



Animal welfare and management

Figure 1 – No. of pets and registered veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong

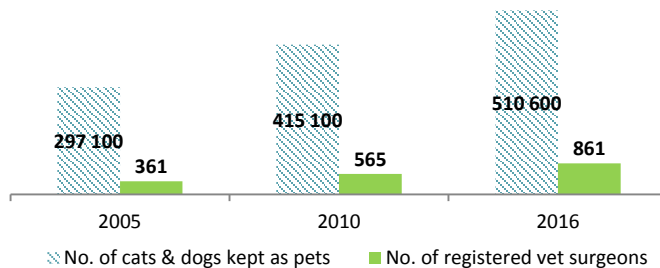
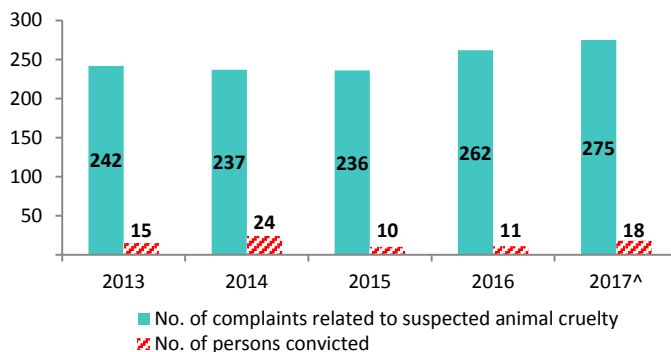
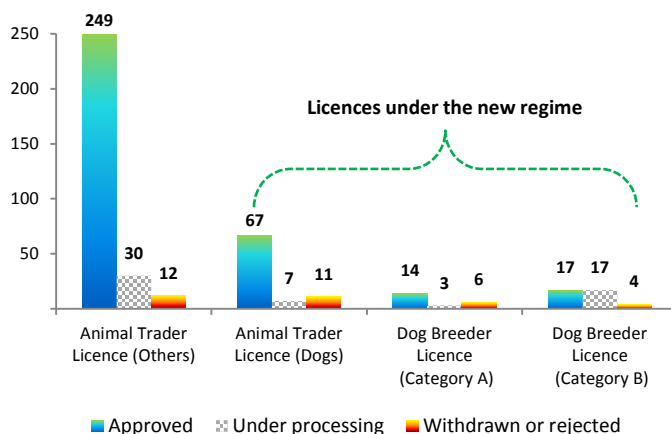


Figure 2 – No. of complaints and persons convicted related to animal cruelty



Note: (^) Figures for the number of convictions up to September 2017 only.

Figure 3 – No. of animal trader and dog breeder licences[#]



Note: (#) Dog Breeder Licence (Category A) is for any person who keeps four or fewer female dogs for commercial breeding, whereas Dog Breeder Licence (Category B) is for any person who keeps a number of female dogs for commercial breeding up to the limit provided for in the licence.

Highlights

- Animal welfare involves the prevention of animal cruelty and safeguarding of their health and wellbeing. In Hong Kong, the number of cats and dogs kept as pets has seen a 72% increase in the last decade, from 297 100 in 2005 to 510 600 in 2016. Over the same period, there was a 139% growth in the number of registered veterinary surgeons, from 361 in 2005 to 861 in 2016 (**Figure 1**). According to the latest vet clinics list compiled by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD"), there are some 150 listed vet clinics in Hong Kong.
- Notwithstanding growing popularity of keeping pets, there were cases of animal abuse or violence by pet owners. At present, all 22 police districts with criminal investigation units have designated teams to investigate animal cruelty cases under the Animal Watch Scheme, which was set up by the Hong Kong Police Force in 2011 in collaboration with AFCD, animal welfare organizations and veterinary associations to combat animal cruelty. In 2017, the number of complaints related to suspected animal cruelty has edged up to 275 (**Figure 2**). According to the Government, most complaints were found to be related to nuisance with no elements of cruelty. As at September 2017, 18 persons were convicted under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169).
- To better safeguard animal welfare and public health, the Government has amended the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Cap. 139B) to strengthen existing regulations on dog trading and breeding for commercial purposes. The amendment came into effect on 20 March 2017 with the introduction of an Animal Trader Licence for the sales of dogs, and two types of Dog Breeder Licences. From 20 March 2017 up to end-February 2018, AFCD has approved a total of 67 Animal Trader Licence (Dogs), 14 Dog Breeder Licences (Category A) for keeping four or fewer female dogs, and 17 Dog Breeder Licences (Category B) for keeping more than four female dogs (**Figure 3**). In the same period, AFCD conducted 4 899 routine inspections and surprise checks, resulting in 10 cases of prosecution of illegal animal sales.

