



AW Subcommittee 21st Feb 2017 - Promotion of Responsible Pet Ownership (RPO)

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Points for Consideration

1. Education and Training
2. Desexing / TNR
3. Adoption
4. Laws relating to Responsible Pet Ownership (RPO)
5. Appropriate Diets / Exercise Benefits / Needs of different common pet species
6. Emergency Information - Who do you call?
7. Prosecutions
8. Public Housing Issues - Education for both sides
9. Budgets / Equipment / Facilities
10. Inclusion at parks, boardwalks, promenades and on public transport
11. Exotic pets

Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, JP

Chair

Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights

Legislative Council Hong Kong

Dear Dr Chiang,

Thank you for the opportunity to give input on the topic of Responsible Pet Ownership (RPO). The following outlines areas of concern for Animals Asia Foundation Limited in regards to RPO.

Animals Asia has been active in Hong Kong for 25 years as of this year, raising awareness of animal welfare issues and responsible pet ownership through our 'Dr Dog' and 'Professor Paws' programmes.

We conduct over 160 visits to schools across Hong Kong each year through Professor Paws, delivering presentations on animal welfare and RPO, as well as our 'Care Cadet' 4 - lesson course to primary aged students.

Our Dr Dog programme is an innovative animal-assisted therapy programme that provides people in need with what they need most – a best friend. The programme is also changing the way people feel about dogs. The concept of animal-assisted therapy began with just one dog and a vision to promote *animal welfare through people welfare*. Through Dr Dog, registered therapy dogs are visiting hospitals, homes for the elderly, disabled centres, orphanages and schools in three mainland Chinese cities and Hong Kong, averaging approx 180 visits in Hong Kong per year.

In China, where we focus our work, Dr Dog is challenging beliefs and changing lives for animals. As more people come to understand that dogs have feelings, both physical and emotional, more people are standing up against the cruel trade in dogs (and cats) for their meat.

As mentioned by the SPCA - RPO education campaigns need to be complemented by a framework of improved regulations and adoption of animal friendly policies ensure the pet owners can more easily achieve what is being asked of them as well as to reduce the risk of triggering animal abandonment. So in addition to education, RPO can be further advanced by creating supportive legal frameworks, committing resources and removing barriers so that people can easily carry out expected behaviours.

Animals Asia completely supports this statement.

The following outlines areas of concern for Animals Asia Foundation Limited in regards to RPO.

1. Education and Training

An increased level of resources should be invested by the Government for education and training. Education and training in regards to understanding animals, animal welfare, animal care and responsible pet ownership, should be open and at a level for members of the public to understand and attend, but there should also be specialist courses available for veterinary professionals, those working in animal care and welfare and also frontline workers in fields concerning animal care and welfare. Sponsorship opportunities should also be available to enable more people to attend. This could be done directly through related departments or through funding special interest groups with expertise in the different areas to deliver such.

More information should also be added to the Agriculture Fisheries Conservation Dept website for Pets (<http://pets.gov.hk/>) and this website should be regularly kept up to date.

Animals Asia has also worked with City University's School of Veterinary Medicine and other NGO's to push for animal welfare education within mainstream education. This year the Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) Applied Learning (ApL) Animal Care Subject¹, offered by SCOPE was introduced. The subject received overwhelming responses from schools, students and teachers, so much so that the number of classes was increased to two, with all spaces promptly filled. More effort needs to be done to engage school aged student in Animal Welfare and Care issues, especially RPO. Funding should be offered to NGO's to deliver approved course content to school aged students in regards to understanding animals, animal welfare, animal care and responsible pet ownership.

The Government, the Hong Kong Veterinary Surgeons Board and the Hong Kong Veterinary Association should also ensure that all registered veterinary care professionals, adhere to welfare guidelines and codes of practice to ensure no animal is left to suffer unnecessarily while under their care. In regards to RPO, pet owners who refuse to adhere to veterinary advice in regard to severely injured or suffering pets, should be reported to the relevant authorities for investigation.

A task perhaps for the AWAG Educational Subgroup would be to develop a bilingual handbook with codes of care and good pet care techniques for common 'pets' to be

¹

http://www.scope.edu/Portals/0/progs/apl/files/16_18/APL_16-18%28Booklet2Nov2015%29content17_A C.pdf

distributed to all students in all schools. Animals Asia would be happy to help with this and with the distribution to students doing our Professor Paws 'Care Cadet' lessons of which we deliver approx 160 per year to schools across Hong Kong.

