

**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 animals and
relevant animal welfare facilities in Hong Kong**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the Government's policy on managing stray animals and the relevant animal welfare facilities.

**POLICY OBJECTIVE AND MEASURES 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, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has all along been adopting a range of measures in line with the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)¹, 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. 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, 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.

¹ 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.

3. In recent years, there have been views suggesting the Government to consider providing public animal shelter facilities to offer one-stop animal-related services funded by public money. Regarding these suggestions, On the basis of animal welfare and disease control considerations, veterinary experts believe that animal shelters are only suitable for short-term accommodation of animals. Keeping stray animals at animal shelters for a prolonged period is not ideal for their physical and psychological well-being. Furthermore, not only would such long-term accommodation involve large amount of public funds and land resources, it would also induce a moral hazard and would most likely be exploited or even encourage the abandoning of pets, creating a vicious cycle that aggravates the stray animal problem. We understand that public animal accommodation facilities in other countries (such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Singapore) do not keep captured stray animals for a long period of time either.

Enhance public education for responsible pet ownership

4. Public education is an important part of our work in stray animal management. 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. Therefore, AFCD has established a dedicated team to devise, implement and fortify public education and publicity programmes, for disseminating messages on caring for animals and responsible pet ownership, and appeal to the public not to hastily give up or abandon their pets. Educational and publicity activities conducted by AFCD include producing and broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest on television and radio; placing advertisements at cinemas, public transport, bus stops, billboards at road tunnel entrances and websites; organising promotional events in shopping arcades and community campaigns; holding talks in schools and housing estates; as well as conducting surveys on pet care. We will continue such work in the future.

Complaint handling and catch and removal approach

5. AFCD receives complaints about stray animals from time to time, including nuisances related to noise, environmental hygiene, public health and safety etc. Upon receipt of complaints, AFCD will take appropriate follow-up actions to minimize such nuisances and potential hazards to the public. To address the nuisances caused by stray animals, AFCD adopts a catch and removal approach, aimed at reducing the nuisance at source and controlling the population of stray animals.

6. Upon receipt of complaints against stray animals, AFCD will try to locate and catch the animals concerned, which will then be placed in an Animal Management Centre (AMC) of AFCD for observation. For animals implanted with microchips, AMCs will try to locate their owners based on the information registered in the microchips. Those without a microchip will stay at AMCs temporarily, pending reclaim by their owners. Unclaimed animals that are in good health and assessed by a veterinary surgeon as having a gentle temperament and suitable for adoption will be transferred to animal welfare organisations (AWOs) for adoption by members of the public.

7. Under continued implementation of measures on stray animal management, the number of stray cat and dog nuisance complaints received by AFCD displayed a continuous downward trend, decreasing by 73% from 7 554 cases in 2016 to 2 024 cases in 2020. Please see [Annex A](#) for the number of stray cat and dog nuisance complaints received by AFCD in the past five years.

Promotion of animal adoption

8. AFCD has been working closely with AWOs in promoting rehoming of suitable animals. AFCD has established partnerships with AWOs, offering animals received by AFCD for adoption by members of the public through these organisations. AFCD has in recent years proactively expanded its network of rehoming partners and enhanced relevant liaisons and assistance, such as providing free neutering services to animals rehomed by rehoming partners. AFCD also provides subvention to eligible organisations, to financially support them in establishing and operating rehoming centres, as well as improving the facilities of these centres etc. AFCD approved funding of around \$2.87 million to AWOs for 2020-21 and has earmarked another \$3 million for 2021-22 for relevant subvention. Meanwhile, the Development Bureau manages the Funding Scheme to Support the Use of Vacant Government Sites by Non-government Organisations and has approved a total funding of around \$18 million, as well as short-term tenancies at nominal rent, to support two rehoming partners to construct animal re-homing shelters on vacant government sites.

9. Currently, AFCD works with 17 partnering AWOs, which are located in various districts across the territory. These AWOs have relevant experience and network of prospective owners, and could provide more service locations and better meeting the needs of the community. Upon receipt of an adoption application, the relevant AWO will assess the

applicant's living environment and capability to own a pet. Home inspections will also be conducted to learn about the applicant's living environment, number of existing pets, experience and views on animal care etc. Such procedures involved in pet adoption are in place to ensure rehomed animals are matched with suitable owners, placing the welfare of the animals as primary consideration.

10. The ratios of cats and dogs received by AFCD and handed to AWOs for rehoming have both increased in recent years. Over the past five years, the rehoming ratio of dogs received by AFCD has increased from 19.5% to 38.1%, whilst the rehoming ratio of cats has increased from 20.8% to 36.7%. Please see **Annex B** for details. This not only showcases the work achieved by AFCD and AWOs, but also reflects the gradual increase in public awareness concerning animal rehoming. AFCD is proactively liaising with other AWOs, with a view to further increasing the number of partnering AWOs and enhancing animal rehoming services.

