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**No animal left behind: a report on animal inclusive emergency management law reform by Steve Glassey, presented at Parliament (New Zealand) and hosted by Gareth Hughes MP, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019.**

**Speech by Key Note Speaker, Craig Fugate, former Administrator, FEMA.**

The first thing is when anybody starts talking about animal issues you're going to have the naysayers say, but people are first, people should be the primary goal here, not pets. And I would go, pets are a people problem. From my earliest days working at the local level of government where we had to evacuate for a chemical emergency, we had this toxic cloud of gas going across the highway. We had law enforcement, a police officer out stopping traffic, and cars were whizzing past him, going into the cloud. We're like, who are these crazy people? They were going home to rescue their pets. I mean they consciously drove through a toxic cloud to get to their pets. But at that time our messaging in disasters was if you had to evacuate, evacuate, but leave your pets behind with plenty of food and water. And I'm like, isn't that kind of a mixed message? Because either I'm saying it's your pet's last meal or it's not that bad and you don't really need to go. But we had kind of broken this down into people first, pet's maybe, but they're not important.

Well fast forward to Katrina in 2005, some of the most compelling images were as the Coast Guard would winch down the baskets from the helicopter to the rooftops and people were trying to get their pets loaded up and they're waving the pets off, you can't bring your pets, and people would say, then I'm not going. Now that showed us a lot. I go all the way back to Hurricane Andrew in 92, when we began to realise that if we weren't addressing pets and companion animals and livestock, this was impacting our agricultural, that this was actually causing us more problems. And emergency managers in our profession I found have this tendency to put the hard stuff to do in an annexe. So we wrote our plans, and when we finally started writing about pets we created an annexe for pets. But we did it for all animals because we were dealing with; in some cases we had dairies with close to 10,000 cattle. You know what happens when you have 10,000 cattle and you lose power and you can't milk them. You have 10,000 cows that are going to go in the mastitis and you're going to have a lot of deaths. So nobody thought getting generators for a dairy was a commercial operation, I'm like, it's about to become a huge public health emergency.

So we had to really take a step back and go, look animals are part of our community, they are parts of our family, they are parts of major industries, and we had to look at them as the total community. What we ended up at FEMA calling the whole community, not just some annexe. So over time we began changing policies, a very classic thing for us for hurricanes is to evacuate before the storm gets there, but we still have a lot of people that chose not to evacuate. They gave us all these reasons, but a reason we heard over and over again is I

can't take my pets to a shelter. And so they would stay behind. They wouldn't leave their pets behind.

So we started asking the question, well, why can't we make pet-friendly shelters? How hard could it be? We already have to let the guide dogs and other ADA Americans With Disabilities Act that had requirements for service animals are already required to be permitted in shelters. Why not companion animals? And everybody gave us a reason why not. And we said, but what if we change the question from why not to what would it take to do it? It turned out it was a lot easier to do it.

So our experience has been that we were not addressing the pets, we weren't addressing the animals, we weren't addressing livestock, and they were becoming bigger and bigger issues in disasters. They were given as reasons why people didn't evacuate; they were given as the economic impacts. And again, just the toll of what we were seeing out there of people who in many cases we're making that decision, do I leave my animals behind or do I stay. Instead of take my animals and go.

So in the States between Katrina, fast forward to when I joined the Obama administration the message had changed, when we tell you to evacuate in the States and take your family, we mean all of the family. All of your pets, and we tell people to plan for that on the front end. Increasingly local governments are making shelters that are pet-friendly. I did some work in Sarasota County in Florida after Hurricane Irma hit the state. They had plans to do a few pet-friendly shelters, but they ended up sheltering 25,000 people in their county and they quickly realised that you cannot just have a couple of shelters that were pet-friendly. By default they all became friendly and now their plan is to always make sure that they accommodate the pets when they show up.

