

**For discussion
on 22 March 2016**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and
Cruelty to Animals**

**Promotion of Animal Welfare and
Responsible Pet Ownership**

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members of the Subcommittee on the work of the Government in promoting animal welfare and responsible pet ownership.

2. For the purpose of safeguarding and promoting animal welfare, the importance of educating the public on responsible pet ownership could not be over-emphasised. The Government has been actively engaged in disseminating messages advising members of the public to weigh up carefully before deciding to raise a pet the full burden of the responsibility that goes with being a pet owner, the commitment that is called for, and the determination that it takes to be a responsible pet owner. At the same time, we appeal to the public for a solemn undertaking of not abandoning their pets and emphasise the need for getting their dogs licensed and vaccinated against rabies, as well as the benefits of neutering their dogs. As pointed out by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the promotion of responsible pet ownership can significantly reduce the number of stray dogs and the incidence of zoonotic diseases.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLICITY

3. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been deploying resources for disseminating the messages and educating the public. To strengthen public education, AFCD established a dedicated team in 2010 to devise, implement and fortify public education and publicity programmes for disseminating messages on caring for animals and responsible pet ownership. In the past year, AFCD has launched a series of educational and publicity activities, including producing and broadcasting APIs on TV and radio; placing advertisements at cinemas, public transport, bus stops, magazines and websites; organising promotional and pet adoption events in shopping arcades; regularly conducting village and community promotional programmes; organising roving exhibitions in Hong Kong's 18 districts and the outlying islands; holding talks in schools and residential estates; as well as conducting surveys on pet care. AFCD has also revamped its website to further promote the message on showing respect to animals, and provide information on taking proper care of pets.

Public Events

4. In the past year, AFCD has organised a wide range of activities to educate the public on responsible pet ownership, raise awareness of animal welfare and promote re-homing of pets. These activities include "Pets With Love" Drawing Competition, a large-scale two-day pet adoption carnival, small pet adoption days, two dog training courses, 78 school seminars, seven estate talks, 35 roving educational exhibitions in urban areas and four educational programmes co-organised with other animal welfare organisations (AWOs). In addition, AFCD also lent facilities such as game booths to other organisations for use in activities to help press home messages on responsible pet ownership in an interactive way.

5. AFCD regularly organises roving educational exhibitions in rural villages and the outlying islands with themes about vaccination against rabies, as well as dog licensing and neutering, with a view to arousing the awareness of the importance of responsible pet ownership among people living in the rural areas, and reminding them of the need to have their dogs (aged five months or above) vaccinated against rabies, microchipped, licensed and neutered, and re-vaccinated every three years along with the renewal of licences. In the past year, AFCD held a total of 13 roving exhibitions in villages in the New Territories and the outlying islands.

Promotional Videos

6. AFCD has established an online “Animal Management Channel” on YouTube, with 64 TV APIs and educational videos that promote messages on caring for animals, responsible pet ownership and prevention of animal cruelty, as well as give highlights of major events. Last year, AFCD produced a ten-episode TV programme “Pets with Love” for broadcast on buses to disseminate messages on responsible pet ownership and re-homing of animals. Since last year, upon requests from individual estate offices, AFCD has been providing digital video players with Government’s TV APIs and educational videos for displaying at their lobbies, reception areas and clubhouses to educate the residents about proper care and management of their pets. Besides, to help domestic helpers who need to look after dogs, AFCD has produced an education slideshow DVD in six languages (including Cantonese, Putonghua, English, Tagalog, Thai and Bahasa Indonesia) and distributed it to domestic helper agencies in Hong Kong to educate the newly arrived domestic helpers about the attitudes and points to note for walking dogs in public places.

Animal Management Website

7. To provide the public with knowledge of keeping pets and information on relevant legislation, and to enhance interaction with the public, AFCD designed a dedicated website on animal management (<http://www.pets.gov.hk>) in 2010. Apart from tips on pet care and related legislation in Hong Kong, the website provides booking forms of educational seminars, e-news subscription service for AFCD's upcoming events, interactive games, as well as information on licensed pet shops, licensed boarding kennels and veterinary clinics, to facilitate members of the public who want to obtain such information and pet owners who are looking for related services.

Advertising and Promotional Publications

8. AFCD places advertisements in different media platforms, including public transport, buses and light buses to promote animal welfare and messages on responsible pet ownership. Every year, AFCD co-organises a promotional campaign named "Hong Kong Original" with the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Under the campaign, posters are placed in MTR stations to promote the annual Dog Adoption Carnival and encourage the public to adopt mongrels, which make up the majority of stray animals. The Department also puts up advertisements on popular websites to remind the public of the legal requirements that regulate commercial activities relating to animal trading and boarding, and to promote animal welfare. Furthermore, AFCD has designed 28 educational leaflets, posters, dog care guides and banners on animal welfare and promotion of responsible pet ownership for distribution at various places. Last year, the Department distributed about 48 000 educational leaflets, 3 200 posters and 900 dog care guides to the public, and 98 banners were placed throughout the 18 districts in Hong Kong to promote messages on responsible pet ownership.

Collaboration with AWOs

9. Animal welfare policy must be in tandem with the values shared by the community in general. To achieve synergy, we need to have the support of the community, including the AWOs. As such, AFCD has been working in close collaboration with various AWOs in promoting animal welfare and better animal management. The Department organises joint activities with different AWOs every year in shopping arcades and outdoor venues to promote animal welfare, the message on responsible pet ownership and animal re-homing. For example, AFCD and six AWOs jointly organised a two-day "Pets With love" Dog Adoption Carnival at the Soccer Pitch, Lai Chi Kok Park Phase 1 in early 2016. The event attracted nearly ten thousand participants and featured dog licensing and renewal services, game booths, dog adoption enquiry services, veterinary consultation services, educational exhibitions, celebrities sharing their experience of keeping dogs, performances by the Hong Kong Police Dog Unit and AFCD quarantine detector dogs, a dog playground, as well as family handicraft workshops.

10. Recognising that most AWOs are non-profit making with limited resources, the Government has been providing partial funding to these AWOs in supporting the enhancement of animal management and promotion of animal welfare through educational activities as long as resources permit. In this regard, AFCD has set aside \$1.5 million in 2015-16 for application by AWOs (including SPCA). Currently, AFCD provides funding support to nine AWOs. Interested AWOs may submit their applications together with details of their animal welfare initiatives and associated performance indicators as well as the estimated budgets to AFCD for consideration. Successful applicants are required to submit to AFCD regular progress reports on the approved projects and audited accounts upon completion of the projects for scrutiny so as to ensure the proper use of public money.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ABOVE EFFORTS

11. With the strengthening of public education, more and more members of the public come to recognise that before making a decision to raise a pet, they have to think twice, take full consideration of factors including their living environment, the preferences of their family members, and their capacity for pet rearing, as well as the merits of giving preference to adopting an animal. Once a decision is made, they should keep the commitment to take good care of pets for the lifetime of the animals, and uphold what is expected of a responsible pet owner.

12. In the past five years, the number of complaints received by AFCD about nuisances caused by cats and dogs has decreased by 37%, while the numbers of cats and dogs received through different channels have dropped by 62% and 58% respectively. Thanks to public support, the public education and related work carried out by AFCD and AWOs has borne fruit. AFCD will continue to take forward the work in this aspect reminding the public of the importance of treating pets well, of being a responsible pet owner, and of paying respect to the life of animals.

ADVICE SOUGHT

13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper, and offer comments on the work that is currently being carried out by the Government to promote animal welfare and responsible pet ownership.

Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
March 2016