2. Desexing / TNR

The Government needs to absolutely get on board with territory wide Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR), regardless of the current TNR trial being conducted.

Public education efforts on the benefits of adopting territory - wide TNR need to continue.

There needs to be continued community education campaigns to advise owners on control of their pets, licensing requirements, relevant codes of conduct as well as the effect of indiscriminate breeding.

Since 2000² increasing number of NGO's have been pushing for TNR to be a recognised, territory wide way to combat populations of stray dogs.

TNR is a long term undertaking that requires sustained community support for continued success. Hong Kong people need continued education in regards to TNR for dogs in Hong Kong, and play their part to stop animal overpopulation, improve general animal welfare and reduce related nuisances.

Countless individuals and NGO's are continuously doing the hard work of catching the dogs and bringing them for desexing surgeries, often out of their own pockets and with few resources, with the added fear of prosecution looming due to the microchipping requirement (in the case of dogs) stipulated by many clinics offering desexing operations.

As previously mentioned to Legco³ in the 2013-14 year by 'TNR Fund Hong Kong⁴' the Government should....

- Provide rabies vaccination and "TNR microchipping":
 - Present problem: Rabies vaccination is not available in HK other than from AFCD with the requirement of microchipping (an individual registered as the owner will bear the full liability). This makes it impossible for volunteers now to vaccinate the dogs against rabies at

² <https://www.sPCA.org.hk/en/animal-birth-control/tnr-trap-neuter-return/history-tnr-hong-kong>

³ <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr13-14/english/panels/fseh/papers/fe0114cb2-621-9-e.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.tnrfundhk.com/>

the time of desexing without taking up unfair liability of being a registered owner.

- It is essential, for public health reasons, that AFCD help procure / supply rabies vaccines for TNR purpose (without formal microchipping).
- Another microchipping system should be designed specifically for stray dogs for the purpose of recording desexing and rabies vaccination.
- The government should confirm that the temporary custody of a dog for desexing or short-term for essential veterinary care does not constitute “keeper” status (Cap 421 s2 & Cap 167 s2); which means that there will be no violation of Cap 421 s22 (abandonment of animals by a keeper), nor Cap 421 s21 (for not registering as the keeper of a dog).
- Provide free desexing surgery, either at desexing centres (including mobile desexing clinic preferably) run by AFCD, or outsourced, for stray dogs brought in by members of the public, volunteers and NGOs.

The underlying strategy on stray management must primarily focus on *prevention of pet abandonment and uncontrolled reproduction of unneutered pets*.

3. Adoption

Ideally, no more dogs would be bred in Hong Kong and all pet shops should keep rescued animals suitable for rehoming, as other countries in the world have done⁵.

Any source of animals (breeder, trader or animal adoption / rehoming organization) should be required to provide information on the biology and needs of the animal they are offering for sale or adoption - along with advice on appropriate care and any related legal responsibilities.

There should be more adoption events organised by the Government and financial support pledged to registered NGO's conduction adoption and rehoming work. There needs to be continued campaigns to help members of the public understand the benefits of adopting an animal in need⁶.

RPO education should be provided at *point of source* wherever a pet is acquired.

4. Laws relating to responsible ownership

Animal Welfare Ordinance with Codes of Practice

Animals Asia support the SPCA in regards to the creation of an Animal Welfare Ordinance, with accompanying codes of practice⁷.

⁵ <http://www.humanesociety.org/news/magazines/2014/11-12/pet-stores-offering-shelter-adoptions.html>

⁶ https://www.sPCA.org.hk/images/Legco_en.pdf

⁷ https://www.sPCA.org.hk/images/Legco_en.pdf

Traffic accidents

Animals Asia also supports updating and changing of the Traffic Ordinance (particularly expanding the definition of “animal” under the terms of the Ordinance) to ensure that ANY animal hit by a vehicle is not left suffering unnecessarily. The Government should work with the Transport Department to update materials provided to all learner / newly registered drivers, to include ‘what to do’ information should they hit an animal. No animal should be left to suffer after a road traffic accident, so drivers need to be educated about who they can call for help.

