

## **SOLUTION TO DOG PROBLEM WITHIN REACH WITH ANIMAL BALANCE**

A team of animal welfare specialists from the overseas-based group Animal Balance have just completed a fact-finding visit to Samoa, in the hope of helping to solve Samoa's dog problem. The founder of Animal Balance, Emma Clifford, was joined by vets Dr Byron and Dr Larry Rickman on their three day visit, which also included a similar trip to American Samoa.

The Animal Protection Society, who hosted the group during their visit, has been liaising with Emma for over 12 months to make this visit possible. Both the APS and Animal Balance believe that the solution to Samoa's dog problem is multi-factorial, but supports desexing as a method of population control rather than culling, with culling alone being shown to be an ineffective means of population control in many countries around the world. Mass-desexing, along with community education and a government-run registration program have been successful in solving similar dog problems in the other two island countries where Animal Balance has worked, the Galapagos Islands and the Dominican Republic.

As part of their three day visit, the APS and Animal Balance teams, joined by three local volunteers, a visiting volunteer vet Hannah O'Connell and her partner Adrian from the UK, and two boys from Coral Reef Academy, visited Fasito'o-tai to conduct a free desexing clinic. The whole group was offered a traditional welcome by the village council, including an ava ceremony, before commencing a long but successful day's work. Over the day, the team of 5 vets and 8 assistants managed to desex a total of 34 animals, including 29 dogs and 5 cats. All the dogs that were desexed were also given free treatments for fleas, ticks and worms, with all owners also receiving a brochure on how to care for their dog.

The people of Fasito'o-tai were extremely appreciative of the visit, keeping the team well fed and hydrated throughout the day, and offering the APS many thanks and a small donation for their services. A'anama'aitu Pasikale, a matai from Fasito'o-tai who helped to organise this visit, was very happy to have the APS visit his village and hoped to work with the APS to have repeat visits in the future.

The cost of the visit was funded by NZaid, who are the major sponsor of APS, and have offered several thousand tala worth of sponsorship to help fund other visits like this one. The APS plans to conduct about 10 village desexing clinics throughout Upolu and Savai'i over the next 3 months, all of which will be funded by NZaid. Their next village visit is already scheduled to take place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January in Tofitoala, and they are currently liaising with several other villages across the country to organise more visits.

While in Samoa, the team from Animal Balance also held meetings with representatives from APS, MNRE and STA to discuss a solution to Samoa's dog problem. All parties saw the collaboration of all these groups as extremely positive, with a real solution to the dog problem finally appearing to be within reach. Over the coming weeks to months,