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20 June 1999

Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong.

Dear Sirs,

I read in the South China Sunday Post today that a proposed Bill has been forwarded for Legco consideration. It is the Bill regarding Dogs. I enclose a letter that I wrote in 1997 to the Bills Committee. The content of the letter is still relevant.

I am extremely perturbed about the 'blanket proposal' that will require large dogs, defined as those being over 20 kilograms, to be muzzled just about everywhere except in their owners home or in country parks. This is an absolutely ridiculous and outrageous proposal! Indeed, it could result in owners challenging the Government on grounds of causing unnecessary cruelty to dogs that are no more in need of muzzling than some humans. However, just because they happen to be over 20 kgs they must suffer this labeling as dangerous and have to wear something over their mouths that I am sure will cause unnecessary stress.

If Legco is really serious about tackling the problem of dogs biting people then they should address the number of nasty village dogs whose owners take not the slightest bit of notice in where or what their dogs do and sort out the huge number of stray dogs. Indeed I am certain that these owners will not care one bit about any laws passed or even know! It is the dogs of responsible owners who will no doubt suffer because of such draconian measures. These are not the problem dogs.

I still have never been given a satisfactory answer from the Agriculture & Fisheries Department as to why they proposed this muzzling for large breeds and how they arrived at a figure of 20kgs. The only explanation I received was that it would cover all dogs. Hardly an reasoned argument, more like one from someone who is trying to cover him or herself, and whilst they may have the interests of the population at heart, they should also consider the interests of well trained dogs and those of a good nature too!

To summarize, myself and many others like-minded dog owners, are vehemently opposed to the proposal that will require dogs over 20 kgs, regardless of nature or past 'clean record' to suddenly have to wear a muzzle every time they take one step outside their owners homes en-route to somewhere to walk. Blanket laws which are akin to corporal punishment have no place in our society anymore.

Yours faithfully,

P C Sanderson

15 Berkeley Bay Villa
Ho Chung
Sai Kung

Attn:

Clerk to Bills Committee
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

29 April 1997

Dear Sirs,

I write with reference to the proposed legislation regarding domestic dogs. I hear with much disappointment that a 'blanket law' will apply to 'certain breeds of dog', such that they will require to be muzzled and kept on a lead at all times out of the home. This sort of cover-all legislation is extremely unfair and does not really help to sort out the dog problem in Hong Kong.

I understand that the 'fighting-breeds' as they have become known, i.e. pit bulls, toasers, etc, will have to be muzzled and leashed at all times outside of the home, as well as other riders to apply. This I believe will also apply to known dangerous dogs, presumably ones which have previously inflicted injury.

However, it is the next part of the proposed legislation that really concerns, angers and upsets me. Certain other breeds such as alsations, dobermans, rottweilers, etc., will also have the same rules apply to them as for "known dangerous dogs". These dogs are no more dangerous than Great Danes, large labradors, retrievers, chows, sharpies, etc, etc. A dangerous dog cannot be defined purely by breed. Temperament is in part inherited but it is greatly determined by environment and training. It is sad that some irresponsible people, make 'certain breeds' bad for their own nefarious reasons but one should note that these animals have to be made to be bad, more often than not through cruelty. Indeed, most of these dogs are working breeds and not in any way vicious as this would be incompatible with their reason d'etre.

Many dogs when rescued from these awful people can and do make fine family pets. I can refer you, for example, to the Rottweiler Welfare Association in the UK for further proof of this. Specifically, Rottweilers are a working breed with over 2000 years of history. They are fine animals with mild and even temperaments and have always had good associations with families. To suggest that these animals are known dangerous dogs is as ridiculous as suggesting that all humans are dangerous because of what some do. In fact, chow-chows bite a good many more people in Hong Kong than the Rottweilers, alsations, etc.

During the summer months, these larger dogs would find muzzles extremely debilitating especially when being exercised, which is, of course, essential for all dogs to one extent or other. This borders on cruelty and in no way can be tolerated by a civilised society. Muzzling in hot conditions can also frighten a dog and cause it distress which can create a problem where one did not previously exist.

When I spoke at length with Dr Ribera of the Agricultural and Fisheries Department on this subject, he informed me that it was at his department's

suggestion that certain breeds, regardless, be muzzled, but gave me no rational reason as to why, except that every case would be covered in this way. Perhaps then we should have every dog muzzled, especially those well known for being temperamental and snappy like Jack Russells. Small dogs are often much worse and can still inflict serious harm to small children. In short, to label any dog as potentially dangerous by its breed is inaccurate, damning and wholly unfair. Any dog of medium to large build has the potential to inflict serious injury to humans, but well-brought up and well trained animals are very unlikely to do so.

Legco would do better to legislate against the hundreds of 'village-dogs' that roam free and that are vicious and often in disgusting states of health with no real socialisation with humans. Also, a more effective culling of their much worse off cousins, the infamous Hong Kong strays, would go a long way to helping the dog problem. Inevitably though, it is through education of people the dog troubles in Hong Kong will be solved. That is, individuals should not get a dog and dump it later; they should take responsibility for their animal, with it being housed correctly, fed properly, socialised with humans and other animals, and trained properly.

As a suggestion, why not have exemption to the muzzling/leashing rule in the case of well trained dogs regardless of breed. In this way, responsible dog owners will not have to submit their pets to unfair and unwarranted and can allow their dogs to exercise in appropriate areas freely. This not only will also benefit the dog but allow it its right too. This could easily be implemented by having dogs exempted by undergoing obedience classes with recognised trainers and/or by a veterinary surgeon's certification.

A dog is an animal, no more and no less. They have been around humans for time immemorial, providing help, companionship and enjoyment. They deserve good training and good homes and not what so often happens in Hong Kong where people have a very lackadaisical and irresponsible attitude to them. Responsible owners and their dogs however have a right to expect exemptions from draconian measures that may be introduced to protect the public from those who are not.

Yours faithfully

P C Sanderson