

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)737/20-21(02)

Ref : CB2/PS/2/16

**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 8 February 2021**

**Management of stray cattle and handling nuisances of wild animals**

**Purpose**

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

**Background**

Management of stray cattle

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.

*Catch and removal strategy for handling stray cattle*

3. According to a territory-wide population survey on stray cattle conducted by the Administration in 2018, there were approximately 1 140 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. In 2019, a total of 125, 207 and 98 stray cattle were captured, sterilized and relocated/returned respectively under the CSR programme.

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.

## Handling nuisances of wild animals

7. Wild animals may occasionally leave their natural habits and enter urban areas. The presence of wild animals in urban areas can cause nuisances (e.g. noise, hygiene and safety issues). The number of complaints lodged with AFCD about wild animal nuisances has increased significantly in the past few years (from 1 147 in 2014-2015 to 2 012 in 2018-2019). According to AFCD's record, complaints relating to wild pigs and monkeys have respectively accounted for about 43% and 29% of the complaints lodged in the period.

### *Handling nuisances of wild pigs*

8. According to the Administration, AFCD adopts a multi-pronged approach to abate the nuisance that might be caused by wild pigs to the public. Upon receipt of reports about wild pigs being injured, trapped in urban areas or having appeared in residential areas causing nuisance, AFCD will deploy staff to the scene to handle the situation and catch the wild pigs with tranquilizer dart guns if necessary. If circumstances warrant, the wild pigs caught will be released in suitable remote locations such as country parks. AFCD will also conduct investigation at sites where wild pigs occur regularly and provide advice on preventive measures to the affected members of the public, relevant property management offices and government departments.

9. Since 2017, AFCD has introduced the Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme ("CCRP") as a pilot scheme to address persistent wild pig nuisance in urban areas. The pilot CCRP involves capturing the nuisance-causing wild pigs for relocation to remote countryside areas. To control the number of wild pigs causing nuisance in the long run, AFCD is evaluating the effectiveness of a contraceptive vaccine, Gonacon, in controlling the fertility of mature female wild pigs. In addition, AFCD has been studying the feasibility of conducting on-site surgical sterilization on wild pigs. According to the Administration, an advisory group comprising local and overseas experts in the fields of ecology, wildlife management, veterinary medicine, etc., will be established to advise on the implementation and review of the management and public education measures to address the nuisance of wild pigs.

### *Handling nuisances of monkeys*

10. Upon receipt of reports about nuisances caused by monkeys, AFCD will deploy staff to the scene to chase away or capture the monkeys, and offer advice and education leaflets to the concerned public or property management offices after investigating the situation and causes of monkey occurrence. Traps will

also be set up to capture the lingering monkeys in residential areas where necessary and conditions permit in order to alleviate the nuisance. AFCD has also been carrying out contraceptive/sterilization operations for monkeys in country parks to control their population growth, and has extended the scope of the contraceptive programme to cover the monkey populations causing nuisance to residential areas in the vicinity of country parks since 2018 with a view to mitigating nuisance caused by monkeys in urban areas in a more effective way.

### **Members' concerns**

11. The major views and concerns expressed by Members on the subject are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### Management of stray cattle

##### *"Capture-Sterilization-Relocation" programme*

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. At its meeting on 24 April 2017, the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights passed a motion urging the Administration to formulate a sustainable policy on the conservation of cattle and evaluate the health conditions and adaptability of the relocated cattle.<sup>1</sup> The Administration stressed that AFCD's work in stray cattle management was to protect the welfare of the cattle so that they could live in the natural environment and AFCD would continue to strengthen the CSR programme through identifying suitable sites for the relocation of cattle.

15. The Administration further advised that AFCD had been studying the feasibility of sterilizing cattle chemically with the use of Gonacon. The first phase involved testing of the drug in captive cattle and the results indicated that the drug yielded a success rate of approximately 70% in sterilizing cattle. In the second and third phases, the result indicated that the vaccine was able to render infertility in most of the wild brown cattle but was unable to render infertility in wild buffaloes effectively. AFCD had carried out the fourth phase to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the vaccine in cattle (especially buffaloes). The whole study would be completed in late 2020 and AFCD would assess whether the vaccine was suitable to be applied to stray cattle in Hong Kong.

16. There was an enquiry on 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 anymore, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> For wording of the motion and the Administration's response, please refer to LC Paper No. CB(2)1624/16-17(01).

### *Cattle grids*

17. Some members had expressed disappointment that despite that the suggestion of installation of cattle grid in Sai Kung Country Park had already been discussed for a couple of years, there had been no progress at all. In these members' view, cattle grid could help minimize the chance for stray cattle to enter urban areas, thereby reducing the nuisance to the public and protecting the safety of both the cattle and the public. These members considered that the Administration should follow up the matter as appropriate.

18. According to the Administration's reply to a question raised by Member during the examination of the Estimates of Expenditures 2020-2021, AFCD and the relevant government departments had carried out a detailed study on cattle grids, which found that such facilities were generally used on private land in farms in foreign countries to prevent cattle from going outside the farms. Having regard to overseas experience, it was considered that there were potential safety hazards to road users if cattle grids were installed on local public roads. In the light of the above, and in the absence of viable options to address the safety concerns, the cattle grid proposal would not be pursued further. However, AFCD would continue to look into other solutions to reduce the possibility of the cattle returning to the urban area.