Animals should be scanned for microchips so that possible owners could be identified (microchip scanners should be provided to FEHD to do this, as they are the department collecting carcasses of diseased animals) and it should be law to report a road traffic accident with any animal, to the police.

We also hope, along with the SPCA, that in the interests of animal and human welfare these deficiencies and other deficiencies could be addressed through amendments to the Traffic Ordinance, particularly expanding the definition of “animal” under the terms of the Ordinance, and also changing policies and procedures relating to carcass collection.

Policies put in place in isolation by different departments may significantly impact animal welfare and conflict with policies and programmes put in place that attempt to safeguard it.

Issues like RPO have many different factors that are under the control of many different departments and Bureaus and that can impact on owner’s ability to comply with what is requested and expected of them.

Today many species of animals outside the more traditional companion animals may be kept as pets. One hindrance to regulating the trade in some species is that the definition of animal under CAP 139 is deficient.

Currently the definition is: "animals" (動物) means cattle, sheep, goats, all other ruminating animals, swine, equines, and all other warm-blooded vertebrates except man and birds, and reptiles; (Replaced 24 of 1950 Schedule.

Amended 25 of 1960 s. 2)3 Fish and amphibians are currently omitted from the definition of animals under CAP. 139 but the welfare of such animals used by the trade is problematic with the SPCA receiving calls on this matter.

The number of ‘new’ species not covered by CAP. 139 being traded and kept as pets has also increased exponentially.

Animals Asia is also very concerned about the keeping of wildlife, such as wild boar - as pets / companions or under the guise of ‘rescuing’. The Government needs to address this issue legislatively to include wild boar, feral cattle, civet cats and other

species not appropriate to be kept as pets under the current definitions of 'animals' 'pets' and or 'wild animal / wildlife'.

The public also need to be educated on when NOT to interfere with wildlife / wild animals and who to contact should they find injured wild animals, as opposed to trying to care for them themselves.

There should be tighter control and regulation overall of the pet trade in terms of selling and breeding under CAP. 139B. Currently only dog breeding is regulated under CAP 139B. Cat breeding and selling regulation should be increased / improved in a similar manner to that under the CAP. 139B amendments that come into effect on 20th March 2017. The commercial breeding of other species should also be regulated. As such we support the SPCA in the belief that the definition of animals under CAP. 139 should more broadly match to that under CAP 169.

5. Appropriate Diets / Exercise Benefits / Needs of different common pet species

Bilingual 'fact sheets' should be produced to inform and educate the public on basic 'best practice' recommended for the care of different species of companion animals. This should include basic diet information, recommended levels of exercise, common health issues, life expectancy, average veterinary costs for things such as desexing / microchipping (if applicable) / health checks and vaccinations.

6. Emergency Information

With awareness increasing in regards to animal care and welfare, now would be a good time for the Government to produce a series of fact sheets perhaps in regards to contact points for pet owners in the case of emergencies (24 hour vets, *reputable* sources of help for animals in need, who can you call if you find injured wildlife etc). This information should be regularly updated and easy to access on the AFCD Pets Website (<http://pets.gov.hk>).

7. Prosecutions

The Government should set up talks with the Department of Justice (DoJ) and run workshops along with other expert NGO's such as the SPCA and Animals Asia, to provide members of the judiciary with a basic grasp of the frontline issues regarding animal care and welfare in relation to our current laws. Many members of the public feel that even within our legal framework and the penalties available by law, many of the cases don't seem to result in deterrent penalties, usually minor fines and the equivalent to a 'slap on the wrist'. It would be beneficial to speak with the DoJ on this matter to ensure animal care, welfare and cruelty cases are given the appropriate attention and due care when they reach court.

8. Public Housing Issues - Education for both sides

The battle in regards to pets in public housing continues and there needs to be continued efforts to ensure that people are allowed to keep their pets if they are called upon to move into public housing. A long standing concern is the fact that if individuals for whatever reason need to move to public housing, their pet should be allowed with them.

The Housing Authority also needs to look at their policies for new developments, and our suggestion would be to ensure 1-2 blocks of new developments are designated as 'pet friendly' blocks.

For existing public housing, continued education is needed to hopefully ensure pet owners act responsibly, cleaning up after their pets, ensuring their pets do not disturb neighbours and that pets are given enough opportunity to exercise.

