



Submission to the Legislative Council

Constitutional Affairs Panel from

Hong Kong Alley Cat Watch

26 May 2007

Hong Kong Alley Cat Watch believes that the proposed restructuring of government policy bureaux offers a singular opportunity to significantly enhance the protection of animal welfare in the SAR, and to bring Hong Kong's approach toward the control of stray animal populations fully into line with best international practice.

To illustrate, we wish to address the issue of how the problem of reducing the stray feline population is being inadequately and contradictorily handled.

Stray cats come under the purview of both the AFCD and the SPCA. The SPCA runs the Cat Colony Care Program (CCCP), which includes trapping, neutering and returning the animals to the street (i.e., TNR). All cats in the Program are micro chipped for identification purposes. The AFCD acts upon complaints and traps homeless animals, the majority of which are destroyed.

Under the CCCP, volunteers take stray cats for neutering and collect them after de-sexing for return to their respective colonies. CCCP volunteers, who are known to the SPCA, also assume responsibility for long-term feeding and care for the strays after their release. The CCCP is a successful, internationally recognized and humane approach to achieving a long-term reduction in the numbers of Hong Kong's stray cat population.

The situation is strikingly different, however, when stray felines are captured by the AFCD as they face destruction unless they are recognized as CCCP cats, or else an owner appears to claim the animal. Only groups on a list of approved organizations may obtain AFCD-held animals, and they can currently do so without charge. Notwithstanding, there are many individuals - not belonging to these approved groups -- who care for stray cats out of compassion and who become concerned about the animals' fate when they go missing. These persons will often make inquiries to the AFCD. If a cat in AFCD custody is recognized as being in the CCCP program, it can be released to an individual



who belongs to the CCCP. However, if it is not recognized as a CCCP cat, it will almost certainly face destruction.

Sometimes the process of release and re-capture can be repeated many times, and on occasion CCCP cats are not recognized and destroyed.

In sum, the AFCD is engaging in inconsistent approaches. On one hand, it partially recognizes the benefits of the TNR approach by allowing CCCP cats to be released either to approved groups or to individuals. For this it should be commended. However, at the same time, it engages in a process of capture and destruction of non-CCCP felines, even where there may be individuals willing to care for them.

The AFCD would no doubt say that CCCP is the work of the SPCA, but why should this be so when the CCCP is indeed a government sponsored program? Why is the AFCD engaging in internally inconsistent approaches? Why is TNR not the overarching approach to an intelligent handling of the stray animal problem internally i.e. by the AFCD conducting their own de-sexing program? This institutional and philosophical divide leads to unnecessary destruction of animals, even though a proven and humane alternative to population reduction exists i.e. trap, neuter and release.

The approaches to animal welfare by the AFCD and SPCA are not properly aligned. Until they are, unnecessary duplication in effort and the needless destruction of animals will continue, as well as the heartfelt suffering and misery of individuals who find themselves embroiled in disputes over the fate of animals who are doomed for the execution block. Clear policies would also ensure that public money is not wasted on the hunting down and/or destruction of strays already successfully incorporated into the Cat Colony Care Program.

We strongly urge that a special Animal Welfare Unit be created under the new Environment Bureau as a matter of priority. It should be charged with overseeing all issues pertaining to animal welfare, and have full responsibility for assuring that the SAR Government has a holistic, comprehensive, consistent, transparent and humane policy toward animal welfare. It should also have full authority for ensuring that this policy is properly implemented.

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