### Measures to reduce nuisance caused by wild pigs to the public

19. Members requested the Administration to formulate effective measures to reduce the appearance of wild pigs in the vicinity of residential areas and farms, so as to enhance the protection of the personal safety of the public, avoid damage to agricultural produce and maintain environmental hygiene. The Administration advised that in late 2017, AFCD launched a two-year CCRP pilot scheme. In the study, AFCD's contractor would deploy veterinarians to capture wild pigs using tranquilizer dart guns, administer contraceptive vaccine, implant microchip and install global positioning system transmitter to suitable wild pigs in good body conditions. The wild pigs would then be released back to the countryside. AFCD was planning to extend the pilot scheme to other districts of Hong Kong and would continue to monitor the wild pig populations concerned to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. While the Administration would continue with the pilot CCRP and explore other practical means to address nuisance caused by wild pigs, some wild pigs might still pose imminent risks to public safety particularly those which (a) had attacked people; and/or (b) were accustomed to searching for food around built-up areas, or to approaching and snapping food from people, and also got irritated easily. The Administration would euthanize wild pigs which met one or both of the above criteria, in order to safeguard public safety.

20. Some members sought information on the specific areas where nuisance-causing wild pigs were relocated to after capture/sterilization and how the Administration monitored their movements after the relocation. Concerns were also raised as to the risks posed to the personal safety of residents and farmers as well as their property and crops in the areas where the wild pigs were relocated to.

21. The Administration advised that microchip was implanted into the captured wild pigs and assured members that nuisance-causing wild pigs captured were relocated to the remote countryside away from residential areas and farmlands. AFCD would enhance existing efforts on monitoring the population, distribution and movement of wild pigs using camera traps and global positioning system tracking technology. The Administration would not disclose the exact locations to which the wild pigs were relocated in order to avoid arousing interest among members of the public to locate the wild pigs.

22. Members noted that before 2017, if wild pigs caused injury to human beings and/or damaged properties and if other management measures were found to be ineffective, they would be removed by hunting operations by the two civilian hunting teams under the authorization of both the Police and AFCD. Hunting operations had been suspended since 2017 to address the growing concern of some local individuals/organizations about animal welfare and the safety constraints for conducting hunting operations in public or residential areas. Some members called on the Administration to disband the civilian hunting teams while some other members considered that hunting operations by civilian hunting teams could be resumed where appropriate and necessary, and suggested that the Administration might consider setting up official hunting teams to better ensure that all hunting operations were carried out according to prescribed requirements and procedures.

23. The Administration advised that compared to hunting where an average of less than one wild pig was hunted per operation, three wild pigs were captured on average in each operation of the pilot CCRP indicating a higher capture efficiency of the latter. Hence, the Administration had no plan at this stage to resume hunting operations by the civilian hunting teams before completion of review of the pilot CCRP. The Administration advised that it would continue to consider suitable measures to manage wild pigs in Hong Kong, taking into account public safety concerns and maintenance of biodiversity, etc.

24. The Administration stressed that the most effective way to reduce the appearance of wild pigs in residential areas was to stop feeding them. AFCD was conducting a series of publicity and education programmes to intensify its efforts to educate the public on the negative impact of feeding on wildlife with a view to discouraging the feeding behaviour of the public. In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department had been conducting improvement works for facilities that are prone to wildlife raids. AFCD had also set up a working group and commissioned a consultancy study on improvements in the design of refuse collection and recycling points, refuse bins, litter containers and recycling bins against wildlife raids.

### **Latest development**

25. In 2019, the Director of Audit published Report No. 73 on the results of value for money audit. The Audit raised a number of issues relating to the control of wild and stray animal nuisances in Chapter 4 of the Report. The Report has also put forth recommendations in respect of such issues.

26. The Administration will update the Subcommittee on its efforts in management of stray cattle and handling nuisances of wild animals at the Subcommittee meeting on 8 February 2021.

### **Relevant papers**

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



**Relevant papers on management of stray cattle and  
handling nuisances of wild animals**

Committee	Date of meeting	Question / Paper
Legislative Council	3.7.2013	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 14431 to 14436 (written question raised by Hon WONG Kwok-hing on "Handling of Stray Cattle")</a>
	26.3.2014	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 9058 to 9062 (written question raised by Hon LEUNG Che-cheung on "Relocation of Stray Cattle")</a>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	9.12.2014 (Item III)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">Administration's follow-up paper on strategy in tackling the issue of stray cattle (LC Paper No. CB(2)1502/14-15(01))</a>
Legislative Council	7.1.2015	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 4418 to 4422 (written question raised by Hon LEUNG Che-cheung on "Handling of stray cattle")</a>
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals	9.5.2016 (Item II)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	-	<a href="#">Report of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals</a>
Legislative Council	22.3.2017	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 5280 to 5283 (written question raised by Hon Kenneth LAU on "Handling of stray cattle")</a>

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Question / Paper</b>
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights	24.4.2017 (Item II)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	1.11.2017	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 1056 to 1059 (written question raised by Hon CHAN Hak-kan on "Management of stray cattle")</a>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene		<a href="#">Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights</a>
Panel on Environmental Affairs	28.1.2019 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	27.3.2019	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 8036 to 8040 (written question raised by Hon Elizabeth QUAT on "Preventing wild animals from causing injuries and nuisances to residents")</a>
Public Accounts Committee	-	<a href="#">The Director of Audit's Report No. 73 (Chapter 4 - Control of Wild and Stray Animal Nuisances)</a>