

**For discussion
on 21 February 2017**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

Promoting Responsible Pet Ownership

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members of the Subcommittee on the work in promoting responsible pet ownership.

BACKGROUND

2. The number of pets kept by the public has been increasing in recent years. According to the Thematic Household Surveys conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, there were about 248,000 dogs and 168,000 cats kept by households in 2010, compared with 198,000 dogs and 99,000 cats in 2005. With the increasing number of pets kept by the public, the risk of pets being abandoned or going astray and the spreading of zoonotic diseases through stray animals may also increase. In order to protect public health while at the same time safeguarding animal welfare, the Government has been actively promoting responsible pet ownership. 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 such as rabies.

3. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been actively promoting the need to bear in mind the serious responsibility and commitment that go with pet keeping, and educating the public how to be a responsible pet owner. Prospective pet owners are reminded to give thorough consideration to all relevant factors before taking on a pet.

4. Since 2010, a dedicated team in AFCD has been implementing public education and publicity programmes for disseminating messages on caring for animals and responsible pet ownership via different types of public events. Details are set out below.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLICITY

Public Events and Collaboration with Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs)

5. In 2016, AFCD organised a wide range of activities to promote re-homing of pets, responsible pet ownership and raise the public's awareness of animal welfare, including two competitions on the theme of "Pets with Love"; two dog adoption carnivals and a small animal (rabbits, cats and reptiles) adoption event; four dog training courses; over 90 school seminars and estate talks; and 25 roving exhibitions throughout Hong Kong including five co-organised with AWOs.

6. Aside from the Government, AWOs in Hong Kong also play an important role in promoting animal welfare. Apart from co-organising public events with AWOs, AFCD has set aside \$1.5 million in 2016-17 to provide financial assistance to support AWOs in undertaking various projects and educational activities that aim at enhancing animal management and promoting animal welfare. Interested AWOs who meet the qualifying criteria may submit their applications together with details of their proposed projects and associated performance indicators as well as the estimated budgets to AFCD. Successful applicants are required to submit regular progress reports on the approved projects for scrutiny so as to ensure proper use of public money.

Promotional Videos and Advertising

7. AFCD has established an "Animal Management Channel" on the online video sharing platform YouTube, with 75 TV APIs and educational videos that promote messages on caring for animals, responsible pet ownership and prevention of animal cruelty, as well as highlights of major events. Since 2015, upon requests from individual estate offices, AFCD has been providing digital video players with the Government's TV APIs and educational videos for displaying at their premises 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 walking dogs in public places.

8. AFCD places advertisements in different media to promote animal welfare and responsible pet ownership. Furthermore, AFCD has designed around 40 educational leaflets, posters, souvenirs, dog care guides and roadside banners on animal welfare and promotion of responsible pet ownership for distribution at various places.

9. To enhance the public's knowledge of pet owning and information related to keeping animals and animal-related business, AFCD also runs a dedicated website on pet keeping and animal management (www.pets.gov.hk) since 2010. In addition to various useful tips for pet owners, the website also 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.

Keeping Dogs on Construction Sites

10. For the safety of the staff of construction sites and safeguarding the welfare of the dogs kept at construction sites, a code of practice has been established to lay down the control measures for such sites with dogs. The code of practice reminds those responsible for the dogs about the legal requirement that all dogs over five months of age should be microchipped, licensed and vaccinated against rabies. It also advises that, upon closure of a site or when the site is no longer compatible for dog keeping, the dogs must be rehomed or moved to a new location. The code of practice is published on AFCD's dedicated website (www.pets.gov.hk) and distributed to construction companies.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ABOVE EFFORTS

11. Thanks to the public's support, the publicity and education work carried out by AFCD and AWOs has continued to bear fruit. With the strengthening of public education, more and more people have come to recognise the responsibility and commitments as a pet owner. In the past five years, the number of complaints received by AFCD about animal-related nuisances has decreased by 45% while the number of stray

cats and dogs caught by AFCD, as well as those given by owners, and received through other channels, has dropped by 68% and 58% respectively. As a consequence of this, together with an increasing proportion of animals rehomed, the number of dogs and cats euthanised by AFCD has decreased by 70% between 2012 and 2016.

12. AFCD will continue to take forward the work reminding the public of the importance of treating pets well, of being a responsible pet owner, and duly respecting animal welfare.

ADVICE SOUGHT

13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

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