

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)1425/15-16(06)

Ref : CB2/PS/1/15

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare  
and Cruelty to Animals**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 9 May 2016**

**Government's efforts in management of stray animals**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on various programmes introduced by the Administration for the management of stray animals, and summarizes major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the programmes.

**Background**

2. According to the Administration, it takes different measures to deal with possible nuisances and public health problems caused by animals, especially the stray ones, with a view to preventing the spread of diseases transmitted by animals and safeguarding public hygiene and safety. As measures to manage stray animals, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") has established Animal Management Centres ("AMCs") and introduced the Trap-Neuter-Return ("TNR") trial programme for stray dogs as well as the "Capture-Sterilize-Relocate" ("CSR") programme for stray cattle.

Handling of stray animals in the Animal Management Centres

3. At present, stray animals caught will be sent to AMCs of AFCD for observation. For animals with a microchip implanted, AMCs will try to contact

their owners based on the information on the microchips for reclaiming the animals. Those without a microchip will stay in AMCs for their owners to reclaim them. In cases where the animals being left unclaimed are in good health and assessed by a veterinary surgeon as having a gentle temperament and suitable for adoption, AFCD will arrange for their transfer to animal welfare organizations ("AWOs") for adoption by members of the public. Only animals that remain unclaimed or not adopted at the end of the process will be euthanized. At present, AFCD has four AMCs across the territory and the utilization of their animal keeping facilities is constantly at a high level.

#### Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme for stray dogs

4. In recent years, some AWOs advocate the TNR concept to gradually reduce stray dog population. It is believed that TNR can slow down the continuous reproduction of stray dogs and with the death of stray dogs by natural causes over time, their population will gradually decline. In this way, the number of stray dogs can be controlled without resorting to euthanasia. As neutered dogs are generally less aggressive, the nuisance caused by them may also subside. Nevertheless, according to overseas experience and data available, whether TNR (as a measure for reducing stray dog population and the associated nuisance) is able to achieve the effectiveness as that suggested by those advocating AWOs has yet to be proved scientifically.

5. With a view to assessing the effectiveness of TNR in Hong Kong, AFCD has agreed to assist the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("SPCA") and the Society for Abandoned Animals ("SAA") in implementing a three-year TNR trial programme for stray dogs starting from January 2015 in designated zones in Yuen Long and Cheung Chau. TNR aims to control the population of stray dogs through neutering them before returning them to their habitats to continue their lives until their natural death.

#### Catch and removal strategy for handling stray cattle

6. According to a territory-wide population survey on stray cattle conducted by the Administration in 2013, there were approximately 1 100 heads of stray cattle (mainly brown cattle and buffalo) in Hong Kong, primarily distributed into four areas, i.e. Lantau Island, Sai Kung/Ma On Shan, Northeast New Territories and Central New Territories. Over the years, the issue of stray cattle has persistently been a matter of concern to the local community, particularly in the case of South Lantau and Sai Kung town where stray cattle have been causing different degrees of nuisance.

7. Over the years, AFCD has adopted a catch and removal strategy for handling stray cattle in accordance with the power conferred by the Pounds Ordinance (Cap. 168). Upon receipt of complaints related to nuisance, AFCD staff will first attempt to ascertain whether there is any owner or person responsible for the cattle. If it is found to be owned, the owner/responsible person will be advised to keep the cattle under proper control, preventing it from wandering and causing damage to private property or nuisance to the public. If no owner can be identified, AFCD staff will catch and remove the stray cattle which will then be impounded at AFCD's New Territories North AMC. Thereafter, the cattle may be disposed of by way of sale to a farmer through auction, or re-homing to a suitable leisure farm. If the cattle is suffering from disease or injury and reported as not suitable for disposal by any of the above means, it may be subject to euthanasia.

#### "Capture-Sterilize-Relocate" programme for stray cattle

8. Apart from the catch and removal strategy, AFCD has introduced in 2011 the CSR programme under which AFCD officers actively capture stray cattle, have the cattle sterilized and ear-tagged for identification, and then relocate them to a more remote location in the same district. Under the CSR programme, selected cattle will be fitted with collars with global positioning system devices to allow AFCD to track their movements after relocation and study their movement patterns in unfamiliar areas. Besides, AFCD officers conduct weekly on-site inspections of the places to which the cattle are relocated.

9. In implementing the CSR programme, it has been found that some cattle would find their way back to the town centre or roads of the same district in a matter of days or weeks after relocation, and become a source of nuisance to residents and road users again. Some cattle have been captured repeatedly for four to five times after being sterilized and relocated. This shows that the choice of relocation paths and sites might not be sufficiently effective in abating the nuisance caused by stray cattle. Starting from November 2013, AFCD has launched the "Capture-Sterilization-Translocation" ("CST") pilot scheme under the CSR programme whereby some of the stray cattle repeatedly captured on roads are relocated to a farther away location in another district.

#### **Members' concerns**

10. The Panel discussed the TNR trial programme for stray dogs and the Government's efforts in management of stray cattle at the meetings on 14 January and 9 December 2014 respectively. Members' major views and

concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Extending the minimum detention period in Animal Management Centres

11. Some members considered that it was inhumane to euthanize those detained animals which were assessed to be suitable for re-homing but could not be re-homed through AWOs within the minimum detention period<sup>1</sup>. Noting that those stray animals without a microchip would stay in AMCs for at least four days only, the Administration was urged to consider extending the minimum detention period to 12 days, so as to allow more time for their owners to reclaim them.