ANIMAL WELFARE FACILITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT

Animal Management Centres

11. AFCD currently operates four AMCs in Hong Kong, located in the New Territories North, New Territories South, Kowloon and Hong Kong Island. The four AMCs currently provide a total of 350 kennels, 170 catteries, 25 and 16 accommodation facilities for birds and other animals respectively.

12. AFCD strives to enhance the facilities of its AMCs and maximise lengths of stay of stray animals at the centres as far as practicable, to improve their chances of being adopted. To enhance the services of the Kowloon Animal Management Centre (AMC(K)) in To Kwa Wan, the Government obtained funding approval from Legislative Council in June 2020 for re-provisioning AMC(K) and constructing the new Animal Management and Welfare Complex in Kai Tak Development Area. Construction works are estimated to be completed by the second quarter of 2024. The complex will provide about 350 animal keeping facilities (including the 80 animal rehoming facilities to be elaborated below), which is an increase of approximately two times over the existing 120 animal keeping facilities in AMC(K). The complex will also provide more advanced animal medical facilities, and indoor and outdoor exercise areas, in order to improve the health and temperament of the animals.

13. In addition to general animal accommodation facilities, the complex will also feature, for the first time, 80 animal rehoming facilities that will be open to the public. The idea is to accommodate animals assessed by AFCD veterinary surgeons as having a gentle temperament and suitable for adoption in such facilities, allowing AWOs offering rehoming services to visit the animals at the complex before receiving them. We believe such visits can help enhance the AWOs' understanding of these animals, such as their sizes, temperaments and behaviours etc, thereby fostering interests to rehome them. Furthermore, the facilities will be used for promotion and education on animal adoption, allowing visiting organisations (such as schools) to learn about caring for the needs of different animals. Upon completion of the complex, AFCD can receive more stray animals or animals given up by owners and increase their chances of being rehomed. In addition, the complex will include AFCD's first library, classroom and exhibition facilities. These dedicated facilities can be used for publicity and public education, including publicity activities on rehoming services, enabling participants to see and handle animals first-hand, which will help enhance animal welfare.

VETERINARY SERVICES

14. Currently, there are more than 1 000 registered veterinary surgeons and around 140 veterinary clinics in Hong Kong providing general and specialist consultation services. According to the Thematic Household Survey Report on keeping of pets and the number of registered veterinary surgeons in 2018 provided by the Veterinary Surgeons Board, the veterinarian-to-pet (dog and cat) ratio of is around 1:410, which is far above the ratios of other places (i.e. Singapore (1:2 543), the United Kingdom (1:2 374) and the United States (1:3 072)). The veterinarian-to-pet ratio is a common indicator for assessing the overall situation of veterinary services: the higher the ratio, the greater the number of veterinary surgeons. Hence, there are currently sufficient registered veterinary surgeons and clinics in Hong Kong offering various veterinary services.

15. At the same time, with the establishment of a local veterinary school at the City University of Hong Kong, it is expected that there will be more locally trained veterinary surgeons practising in Hong Kong in the coming years. In order that veterinary students may receive veterinary training comparable with international standards in Hong Kong, currently the Government is proposing an amendment to the Schedule 2 to the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529), with a view to

permitting veterinary students to perform acts of veterinary surgery, under the direct and continuous supervision of a registered veterinary surgeon, so as to facilitate the training of veterinary students as well as to improve the standard of local veterinary services.

ADVICE SOUGHT

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

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
March 2021**

**Number of stray cat and dog nuisance complaints received by AFCD
over the past five years**

Year	Stray dog and cat nuisance complaints received (cases)		
	Dogs	Cats	Total
2016	5 171	2 383	7 554
2017	4 268	1 842	6 110
2018	3 751	1 141	4 892
2019	3 259	814	4 073
2020	1 568	456	2 024

Annex B

Number of animals handed by AFCD to AWOs for rehoming over the past five years

Year	Stray animals caught		Animals given up by owner		Animals received through other channels [#]		Total animals received		Animals reclaimed by owner		Animals Re-homed (rehoming ratio)	
	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats	Dogs	Cats
2016	1 919	876	1 003	107	343	70	3 265	1 053	637	400	513 (19.5%)	136 (20.8%)
2017	1 566	674	1 024	84	336	65	2 926	823	560	269	588 (24.8%)	67 (12.1%)
2018	1 235	547	715	80	304	62	2 254	689	512	206	577 (33.1%)	89 (18.4%)
2019	965	304	674	75	226	63	1 865	442	404	127	547 (37.4%)	78 (24.8%)
2020	603	209	531	60	271	47	1 405	316	284	98	427 (38.1%)	80 (36.7%)

[#] Includes microchipped stray animals handed by AWOs to AFCD and animals seized by law enforcement agencies in enforcement actions etc.