**Speech Notes for Governance & Administration Select Committee Hearing**

**6 March 2019, Parliament Buildings, New Zealand**

Tena Koutou

Ko Ruahine te maunga

Ko Manawatu te awa

Ko Tipene Glassey ahau

Kia ora

Good morning, my name is Steve Glassey, and I am joined today by Theresa Parkin, we are the co-founders of Animal Evac New Zealand. Animal Evac is NZ’s only dedicated animal disaster management charity, with over 160 highly trained animal disaster responders nation wide.

We are here today because we feel that the draft national disaster resilience strategy in its current state fails the animals of Aotearoa and we hope you can change that.

We can all remember the impact of Hurricane Katrina that struck the US gulf states in 2005. Over 1,400 people died in what would become one of the deadliest disasters in US history. 44% of those who chose to stay behind despite the mandatory evacuation order, did so in part because they could not take their pets. The year later, the Pet and Emergency Transportation Standards or PETS Act was introduced as federal law to mandate plans, provide funding, and ensure animals were rescued and housed during disaster. They did this because saving animals, saves human lives.

In 2010 I published a masters research report on animal disaster management in New Zealand that highlighted significant flaws in our animal emergency response arrangements. It was made very clear that failure to address these flaws would result in animal owners placing themselves in harm’s way during disasters.

The issues raised in that report played out in the Canterbury quakes, Nelson Flood, Kaikoura quake, Edgecumbe Flood, Port Hills Fire and just in the past few weeks, the Nelson Fires. Simply, our animal disaster arrangements are dysfunctional, and we fail to learn from our disasters.

In 2017 as the former CEO of Wellington SPCA, and founder of the SPCA’s National Rescue Unit, I made a comprehensive submission to the Ministerial Inquiry into Civil Defence to raise concerns about the direction or lack of, in regard to protecting animals from disasters. Over 10% of all public submission content related to animals, yet the review had dismissed them all from key recommendations. Democracy failed the animals.

In January this year, with the support of Garth Hughes, we presented what is now referred to as the most comprehensive review of animal disaster law to Parliament. We even had the former Head of FEMA, Craig Fugate present on why animal disaster management reform is so critical to protecting humans in emergencies. There would be no one in New Zealand that would have more experience or credibility in emergency management than Craig.

The Nelson Fires repeated many of the major mistakes made in previous responses. Despite legal mandate for MPI to coordinate animal emergency plans, there was no animal emergency plan approved under the civil defence emergency management act in effect at the time of the fire. Our official information requests have revealed that MPI does not even have funding for its regional animal welfare emergency management coordination function, despite it being a mandated under the national civil defence emergency management plan order.

We have had veiled threats from officials and even a Minister, that if we continue to draw attention to such deficiencies, our chances of getting funding will be affected. Yet this government repeatedly says it is prepared to be held to account.

Today we learned that despite being told costs for responding would be covered by MPI, MPI are now undecided whether to pay our piddly expense claim. This is day-jar-vue like Edgecumbe, and though central government will reimburse civil defence welfare costs fully, the animal welfare sub-function is excluded. In the US, disaster response costs for animal rescue and sheltering are funded. Our arrangements are not world class.

Indeed, last year the government announced TEC funding for civil defence volunteers would be extended to animal response groups like ours, within weeks officials changed the rules, the money went back to the crown and groups like ours missed out on funding. Current arrangements failed the community and its animals again.

In the nelson fires, people went back illegally through the cordons to attend to their animals. In the Edgecumbe flood, residents did the same including one who swam across the flooded Rangiteiki river to get to her horse after being turned away at a cordon. These risks were identified to government over eight years ago. Emergency management plans must be based on likely behaviours, not correct behaviours.

We are concerned that this strategy was not consulted sufficiently. Other animal groups have also reported they were never consulted or directly invited to submit. In fact MCDEMs own electronic newsletter came out a couple of days after the public consultation period opened, and did not even mention it. Deliberative democracy failed.

We are very thankful that this select committee has put the strategy out for their own round of public consultation, otherwise we would not have had the chance to engage and the animals would have been failed again, for another 10 years.

We internationally trade on a reputation for striving for high standards of animal welfare and how we treat animals from day to day, to during times of disasters is how we will be judged. I remind you of the story of the three cows that were stranded on a landslide island during the Kaikoura quake. The whole world watched and wanted to know what was going to happen to the cows, not the people. How we treat animals in disaster will affect our global trading reputation.

And kiwis love animals. Voters love animals. And just in a few days, through a small followership on our facebook and a $80 boost, with no media attention, we have rallied what I understand to be record breaking public submissions on civil defence strategy consultation. I know this as I used to work at MCDEM and know how much the public sadly don’t engage on these kind of strategies. We’ve had over 1000 views of our webpage that raises our concerns over the strategy. This is a barometer of public opinion and expectation – animals need to be a specific and accountable metric in the national disaster resilience strategy.

The strategy calls for accountability and improved public engagement in policy setting. I hope these aspirations are not empty gestures.

Officials will tell you the national plan is up for review and they can address some of the issues then. Good, then let’s make it low hanging fruit in the strategy. The strategy needs to reflect what citizens want, not just the views of officials.

You all have the opportunity to be remembered as the politicians that created change, change that will protect our global reputation, and save both human and animal lives. This is not about Labour, National, Act, Greens, NZ First or any other party’s agenda – this is about doing the right thing.

For every day we fail to reform our animal disaster management arrangements, we will continue to put human lives at risk. As our elected representatives, we hope that you will listen to the overwhelming calls for animals to be made a specific and accountable objective in the national disaster resilience strategy, for the sake of the animals, people and democracy.

Thank you for you time today.