With pet ownership increasing, the housing needs of pet owners and their need to access public facilities such as parks and public transport with their pets should be met.

Animals Asia supports the SPCA in the belief that the Housing Authority's policy and the rules on pet keeping (including dogs) should be reviewed and adjusted to reflect a more positive approach to pet ownership, providing a framework for a fair and enlightened policy that permits all public housing tenants the option of keeping a dog. Other subsidised housing with similar restrictive approaches to pet ownership such as subsidised flats and Housing Association accommodation, should also change policy and rules on pet keeping.

9. Budgets / Equipment / Facilities

Whatever the current record keeping system is for AFCD, it needs to be upgraded. It can take up to 6 months to be issued with a license for dogs, there is no microchipping / registry for cats and it is my assumption there is an insufficient number of staff to deal with the data entry and record checking of registered and owned pets.

Online registration / resources are also needed to enable vet clinics to check ownership details attached to microchips quickly in the case of emergencies.

It is well known that the budget allocated to the Agricultural Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) is quite minimal in relation to the huge amount of work required under their department including RPO education work. The Government needs to address this and provide AFCD with the finances and resources to match their required duties.

10. Inclusion at parks, boardwalks, promenades and on public transport

In order for a responsible pet owner to meet many of the standards expected of society, they may need to transport their animals around Hong Kong. They may need to travel to access pet friendly open spaces, to visit the vet, the groomer, dog trainers or boarding facilities. Currently, most pets have to travel by private transport often at considerable cost.

Animals Asia also believes that it should be possible for some types / sizes of animal to be transported in some manner (for instance on a leash, in a carrier or on their owners lap) on different forms of public transport as is allowed in various overseas countries.

Animal Friendly section of MTR trains could be easily implemented (1 carriage per train) for example.

11. Exotic pets

There seems to be arising trend in the keeping of exotic species such as hedgehogs, squirrels, sugar gliders and ferrets as well as exotic species of turtles, birds and rabbits.

These animals need specialist care to thrive and it is a concern how people are procuring them as well as ensuring they receive the appropriate care.

As outline previously by the SPCA in March 2016, exotic animals can be very difficult for pet owners to responsibly care for, as many exotic species are fundamentally wild animals and they should not be kept in captivity, as they are unsuited to lives as pets or companion animals. Many of these animals have complex needs and suffer at many stages during their life as an exotic pet.

The Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department should conduct a review of the exotic pet trade on welfare grounds and change policy on this trade and thereby introduce 'positive lists' to determine species that reasonably could have their welfare needs met by an average responsible pet keeper and consequently, can be more safely kept and traded as pets.

A review of the species and volume of animals imported for the exotic and endangered pet trade to limit the number of abandoned exotic and invasive animals

Hong Kong imports more than a million exotic animals, mostly reptiles, for the pet and food trade annually. The SPCA also receives abandoned exotic animals such as sugar gliders, hedgehogs and ferrets every year. According to the AFCD, these animals have never been permitted for import for the pet trade in Hong Kong. A

significant number of exotic animals traded are listed under CITES and whilst HK regulates the trade and possession of 'endangered species' under CAP 586 the current system could and should be improved. In addition there is little public awareness on matters related to CITES and CAP 586. As such, the SPCA suggests that possession of all CITES listed animals of Appendix I or II should be properly regulated. Owners should require possession licenses and transfers be reported (irrespective as to whether they were captive bred or not) and where possible the animals should be uniquely identified and all animals should be traceable throughout the supply chain. Many exotic pets are fundamentally wild animals and they should not be kept in captivity, as they are unsuited to lives as pets or companion animals. Many of these animals have complex needs and suffer at many stages during their life as an exotic pet. The AFCD should conduct a review of the exotic pet trade on welfare grounds and change policy on this trade and thereby introduce 'positive lists' to determine species that reasonably could have their welfare needs met by an average responsible pet keeper and consequently, can be more safely kept and traded as pets.

There needs to be a truly "animal friendly" policy position that is adopted and adhered to across all bureaus and departments in the Government.

In conclusion, Animals Asia would be happy to assist further in the improvement of welfare for all animals in Hong Kong. Please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Karina O'Carroll at [REDACTED] should you have any enquiries in regards to this submission.

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