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Subject Submission for 13 May 2008

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene. 13/5/2008  
Submission in Support of the proposed amendment to the Animal Traders Licence

Submission of Dr Katriona Bradley B.V.M.S., M.R.C.V.S,  
Director of Tai Wai Small Animal & Exotic Hospital

To Whom it may concern.

I have been working as a veterinary surgeon in Hong Kong for 17 years, firstly for 7 years at the SPCA and for the last ten years working in my own animal hospital in Tai Wai.

The Government has invited me to be a member of the Veterinary Surgeon's Board and a member of the Animal Welfare Advisory Group. I am the proud owner of 5 dogs, mongrel and pedigree and a frequent visitor and purchaser in pet shops. At my hospital we have consultations with the new owners of pet shop animals on a daily basis.

The above means I feel I am strongly placed to comment on the licence amendments as proposed. I am here to speak on behalf of pet shop puppies and their owners, past and future as they are not able to speak here today.

Vets will not profit from improvements in animal health however the HK Veterinary Association, myself and many of my colleagues are strongly in support.

I strongly support the amendments both to improve animal welfare and to protect the Hong Kong consumer.

I have seen hundreds of Hong Kong citizens devastated emotionally and financially by the illnesses and deaths of their newly purchased puppy. Diseases can be passed around easily from one young puppy to another in pet shops as their immune systems are not fully developed and vaccinations are not yet fully protective.

There are dirty, unhygienic and overcrowded pet shops to be found in many areas of Hong Kong, which reflect badly on Hong Kong's position as a World City. There are also higher quality pet shops which practice better disease control measures and sell a higher quality of animal.

The amendments being introduced will ban the sale of diseased animals, cause the traders to improve their disease control measures and will limit the supply of puppies to known sources.

The measures proposed in the Amendment will improve the quality of the puppies available for sale by reducing the likelihood of disease.

I am aware that some traders and "hobby" breeders are against some of these measures as they believe it may harm their business and cause them difficulties. It is important to realise that home breeders still have many other options open to them to sell their puppies, such as amongst friends, newspaper adverts and the internet.

Keeping puppies at their first home until sale when they go directly to their second home is much better for their health than passing through a pet shop as the risk of catching disease is much reduced.

Personally I would like to see the hobby breeders clause being removed altogether and strict conditions being placed on dog farms as to the breeding process, not just point of sale.

Overall I believe that an improvement in the quality and a resultant increase in the price of the puppies for sale will have many benefits - it will cause a significant improvement in animal welfare by reducing disease

- it will increase the satisfaction and happiness of the consumer and Hong Kong Public

It must also be considered that by increasing the quality and price of puppies available for sale that potential buyers will consider purchase more carefully. Impulse buys will be reduced.

This will decrease the number of pet dogs abandoned and the numbers of stray dogs present in Hong Kong. This will improve animal welfare, improve the environment and reduce the burden on the government and charities- currently over 1,000 dogs are killed every month in AFCD kennels.

We need to strike a balance between the needs of the animals, the trader's business interests and the rights of the consumer and I believe these amendments will improve the present very unsatisfactory situation greatly.

I urge the Panel members to listen carefully to all the submissions and consider what is best for the animals and for the general public.

Thank you for your consideration,