Animal welfare and management (cont'd)

Figure 4 – No. of stray animals caught

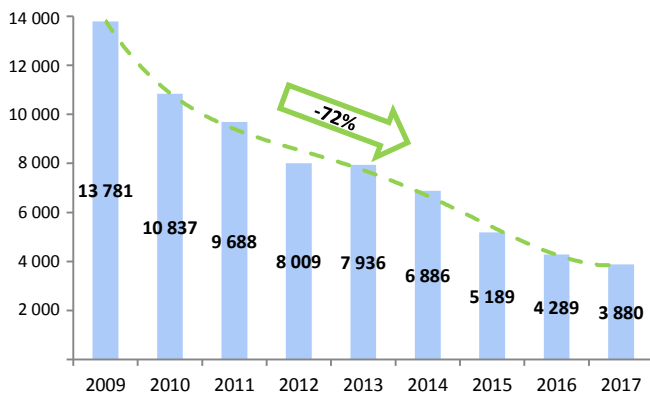


Figure 5 – No. of pets given up by owners to Animal Management Centres

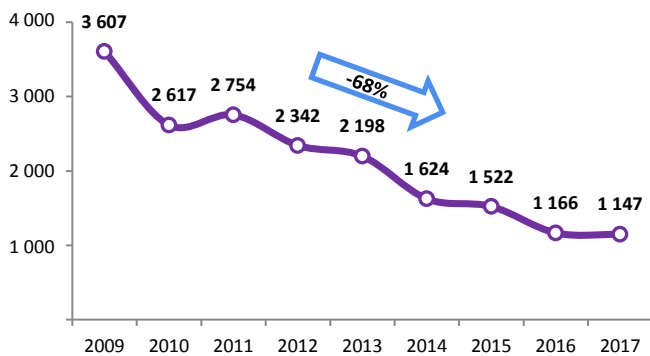
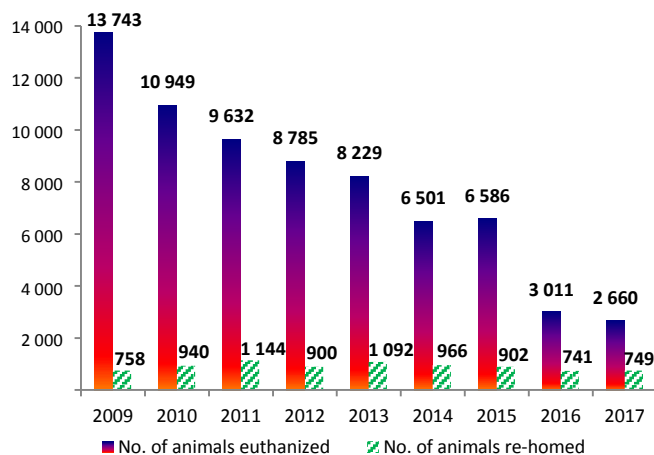


Figure 6 – No. of animals euthanized and re-homed



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Highlights

- At present, AFCD operates four Animal Management Centres respectively in Hong Kong, Kowloon, and New Territories South and North to handle stray animals. Stray animals are generally abandoned animals, feral animals and lost pets. Upon receipt of complaints regarding nuisance caused by stray animals (mostly dogs and cats), AFCD will conduct follow-up inspections and arrange catching operations. Probably reflecting the public's increased awareness in the proper care of animals, the number of stray animals caught has seen a 72% decline from 13 781 in 2009 to 3 880 in 2017 (Figure 4).
- Under the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421), it is illegal for a person to abandon an animal in his/her possession without reasonable excuse. However, some animals are surrendered legally and as a last resort to Animal Management Centres. During the period of 2009-2017, there has been a 68% drop in the number of pets given up by owners to the Animal Management Centres (Figure 5), which might be indicative of a strengthened sense of responsibility on the part of pet owners.
- Surrendered and stray animals caught are housed in Animal Management Centres for observation. For stray animals with a microchip implanted, AFCD will arrange for their reclaim by owners. Other animals with good health and gentle temperament are transferred to a partnered animal welfare organization for re-homing. However, animals not adopted or unclaimed at the end of the process will, as a last resort, be euthanized. With fewer animals caught and surrendered in recent years, the number of animals euthanized by AFCD has largely reduced from 13 743 in 2009 to 2 660 in 2017 (Figure 6). However, the number of animals re-homed has seen a gradual decline since 2013, prompting calls for AFCD to take a more proactive role in promoting animal adoption.
- Notwithstanding AFCD's efforts to promote responsible pet ownership, there are concerns that the existing legislation, primarily focusing on animal cruelty, is not comprehensive enough to safeguard animal welfare. There are views that the Government should continue to explore more humane means of animal management, such as extending the dog breeding licences to cats and/or other animals, as well as introducing a positive duty of care for animal keepers. In part responding to these concerns, the Government has announced in its 2018 Policy Address that it will consult the public on amending legislation related to animal welfare in early-2019.

Data sources: Latest figures from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong.