

SPCA Submission

1st September 2025

On the Petitions of Animates NZ Holding Ltd, Raewyn Harrison, and Suzanne Cook calling for a ban on the private sale of fireworks



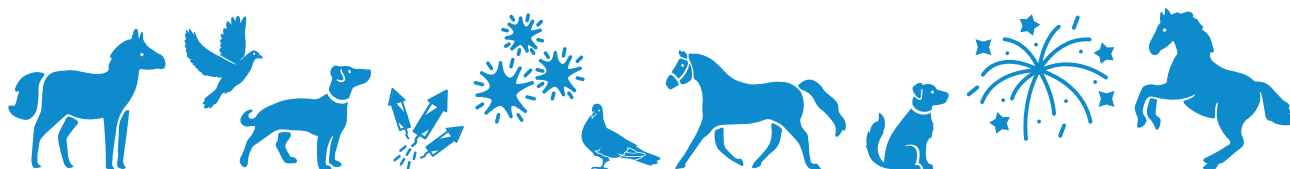
Executive Summary

- > SPCA supports the petitioners' calls for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks.
- > Fireworks cause widespread psychological and physical harm to animals.
- > Studies show that many companion animals experience fear or anxiety during fireworks, often leading to panic, injury, and death.
- > Management strategies, such as medication or confinement, are largely ineffective especially as fireworks may be let off unpredictably year-round.
- > Wildlife impacts are significant. Fireworks disrupt birds during breeding season, triggering mass night flights, nest abandonment, and increased predation.
- > Additional harms include:
 - » Wildfires: 106 firework-related fires in 2023 (a 58% increase on 2022).
 - » Marine life: exposure to underwater noise and toxic debris.
 - » Captive wild animals: stress, injury, and deaths reported in New Zealand zoos.
- > Public support for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks is strong and consistent: a combined 95,354 people signed the petitions currently under consideration.
- > Despite assurances from a Select Committee report in 2021 that sales would continue to decline, imports of fireworks rose 52% in 2023, alongside sharp increases in fires and police call-outs. The status quo is not sustainable.
- > Internationally, New Zealand is an outlier. Most Australian states, Ireland, and many parts of the US and UK have far stricter controls or outright bans on private fireworks.
- > SPCA supports controlled, licensed, and notified public displays as a safe alternative, alongside modern options such as laser or drone shows. These enable cultural and community celebrations without compromising animal welfare.
- > Given the predictable, preventable, and widespread harms to animals, SPCA urges Parliament to act decisively by banning the private sale and use of fireworks in New Zealand.



Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	4
Submission	5
SPCA supports the petitioners' calls for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks.....	5
Harms to domestic animals.....	5
Psychological harms	5
Physical harms	6
Management strategies.....	6
Harms to wildlife and captive wild animals.....	7
Nesting season	7
Wildfires.....	8
Marine life.....	8
Captive wild animals (zoos)	8
Previous petitions and why a ban is warranted now	9
Support for a ban.....	9
International comparison	10
Conclusion	11
References	12
Appendix 1 – Example of intentional harm caused by fireworks	14
Appendix 2 – Petitions calling for a ban on fireworks	15



Introduction

The following submission is made on behalf of The Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (trading as SPCA).

SPCA is the preeminent animal welfare and advocacy organisation in New Zealand. The Society has been in existence for over 150 years with a supporter base representing more than 100,000 New Zealanders across the nation.

The organisation includes 28 Animal Welfare Centres across New Zealand and approximately 60 inspectors appointed under the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

SPCA welcomes the opportunity to submit in support of the petitions of Animates NZ Holding, Raewyn Harrison, and Suzanne Cook calling for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks.



Submission

SPCA supports the petitioners' calls for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks.

SPCA advocates for a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks in New Zealand due to the distress and harm they cause to animals.¹ SPCA also advocates that fireworks, pyrotechnics and gas-fired explosions should never be permitted to be used at events involving animals due to the distress they cause animals.

