

HFC Committee

From: Rahimo <rahimo@maui.net>
Sent: Wednesday, May 20, 2020 1:26 PM
To: HFC Committee
Subject: regarding Bill 6.04.041 ban on feeding of feral animals

Aloha Council Committee,

I would like to direct my comments to the banning of feeding feral cats.

For many years now, myself and many others have worked diligently to improve the situation with the feral cat population on Maui. To this end we have worked tirelessly to assist in feeding and caring for the feral cat population. In these years there have been changes to the way Maui Humane Society and many in the population, at large, have seen to address the issue. Four years ago Maui Humane Society changed course, based on hard evidence and experience, to support Trap/Neuter/Return, or TNR, as the most humane and practical way to control the Maui feral cat population. Many of us had already, through our own efforts, and through our own expense, been doing this for many years. We had seen that, over time, when consistently caring for cats in a particular location, the methodical practice of TNR was incredibly beneficial. The population of those particular colonies would decrease and then, over time, cease. If cats were removed and euthanized, then even more cats would move in, breed, and we would have to start the process all over again, only with more, often less healthy cats. This has been widely documented to be the "vacuum effect". It has become clear that the starvation process is cruel, ineffective and expensive. It simply does not work. If cats are fed, instead of starved, they stay healthy and hang around enough to be systematically trapped. If they are not fed, they will still survive, but become much more problematic as they come closer and closer in to neighborhoods to find food. They will still breed quickly and will be less healthy. Starvation would be so inordinately cruel, such a betrayal, to so many of our beloved community cats, that cat caretakers would not be able to deal with the ensuing anguish. This would cause a huge rift in our community bringing with it a great deal of pain, anger and sneaking around to feed cats, knowing the consequences could bring penalties for doing so.

This bill simply does not allow for conciliatory measures of dealing with cat vs. birds vs monk seals. That is very concerning. Certainly there are many factors to take into consideration in dealing with this situation. But to blame cats for the indigenous birds' demise and monk seal deaths is really a skewed perspective. There are many variables here. Of course, we all know that humans ourselves have probably caused most of the damage, having brought in alien species of all kinds and then having taken no responsibility for the results. Still, cats, dogs, roosters, etc. are regularly dumped by uncaring owners. This, first and foremost is the condition that must be dealt with. Rats, mongoose, chickens, pigs, goats, deer, and many invasive insects have been and are a large contributing factor to contaminated waters and increased diseases. Again, for the most part, this is a result of human interference and negligence. Without cats, rats and mice would definitely become a huge problem. So, there are many situations that have to be looked at from many sides before accusing cats of being the culprit. Hard facts are absolutely necessary to a viable solution.

Yes, TNR takes time, but not really that long, considering how much time would be wasted, backtracking, rather than allowing TNR to continue. It is a project deserving of the councils' attention and support. With this support both Maui Humane Society and so many of us colony caretakers and independent feeders could continue to fervently do our work for the betterment of our whole community. To go back to an outmoded method, that of starving for intended results, is not useful and dangerous on so many levels. It will fracture the community. It will alienate many tourists who, impressed by the care shown cats in areas they are staying, express their pleasure at seeing such healthy cats. Often they will start discussing their own TNR programs in their home towns, and express that seeing the care given the cats makes them feel so at home. I have often been offered donations for the cats care, and several tourists I have met have even ended up adopting cats and kittens who are around where they are staying and taken them back to their mainland homes.

There are so many things that could be said here, but it is certainly time for the efforts of the many devoted ones, who have helped in this community effort to care for the feral cats, to be acknowledged, not potentially made criminals by being feeders. It is time for our actions, our commitment, our love and compassion to be honored, not vilified. Every one of us also loves birds and monk seals and all the other animals. We care about the welfare of every being, and wish to work together to that end. But we cannot accept starvation as an answer. It lacks forward thinking, and productive humane problem solving. Compassion is something that we all need to cultivate more of for all sentient beings and for each other. Let us work together to that end, with kindness. Maui is such a potentially wonderful place for that aloha to extend. TNR is not an overnight process, but with wholehearted support it will go faster and stronger and bring, over time, the desired effect.

It is unfortunate that such a bill has been brought up in the thick of the COVID pandemic time, when we cannot physically dialogue together and share our hearts. It is unfortunate that we were not given more notice before this bill was first presented. Right now there are so many unemployed, just getting by, and trying to hold back the fear and panic of what life will bring physically and economically in the months to come. Certainly this bill coming at this time is oddly out of sync with the pressing issues. The whole issue has been lacking in transparency and careful consideration of what is most pressing to the most people at this time. And the idea of enforcing a no feed ban on feral cats begs the question of how much money it would take to enforce such a ban when so many simply need food. It is so callous in it's untimely intent.

Thank you for your time. With respect and appreciation for your thoughtful consideration, Laura Gleason