Search and rescue teams during hurricane Katrina would not take you if you brought your pet. For the last couple of years in my time at FEMA, we had actually changed the policy, when the urban search and rescue teams get to you, if there are animals, unless the animals pose a danger to the team, the animals come out. They'll take the animals out. And it was oftentimes as we saw in the flooding at Harvey, sometimes the boats were coming back with nothing but animals that had been left behind by owners tied up and we're literally treading water about to drown. And so for the rescuers, they no longer have to make that painful decision to leave animals behind because they were told they don't rescue pets. If they can safely do it and they don't have a more pressing mission, they'll bring the pets out. If they show up at your house and you have a dog or a cat, or pretty much any type of critter, as long as that animal does not pose a threat to that rescue crew, they're coming with you.

We try to really get this idea that if we're going to talk about reducing the impacts of disasters; we have to reduce the barriers for people to take action. If people don't think they can bring their pets with them to a shelter they may choose to stay behind. If the rescue teams get there to pull them out and they say, I can't take my pets, they may choose to stay behind. This is why this is a people issue. It isn't just a pet issue; it's just not an animal issue.

It's the fact that people will go in harm's way, in the most dangerous areas and refuse to be evacuated if they are made to leave animals behind makes this a people issue.

And again if we do the planning on the front end, it's much easier. My joke back in my hometown was if I ask people to show up to volunteer at a shelter to take care of the people, I got a handful of people. If I ask people to show up the shelter to take care of the pets, the room was full. It isn't that government's got to do this all by themselves, and I think that's probably the biggest barrier we face with local emergency managers and civil defence officials. They somehow think this is another unfunded mandate that they're going to have to solve all by themselves. I would beg to differ and go, if you just ask your community to help, you'll have more volunteers for the animals than you will for the people.

And I think this is again, engaging the community as part of the plan and as part of the solution. Don't look at the public as a liability but a resource, and include pets in the planning as part of the reality that every community will face at some point the need to evacuate and shelter their populations. If you say no pets, you'll have people that will choose to stay at risk, and that puts rescuers at risk, increases our losses. And again, as we have seen with the cows that were sitting out there; I had a similar situation, I had cows fall into a sinkhole. It is amazing that sometimes our humanity is judged by how we treat our animals in a crisis as much as how we treat the public. And in the absence of a compelling human interest story the animals become a story in itself. And whether or not we're there to serve is often how we are judged in that response.

So I always start off with the very first thing. This isn't about the pets, it's about the people, because people will not leave their pets behind, they will not evacuate, they will go in harm's way, and increasingly we are judged by how we care for our companion animals, our members of the family, as we are for the people. So to me it's binary. You either plan for it ahead of time or you're forced to deal with it in a crisis when you have fewer options.

So I read the report, many of the recommendations are things that we have seen done in the United States. One of the things that was done after Katrina is FEMA does reimburse for animal care. So if we have pets in shelters and the local communities buying the dog food and cat food and all the containers, FEMA reimburses, that's considered an emergency protective measure. If the search and rescue teams go out and they are out there rescuing animals, that's reimbursable, it's considered part of the rescue process.

So we were lucky that we did learn the lessons of Katrina. Congress did pass legislation, so this is not just a good idea, it's actually the law that we have to plan for pets and incorporate them in our plans. We're putting the resources there. But I think probably the most important part is as people came to understand that giving people the option of you or your pets was not an option. And so in reading the report, I'm glad to see many of the things we've learned are in this report. I think it's a good starting point.

Again, I think when a lot of the government officials look at this, they may be initially thinking, well I don't have the resources, we don't have the capabilities, you're asking us to do something that will put people in jeopardy. I would turn around and go, just ask the people in this room, how many people will be there to help the community in that disaster.

We just need to be part of the plan. We need to be part of the solution. As long as we're an afterthought, it's too late. But incorporate us into your community plan, the resources are there, the volunteers are there, but if you wait until the event occurs, it's too late.

So thanks for the opportunity, it was a great report. And again hopefully they will take this up, but if not, you have your legislative process. But again, the best way to deal with this is everybody in this room just going out and saying pets are important, but we're going to make sure that people are not given that choice of leave your pets behind or don't evacuate. So thanks.

## **ENDS**

Further information including the report and video, available from [www.animalevac.nz/lawreport](http://www.animalevac.nz/lawreport).