We acknowledge that many New Zealanders include firework displays when celebrating special occasions such as Matariki, Diwali, Chinese New Year, and Guy Fawkes. We are supportive of controlled and notified public firework displays, which allow communities to celebrate while minimising harms.

This submission outlines the harms fireworks cause to animals, evidence in favour of a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks in New Zealand, and international comparisons.

Harms to domestic animals

Psychological harms

Fear of fireworks is common in companion animals. New Zealand research shows that between 46–74.4 % of cat and dog owners report their animals show fear of fireworks (Dale et al., 2010; Gates et al., 2019). Horse owners reported 79 % of horses were anxious or very anxious around fireworks (Gronqvist et al., 2016). These fears can lead to panic, destructive behaviour, and long-term phobias.

The potential for psychological suffering is a significant welfare issue for animals. This is exacerbated by the unpredictable nature of firework use in New Zealand. Therefore, rather than becoming desensitised to the noise and sight of fireworks, many animals become sensitised, and their response can be more severe and generalised to a fear of other loud noises.

Fireworks pose a significant risk of acoustic trauma (Plontke et al., 2002). Common responses from animals to fearful or loud noises include increased heart rates and changes in blood chemistry, vigilance, trembling, vocalising, urination, and defecation, and destructive and escape behaviours (Christensen et al., 2005; Hydbring-Sandberg et al., 2004). The New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA) has acknowledged the severe anxiety, stress, and psychological harm caused to animals by fireworks, which significantly compromises their welfare.²

Fear-related behaviours are indicative of negative welfare for animals and can have long-term physiological effects. Stress responses in animals have been associated with changes in hormonal and immune performance, disease processes, and shortened life spans (Dreschel, 2010).

¹ <https://www.sPCA.nz/advocacy/position-statements/article/fireworks>

² <https://nzva.org.nz/positions-advocacy/position-statements/fireworks/>



Physical harms

Animals frequently injure themselves attempting to flee fireworks. Most companion animals impacted by fireworks are owned and thus owners typically take injured animals to their local veterinary practice. As such, SPCA does not collate data on injuries caused to animals.

Several New Zealand studies have documented animals injured as a result of fireworks:

- 35% of horse owners reported having horses run through fences in response to fireworks; 26% reported injuries ranging from cuts to broken limbs, with some horses requiring euthanasia (Gronqvist et al., 2016).
- In a study of cat and dog owners, 6% of animals (51/923) were reported to have been injured due to fireworks (Dale et al., 2010).
- A 2019 study recorded at least 345 animals severely injured by fireworks, with 14% dying or being euthanased as a result (Gates et al., 2019).

Each year, stories emerge of much-loved companion animals dying due to fireworks. These are a predictable but tragic occurrence with devastating impacts (see for example, Conchie, 2024; Roberts, 2023). We encourage the committee to read about and reflect on these entirely preventable deaths and the suffering caused to both the animals and their owners.

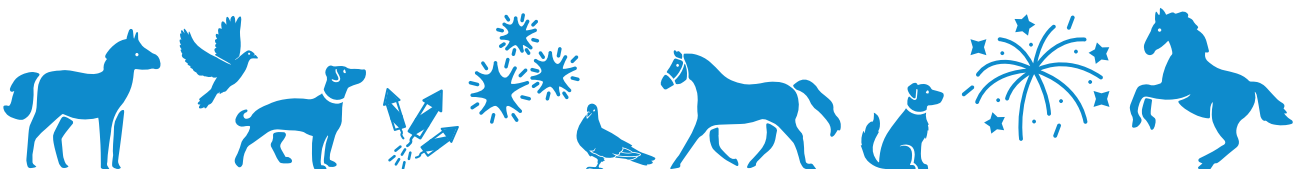
Management strategies

While management strategies exist, including medications, environmental modification, and behavioural interventions, research shows their success is limited (Gates et al., 2019; Gronqvist et al., 2016; Riemer, 2020).

Prescription medications are the most effective intervention but require advance preparation. With fireworks permitted year-round in New Zealand, owners cannot reliably predict when to administer treatments, leaving many animals unprotected.

