellbeing in the context of pest control.

Māori participation in, and leadership of, feral cat management is widespread, with many *iwi* and *hapū* around the country actively involved in feral cat control and eradication projects. For example, the *Tū Mai Taonga* project aims to completely eradicate feral cats and rats from Aotea, Great Barrier Island (Parkes, 2022). It is led by *Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea hapū*, and more than half the workers are *mana whenua*, many of whom have been enabled to return home to the island after residing elsewhere (Duval, 2023). In addition to place-based projects within their own *rohe*, Māori aspire to play a larger role in strategy and policy-setting at the nationwide scale. When asked who should be leading environmental decision-making in Aotearoa, Māori respondents in a recent survey ranked *iwi* or *hapū* entities as their most preferred options by a substantial margin (Te Tira Whakamātaki, 2024). As feral cat control and eradication become increasingly common, it is essential to include Māori in related policy-making as treaty partners, as the owners of large tracts of land, and as active *kaitiaki*.

The views of contemporary Māori on how companion cats should be managed appear to be particularly under-studied. Two studies have found that Māori are less supportive of de-sexing and microchipping than non-Māori (Forrest, Pearson, & Awawdeh, 2023; Gates et al., 2019); however, the potential reasons behind these differences were not explored and require further study. Some IHMPs (*Kāi Tahu ki Otago*, 2005; *Korowai Kāhui ō Te Patuwai Tribal Council*, 2011; *Ngāti Kuri Trust Board*, 2018) acknowledge domestic cats (in addition to their feral counterparts) as threats to biodiversity. With feral cat eradication now an official national goal, discussions around responsible management of companion cats will inevitably surface. It will not be possible to eradicate feral cats if their populations are continuously replenished via escape or dumping of companion cats and kittens. For Māori who aspire to feral cat eradication, it will be essential to explore what it means to be a responsible pet owner within a *te ao Māori* framework. For instance, can ensuring that pet cats are de-sexed, or imposing a cat curfew, be considered an expression of *manaakitanga* and *kaitiakitanga*? It will also be critically important that barriers to adoption of responsible cat management practices by Māori and all New Zealanders be identified and mitigated.

## Conclusion

This literature review has established that little academic attention has been directed at documenting the attitudes of contemporary Māori towards cats and cat management in Aotearoa. However, evidence collated across a range of sources, including IHMPs, suggests that Māori typically consider feral cats to be pests and that they support efforts to control or eradicate them. Further research in this space could focus on more detailed enquiry around the acceptability (or not) of different feral cat management methods to Māori (e.g., trapping or shooting vs the use of toxins) and what underlying values or contextual factors are influential in shaping these views.

Conversations around feral cats as a pest species inevitably touch on issues of responsible management of companion cats. This review has revealed that very little is known about the views of contemporary Māori on companion cat management practices such as de-sexing, microchipping, and cat containment. Further research into these topics is also recommended to help inform the ongoing public conversation about the role of cats in Aotearoa today.

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## Glossary

hapū	subtribe, kinship group
iwi	tribe, extended kinship group
kaitiaki	guardian, custodian
kaitiakitanga	guardianship, custodianship of the environment and natural resources
mahinga kai	natural food resources
mana	authority
manaakitanga	nurture, reciprocity
mana whenua	power associated with possession and occupation of tribal land
mauri	a binding force between physical and spiritual realms

rangatiratanga	sovereignty, self-determination
rohe	area of land
te ao Māori	the Māori worldview
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), founding document of New Zealand
tikanga	customary system of values and practices
tītī	muttonbird
whakapapa	genealogical connection
whānau	family, including extended family

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