12. According to the Administration, AMCs would endeavour to contact the owners of stray dogs and cats caught by AFCD if they had been implanted with microchips. The animals would usually be detained for a long period until they were reclaimed by their owners. For stray dogs and cats which had not been implanted with microchips and were assessed to be suitable for re-homing, they would be retained in AMCs for an average of about eight days until re-homing could be arranged. Since the utilization of the animal keeping facilities was constantly at a high level, allowing all animals to stay longer in AMCs would significantly reduce the space for keeping other animals, including those healthy and docile animals suitable for adoption. Besides, a crowded environment in AMCs might increase the risk of disease transmission among animals. As such, the Administration had no plan to change the current arrangements.

### Evaluation of the Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme

13. Noting that the effectiveness of the TNR trial programme would be evaluated with reference to a number of targets including achieving an average 10% annual decrease in the population of stray dogs in the trial zones, some members expressed concern as to whether this target could be easily achieved since the decrease might not be able to catch up with the birth rate of stray dogs.

14. The Administration explained that AFCD would commission a consultant to help monitor the TNR trial programme and assess its effectiveness. The target of 10% annual decrease had taken into account the birth rate and the death rate of stray dogs. The two participating AWOs were required to catch at least 80% of stray dogs in the trial zones during the first six months of the

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<sup>1</sup> In general, stray animals will stay in AMCs temporarily for about 10 to 20 days. Those without a microchip will stay in the centres for at least four days allowing time for their owners to reclaim them.

trial programme. Stray dogs caught and selected to be kept in the trial programme would be neutered, microchipped and given anti-rabies vaccination before they were released back to the trial zones.

#### Scale of the Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme

15. Members were concerned about the criteria for selecting AWOs to carry out the TNR trial programme. They also called on the Administration to invite more AWOs to participate in the trial programme. The Administration advised that the two AWOs, namely SPCA and SAA, had been strong advocates of the TNR concept. They had been collaborating with AFCD in studying the feasibility of applying the TNR concept in Hong Kong for many years, and had taken the initiative to develop and implement the trial programme. If the trial programme was found to be successful, other AWOs might be invited to take part in it in future.

16. Noting that some AWOs had been voluntarily operating TNR programmes in certain districts with their own limited resources, some members were concerned about the support that the Administration could provide to these AWOs. Given these AWOs' successful experience in operating the voluntary TNR programmes, members were of the view that the Administration should consider extending the trial programme to other districts after taking into account the results of those voluntary TNR programmes.

17. According to the Administration, the statistical and empirical data collected in the voluntary TNR programmes operated by some AWOs were not sufficient to support the implementation of a territory-wide TNR programme. Successful results of the voluntary TNR programmes in certain sites might not be readily applicable to other places in Hong Kong, having regard to the differences in places in terms of dog population dynamics, human population densities, traffic conditions, public health, as well as animal health and welfare concerns. The trial programme pioneered by SPCA and SAA would be able to provide reference for consideration of whether TNR could effectively tackle the problems posed by stray dogs and associated nuisance in different districts. AFCD would commission a consultant to assess the effectiveness of the TNR trial programme. If it was to be expanded to other districts, any such future sites would have to be assessed individually for suitability.

#### Consequences of the "Capture-Sterilize-Relocate" programme

18. In response to members' concern that the population of stray cattle in Sai Kung and Lantau would diminish should AFCD continue to sterilize stray cattle in these districts, the Administration advised that the effect of sterilization

on the control of cattle population would be seen in around 10 years and the number of cattle was expected to become stable or smaller by that time. Since many feral cattle were dwelling in remote and inaccessible rural areas posing difficulty for AFCD officers to catch and sterilize them, sterilization alone would not reduce the size of the feral cattle population in Hong Kong. That said, AFCD would continue to monitor the population of stray and feral cattle and adjust the strategy as and when appropriate.

19. Members were concerned about the potential health and adaptation problems arising from the translocation of cattle under the CST pilot scheme. The Administration advised that there was a genuine need for AFCD to move the stray cattle from one district to another, so as to prevent them from wandering in the urban areas or on roads as they tended to return to their original dwelling places. AFCD had been monitoring the health condition of cattle under the CST pilot scheme, and they were found in satisfactory condition. There was also no sign that the cattle had problem in adapting to the new environment.

#### Other measures for managing stray cattle

20. Noting that in some overseas countries, cattle grids were used in ranches to avoid cattle from trespassing beyond the ranch boundaries and on highways to prevent passage of cattle that might interrupt the normal traffic, some members suggested the Administration use fencing or cattle grids in Hong Kong to abate the nuisance caused by stray cattle to residents or road users.

21. According to the Administration, AFCD would assess the feasibility of putting in place on a trial basis a cattle grid in Sai Kung with a view to keeping stray cattle in the specified area. AFCD would liaise closely with different stakeholders to identify a suitable location for the trial and study the grid design. This trial scheme would help complement the CSR programme. Drawing reference from its efficacy, AFCD would assess the merits or otherwise of installing cattle grids or fences in other locations.

#### **Latest development**

22. The Administration will update the Subcommittee on its efforts in management of stray animals at the Subcommittee meeting on 9 May 2016.

**Relevant papers**

23. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
5 May 2016

**Relevant papers on the Government's efforts in management of stray animals**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Motion/ Question / Paper</b>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	14.1.2014 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>Administration's follow-up paper on the detention period for animals at the Animal Management Centres (LC Paper No. CB(2)788/13-14(01))</u>
	9.12.2014 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>Administration's follow-up paper on strategy in tackling the issue of stray cattle (LC Paper No. CB(2)1502/14-15(01))</u>
Legislative Council	14.10.2015	<u>Official Record of Proceedings Pages 106 to 109 (written question raised by Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung on "Stray dogs")</u>
	28.10.2015	<u>Official Record of Proceedings Pages 535 to 540 (written question raised by Hon CHAN Hak-kan on "Animal abandonment")</u>