While smaller companion animals can be brought inside to protect them from some of the stressors associated with fireworks, larger animals such as horses and farmed animals cannot simply be brought indoors, and relocation or confinement often introduces further risks of injury.

SPCA is concerned that, at present in New Zealand, fireworks can be let off at any time of the year. While fireworks are only on sale between 2 and 5 November, stock piling is a known issue. The inability to predict when or where fireworks will be let off prevents those responsible for animals from taking the precautionary measures necessary to protect them as far as is possible.



Taken together, the evidence shows that fireworks create a significant acute disturbance for birds, with the potential for longer-term impacts on populations. For New Zealand, this means fireworks have the potential to harm both our iconic native species and our more common urban birds. The precautionary approach is clear: restricting fireworks use, particularly near sensitive habitats and during breeding periods, would help safeguard our birdlife. A move to ban the private sale and use of fireworks, and to replace them with controlled, professional firework displays or alternatives, would align New Zealand with international best practice while better protecting our native wildlife.

Wildfires

Wildfires caused by fireworks can have devastating impacts on wild animals and their habitats. One hundred and six fires were reported to be caused by fireworks in 2023 (around a 58% increase on the prior year with a total of 67 incidents) (Hollings et al., 2024).

The general trend is for an increasing number of days of extreme fire danger per annum and the extension of extreme fire danger into areas which historically haven't seen many extreme fire danger days. The areas of the country and the number of extreme fire danger days experienced annually across New Zealand varies depending on the weather conditions experienced during each season. However, with climate change it is anticipated that we will see an increase in fire danger days in many parts of the country as a result of increases in temperature or wind speed, and lower rainfall or humidity.

Marine life

SPCA is also concerned about the potential harms to cetaceans and other marine life associated with the use of fireworks.

This area is under-researched and the impacts are difficult to document and quantify. However, sound can travel long distances through water, and we know that cetaceans, such as dolphins and whales, change their behaviour in response to loud and abrupt noises. Fireworks also release debris, heavy metals, and toxins into the environment. This debris can contaminate waterways or be ingested by marine life and birds.

Captive wild animals (zoos)

Zoos in New Zealand have long supported a ban on private sale and use of fireworks. Wild animals in captivity have limited ability to escape noise and light stressors associated with fireworks. Deaths linked to fireworks-induced stress have been documented in New Zealand zoos, including a giraffe, a male Nyala (antelope), and a wallaby joey ejected from his mother's pouch.

Fireworks can also impact breeding programmes of endangered animals in zoos. Auckland Zoo have urged people to not let off fireworks at any time due to the likely impacts on the breeding programmes of precious taonga such as kiwi, pāteke, tīeke, kororā/little penguin, kea, and kākā (Healy, 2024).



This year, more people have signed petitions calling for a ban on the private sale of fireworks than ever before, with a combined 95,354 signatories between the three petitions currently under consideration. This clearly demonstrates that previous actions have not been adequate in addressing the concerns of the public; the status quo is not tenable.

International comparison

New Zealand's approach to fireworks regulation is notably more permissive compared to many other jurisdictions:

Australia

- Western Australia – banned since 1967
- Queensland – banned since 1972
- Victoria – banned since 1985
- New South Wales – banned since 1987
- South Australia – banned since 2001

Ireland

- With the exception of party poppers and Christmas crackers, it is a criminal offence to use a firework in public or private.

United States

- Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey – sale of all consumer fireworks is banned.
- Illinois, Iowa, New York – only wire or wood stick sparklers and other novelties are permitted.
- Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia – sale and use of non-aerial and non-explosive fireworks only (e.g. fountains and sparklers) are allowed.

Canada

- Sale and use of fireworks is restricted to between 24th October and 1st of November each year. Certain types of fireworks are illegal.

