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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 24 April 2017**

Management of stray cattle

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's effort in management of stray cattle, and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members on the subject.

Background

2. According to the Administration, there are divergent views in the community on how best stray cattle should be managed. Some are of the view that stray cattle have ecological value and should be protected. In addition, as part of the community, stray cattle should be allowed to live freely in their original dwelling places. On the other hand, there are views that stray cattle should be relocated because they cause obstruction to traffic, affect environmental hygiene, cause nuisance to the daily lives of residents, and may damage crops at times. To strike a balance among these conflicting views, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") has set up in 2011 a dedicated Cattle Management Team ("CMT") to manage the issue of stray cattle through a multi-pronged approach. According to the Administration's reply to the written question raised by Hon Kenneth LAU at the Council meeting of 22 March 2017, the current staffing establishment of CMT comprises one Veterinary Officer, two Field Officers II, four Field Assistants and one Driver.

Catch and removal strategy for handling stray cattle

3. 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 in Hong Kong, primarily distributed in four areas, i.e. Lantau Island, Sai Kung/Ma On Shan, Northeast New Territories and Central New Territories. The issue of stray cattle has persistently been a matter of concern to the local community, particularly in South Lantau and Sai Kung town where stray cattle have been causing different degrees of nuisance.

4. 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 the owner is found, 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 Animal Management Centre. 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-Sterilization-Relocation" ("CSR") programme

5. 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. Besides, AFCD officers conduct weekly on-site inspections of the places to which the cattle are relocated.

6. 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. 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

7. Members' major views and concerns on the subject are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

CSR programme

8. Some Members were concerned 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. AFCD would continue to monitor the population of stray and feral cattle and adjust the strategy as and when appropriate.

9. Concern was also raised about the potential health and adaptation problems arising from the translocation of cattle under the CST pilot scheme. According to the Administration, some cattle had been captured repeatedly for four to five times after being sterilized and relocated. This showed that the choice of relocation paths and sites might not be sufficiently effective in abating the nuisance caused by stray cattle and 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 to be in satisfactory condition. There was also no sign that the cattle had problem in adapting to the new environment. AFCD would continue to strengthen the CSR programme through identifying suitable sites for the relocation of cattle.

10. The Administration further advised that AFCD had been studying the feasibility of sterilizing cattle chemically with the use of a contraceptive drug named Gonacon. The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase which involved testing of the drug in captive cattle, was completed in 2014. The results indicated that the drug yielded a success rate of approximately 70% in sterilizing cattle. The second phase, which had commenced in June 2015 and scheduled to complete in 2016, was a field trial involving testing of the drug in free-roaming cattle and buffalo. Should this contraceptive drug proved to be effective, it would enable AFCD to sterilize cattle chemically without the need for surgical operation.

11. There was an enquiry whether the Administration would explore other measures for managing stray cattle, such as providing support to animal welfare groups for identifying suitable sites in the rural areas for developing open cowsheds as feeding and resting places for stray cattle, so as to enable the cattle to live in a safe and natural environment without having to wander around any more, thereby mitigating the nuisances caused by stray cattle to the local community. According to the Administration, it had received proposals in recent years from various animal welfare groups for constructing cattle shelters for stray cattle with the provision of fodder and water in a few locations on the Lantau Island. Most of the proposed sites, however, were close to traffic and residential areas. It was therefore difficult for the Administration to lend support to these proposals. That said, the Administration would consider the feasibility of any such further proposals on the merits of each case, taking into account factors including the location of the site proposed, the land use status of the site identified, and how the animal welfare group intended to go about taking care of the stray cattle.

Cattle grids

12. Members noted 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 normal traffic. Some Members suggested that the Administration should consider using fencing or cattle grids in Hong Kong to abate the nuisance caused by stray cattle to residents or road users.

13. 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

14. The Administration will update the Subcommittee on its efforts in management of stray cattle at the Subcommittee meeting on 24 April 2017.

Relevant papers

15. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
19 April 2017

Relevant papers on management of stray cattle

Committee	Date of meeting	Question / Paper
Legislative Council	3.7.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 14431 to 14436 (written question raised by Hon WONG Kwok-hing on "Handling of Stray Cattle")
	26.3.2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 9058 to 9062 (written question raised by Hon LEUNG Che-cheung on "Relocation of Stray Cattle")
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	9.12.2014 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes Administration's follow-up paper on strategy in tackling the issue of stray cattle (LC Paper No. CB(2)1502/14-15(01))
Legislative Council	7.1.2015	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 4418 to 4422 (written question raised by Hon LEUNG Che-cheung on "Handling of stray cattle")
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals	9.5.2016 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	-	Report of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals