

**For discussion  
on 22 March 2021**

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

**Management of stray cats and dogs  
– Trap-Neuter-Return Programme**

**PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the Trap-Neuter-Return Programme implemented by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD).

**POLICY OBJECTIVE ON STRAY ANIMAL MANAGEMENT**

2. The Government's policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist harmoniously in Hong Kong. In achieving this, we need to strike a balance between the well-being of people in Hong Kong and the welfare of animals. When managing stray animals, AFCD has all along been adopting a range of measures in line with the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)<sup>1</sup>, to handle the animals appropriately, especially the possible nuisances and public health problems caused by stray animals, with a view to effectively preventing the outbreak of zoonotic diseases and safeguarding public hygiene and safety in Hong Kong. As pointed out by the OIE, the promotion of responsible pet ownership can significantly reduce the number of stray dogs and the incidence of zoonotic diseases.

3. In view of the above suggestions from international experts and actual circumstances of Hong Kong, AFCD has on the one hand been actively conducting publicity and public education programmes to appeal to the public to take care of pets responsibly and not to abandon them, in order to reduce the number of stray cats and dogs. On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> OIE has been developing animal welfare standards for inclusion in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code ("the Code"). In Chapter 7.7 of the Code, OIE sets out a number of control measures for stray dogs which can be considered by various countries after taking into account the local circumstances and context. Suggested stray dog control measures include education and legislation for responsible ownership, sterilisation, removing and handling, promotion of rehoming, registration and identification of dogs and euthanasia, etc.

AFCD has been implementing measures to manage the number of stray animals and relevant nuisances caused, such as providing rehoming and neutering services for animals. Under the continued implementation of stray animal management measures, the number of complaints received by AFCD annually (related to nuisances caused by stray cats and dogs), has been falling consistently, decreasing by 73% from 7 554 in 2016 to 2 024 in 2020. At the same time, we noticed public awareness concerning pet rehoming gradually increasing. The ratios of cats and dogs received by AFCD and handed to animal welfare organisations (AWOs) for rehoming have both increased in recent years.

## **“TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN” (TNR) PROGRAMMEE**

### *“Trap-Neuter-Return” Programme for Stray Dogs*

4. Apart from the measures mentioned above, AFCD assisted two AWOs promulgating TNR to conduct a trial programme<sup>2</sup> between 2015 and 2018, set out performance targets<sup>3</sup> and amended relevant legislations (to exempt the programme coordinators and their volunteers from relevant provisions under the Dogs and Cats Ordinance (Cap. 167) and the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421)). Under the TNR trial programme, stray dogs are caught, neutered and then returned to their original habitat. Proponents believe that, through TNR, the stray dog population will gradually decline over time in keeping with death by natural causes. However, there is so far a lack of scientific study in other places to prove the effectiveness of TNR in reducing stray dog population. Furthermore, the Terrestrial Animal Health Code published by OIE mentions that since captured dogs are returned to the original habitat and may cause nuisances, TNR may not be suitable for all places or situations.

5. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Society for Abandoned Animals (SAA) implemented the trial programme in Cheung Chau and Yuen Long Tai Tong respectively as the

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<sup>2</sup> The trial programme aimed to assess the effectiveness of TNR in reducing stray dog population and associated nuisance in designated trial sites in Cheung Chau and Yuen Long Tai Tong. The programme coordinators recruit carers to feed and catch stray dogs within the trial sites. Dogs caught will be neutered and microchipped, before being returned to the trial site.

<sup>3</sup> The three performance targets of the trial programme included –

- (a) catching at least 80% of stray dogs in the trial sites during the first six months of the programme;
- (b) achieving an average of 10% annual decrease in the population of stray dogs in the trial sites during the trial period; and
- (c) complaints received should be matching with, or lower than, the territory-wide average during the trial period.

programme coordinators. After the end of the trial programme, outcome of the programme was reported to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene in May 2018 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1318/17-18(03)). According to the study findings of the programme, neither TNR trial site achieved the target of reducing the population of stray dogs by 10% annually. Although the trial programme already ended, the two programme coordinators agreed to continue to manage the trial sites and monitor dogs in the programme, and regularly provide AFCD with information on the conditions of the dogs concerned, average lifespan and changes in the population of stray dogs in the trial sites.

6. As at end of 2020<sup>4</sup>, the number of dogs in the Cheung Chau trial site was estimated to have decreased slightly by around 7%, as compared to that during the TNR trial programme (between 2015 and 2018). That did not come close to meeting the performance target regarding reduction of stray dog population. Nevertheless, the number of complaints concerning stray dog significantly decreased, with the number of complaints in 2020 reduced by 97% from 2015, the first year of the trial programme, falling by a larger extent than territory-wide stray dog-related complaints in Hong Kong during the same period<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the number of dogs in the Tai Tong trial site was estimated to have increased by 21%<sup>6</sup>, as compared to that during the TNR trial programme (between 2015 and 2018). The number of complaints in 2020 decreased by 50% from the first year of the trial programme (2015), displaying a downward trend but still trailing the overall rate of reduction in complaints in the territory.

7. The TNR programme has yet to achieve the performance target of the programme concerning reduction of stray dogs, reasons for which may include difficulties in recording accurately due to the movements of dogs within, into and out of the sites, and the increased average lifespan of the dogs, compared with other stray dogs, under the care and medical treatment of the programme coordinators. Since the average lifespan of dogs generally exceed 10 years, the effectiveness of the TNR programme may be more observable after a longer period of operation. AFCD will

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<sup>4</sup> AFCD commissioned a consultant to observe during the TNR trial programme (February 2015 to January 2018) on a monthly basis, recording the number of stray dogs in the sites. At the Cheung Chau trial site, the monthly average number of stray dogs over the 36 months of the trial period was 29. After the trial programme ended, the consultant recorded a total of 27 stray dogs at the site between September and December 2020.

<sup>5</sup> The number of complaints related to nuisances caused by stray dogs in Hong Kong decreased by 74% from 6 060 in 2015 to 1 568 in 2020.

<sup>6</sup> At the Tai Tong trial site, the monthly average number of stray dogs over the 36 months of the trial period was 24. After the trial programme ended, the consultant recorded a total of 29 stray dogs at the site between June and October 2020.

continue to monitor the implementation of TNR at the two trial sites. We believe that relevant information on changes in dog population will help AFCD formulate management measures for stray dogs. The Government is open-minded about conducting further TNR if AWOs or other parties are interested in running such a programme at other locations.

8. The World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong (WWF) submitted a proposal in 2020, proposing a TNR programme for stray dogs at Mai Po, Yuen Long. AFCD preliminarily considers the designated location suitable for the programme. WWF is liaising with the relevant stakeholders. If the proposal is supported by the local community, AFCD will provide assistance as appropriate, help enhance liaisons with local stakeholders and propose relevant legislative amendments.

#### *The Cat Colony Care Programme (CCCP)*

9. CCCP was established in 2000 and implemented by SPCA. The programme aims to stabilise and reduce the population of stray cats by way of TNR. SPCA recruits and trains volunteers to capture stray cats in Hong Kong. The captured cats are then taken to SPCA where they are assessed, neutered, microchipped and vaccinated against rabies and other common feline infectious diseases. Subsequently, the cats are returned to their original habitat, where they continue to be fed and monitored by volunteers.

10. AFCD collaborates with SPCA in setting standards of operations to facilitate CCCP. If complaints are received concerning locations under the programme, AFCD will inform SPCA to follow up. Under CCCP, the number of neutered and returned cats fell in recent years from around 6 000 in 2014 by 55% to around 2 700 in 2020. Furthermore, the number of stray cats captured by AFCD decreased significantly from 1 836 in 2014 to 209 in 2020. This reduction may be attributed to various factors, such as raised public awareness on animal welfare and knowledge on caring for cats.

11. It may be worth noting that TNR programmes for cats and dogs are not comparable. The natural behaviours of cats and their risks of spreading rabies are different from dogs. The potential risks posed by dogs on public health and safety are higher than cats, hence there are currently more regulation on owning and managing dogs than for cats in the legislation. Therefore, there are more restrictions in conducting TNR for dogs than cats. AFCD will exercise caution in conducting TNR Programmes for dogs whilst continuing to assist SPCA to implement

CCCP.

**ADVICE SOUGHT**

12. Members are invited to note and comment on the contents of this paper.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
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