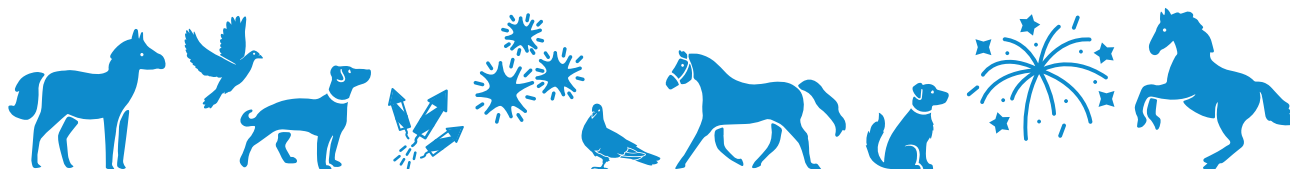


Conclusion

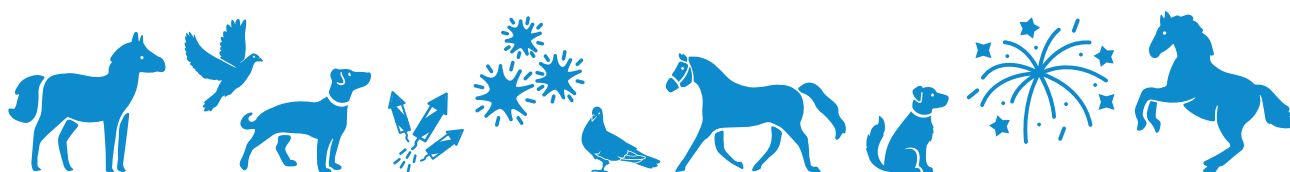
SPCA appreciates the opportunity to submit in support of the petitions of Animates NZ Holding, Raewyn Harrison, and Suzanne Cook.

Fireworks cause predictable and preventable harms to animals, the environment, and people. We urge the Government to heed the repeated calls from the public, Police, Fire and Emergency, zoos and conservation groups, veterinary associations, and animal protection organisations.

SPCA considers that a ban on the private sale and use of fireworks, in combination with licensed public displays, offers a reasonable balance between protecting animals, people, and communities from harm while allowing celebration of culturally significant events. Our organisation is happy to discuss this matter if further information is required.

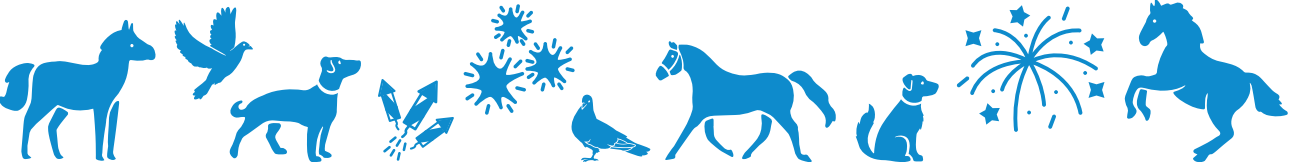


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Appendix 1 – Example of intentional harm caused by fireworks

A female duck showing injuries consistent with deliberate harm caused by fireworks. Due to the extent of her injuries, this duck was euthanised.



Appendix 2 – Petitions calling for a ban on fireworks

Year	Petitioner	Signatures
2025	Animates NZ Holdings Ltd Pawprint Petition: Ban Public Fireworks Sales to help protect the Animals of NZ	93,248
2025	Suzanne Cook: Ban private sales of fireworks; allow only licensed public fireworks events	908
2025	Valentine Croon: Ban the sale of fireworks to the public in NZ!	1,198
2024	Raewyn Harrison: Ban the public sale of fireworks	2,233
2023	Grayson Sutherland: Ban the public sale of fireworks	1,042
2023	Catherine Bindon: Ban the sale of fireworks to the New Zealand public	5,630
2020	Chris Eichbaum: Cease retail sales of fireworks	17,942
2020	Melanie Lindstrom: Ban the private sale of fireworks and promote Matariki for public displays	59
2020	Catherine Bindon: Ban the sale of fireworks to the public	28,652
2015	Petition 2011/0127 of Charlotte Purdy	25,000
2009	Petition 2008/0035 of Tony Ciani	10,088
2006	Petition 2005/0024 of Judy Taylor and 2648 others	2,648
2006	Petition 2005/0036 of Patricia Hall and 504 others	504

