TNR Fund HK

*Saving Dogs Through **T**rap, **N**euter and **R**eturn*

Submission in response to the Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Panel Meeting on the topic of "Trap-Neuter-Return trial scheme for stray dogs and handling of animal cases" (Submitted on Jan 3, 2014)

TNR Fund HK's standpoint:

TNR Fund HK strongly urges the government to immediately adopt TNR (Trap, Neuter and Return) for stray dogs as the primary approach for managing stray dog population; with the present "catch and remove" policy used only as a supplementary measure.

Interpretations:

"Stray dogs": Dogs that are free roaming (and free to breed) without a proper owner (an individual who can provide consistent food, shelter, care and control, and is willing to act as legal keeper of the dog). These dogs may or may not have someone ("carer") to provide food on an inconsistent basis. Examples of "stray dogs": street dogs, village dogs, dogs in hillside, construction sites, scrapyards etc.

"Catch and remove": AFCD's current stray dog management programme which consists of catching stray dogs in response to complaints of noise and environmental hygiene nuisances, potential danger to members of the public and dog biting incidents. When caught, for dogs not microchipped or unclaimed by owners, they may be re-homed through animal welfare organisations if they are found to be healthy and of an acceptable temperament, or otherwise killed (the majority).

Discussion:

1. Are AFCD's current strategies for stray dogs adequate?

It is very commendable that the AFCD has been actively promoting responsible pet ownership and tightening pet breeding and trading regulations. However, these measures apply mainly to pet dogs, and not to dogs without owners ("stray dogs"). As the vast majority of stray dogs in Hong Kong are not abandoned pets but are from generations of strays, clearly the above policies are not enough to target the stray dog population.

AFCD now implements a "catch and remove" policy for stray dogs when they receive complaints from the public. However, this is only a piecemeal approach and does not address the control of the ***overall*** stray dog population. We clearly need a more proactive, territory-wide strategy.

2. Is TNR an effective method for managing stray dogs?

There are increasing published data to show that TNR is an effective method to control stray dog population and improve public health:

- In Jaipur, India, TNR + rabies vaccination of 24,989 dogs were carried out from 1994 to 2002: 65% of females sterilized, population declined by >28%; cases of human rabies declined to zero (Recce and Chawla 2006).

- In Jodpur, India, between 2005 to 2007: 61.8 – 86.5% of the free-roaming dog population was sterilized and vaccinated for rabies in the 5 surveyed areas. Population model using the results predicted that the dog population would decrease by 69% after 13-18 years (Totton 2010).

- In Jaipur, India: after implementation of TNR, the number of human dog bites was halved (despite population growth), which was attributed to both the fall of the size of dog population as well as the reduction of the maternal protective behavior of the sterilized bitches (Reece et al, 2013).

Locally in Hong Kong, voluntary animal welfare organizations have already demonstrated very good results with TNR for dogs in sites like Lamma Island and Lion Rock.

Moreover, AFCD also has already acknowledged the effectiveness of TNR as it has officially adopted TNR as a population control measure for stray cattle, wild monkeys and feral cats in Hong Kong. There is ***no*** reason why TNR should not be implemented for dogs in Hong Kong.

3. **Do we need the TNR Trial Scheme?**

Although the TNR Trial Scheme may serve some academic interest, it is, however, a $5.8M project, which we believe could be put into more productive use by actually supporting territory-wide TNR.

Scientifically, the outcomes (final size of dog population and complaints about nuisance) of the TNR Trial Scheme cannot be considered valid data to decide whether TNR works or not:

- Study sample size is very small (only ~10-30 dogs per site)
- The short study period (3 years) is not long enough to show up the true impact of TNR
- The study environment does not resemble real-life scenario - artificial food source (carers feeding the dogs) and veterinary care prolong life span
- Dogs causing complaints about nuisance are not removed
- There is no control-arm to the study nor historical control

In conclusion, the government should not wait for the TNR Trial Scheme results before officially adopting TNR as a stray dog management strategy. With the availability of new data from overseas studies (which was not present a few years ago when the Trial Scheme was discussed) that prove the effectiveness of TNR in dogs, the TNR Trial Scheme is clearly redundant.

4. Does TNR cause additional public nuisance?

TNR Fund HK still supports the government to continue to catch and remove stray dogs on receiving complaints, but only after verifying the complaint is reasonable and the nuisance is significant, and due consideration and respect given to both animals and humans. Utmost efforts should be made to rehome these dogs rather kill them.

Since TNR is as an additional, and not a replacement to the present strategy, it is quite impossible that there will be any increase of public nuisance. Quite the contrary, public nuisance will reduce with the decline of the stray dog population through TNR.

5. How should the government implement TNR?

For TNR to be most effective, coverage is important (desexing as many dogs as possible in as short a period as possible). Working hand-in-hand with volunteers and NGOs is highly recommended as this can quickly increase coverage and also can improve cost-effectiveness since these individuals have experience in locating, befriending and catching stray dogs.

We urge the government to consider the following action plans:

a. The government to locate sites which have potential for public nuisance, and also sites where complaints have been received for nuisance, and carry out TNR themselves at these sites.

b. Provide free desexing surgery, either at desexing centres (including mobile desexing clinic preferably) run by AFCD, or outsourced, for stray dogs brought in by members of the public, volunteers and NGOs.

   - This is the model of the TNR Fund HK, which fully sponsors the desexing surgery for eligible dogs at the 12 designated clinics. We have found this to work very well and require little administrative costs. Since our set up in Aug 2012, more than 800 dogs have been desexed.

c. Facilitate volunteers to catch and transport dogs for desexing:

   - Volunteers often do not have the necessary equipment to catch and transport the dogs. Lending trap and transport cages, and arranging transport to and from desexing centres will greatly help increase TNR coverage at little costs to the government.

d. Provide rabies vaccination and "TNR microchipping":

   - Present problem: Rabies vaccination is not available in HK other than from AFCD with the requirement of microchipping (an individual registered as the owner will bear the full liability). This makes it impossible for volunteers now to vaccinate the dogs against rabies at the time of desexing without taking up unfair liability of being a registered owner.

   - It is essential, for public health reasons, that AFCD help procure / supply rabies vaccines for TNR purpose (without formal microchipping).

   - Another microchipping system should be designed specifically for stray dogs for the purpose of recording desexing and rabies vaccination.

e. Encourage participation of volunteers and NGOs by alleviating concern about the legality of TNR:

   - The government should confirm that the temporary custody of a dog for desexing or short-term for essential veterinary care does not constitute "keeper" status (Cap 421 s2 & Cap 167 s2); which means that there will be no violation of Cap 421 s22 (abandonment of animals by a keeper), nor Cap 421 s21 (for not registering as the keeper of a dog).

Submitted by:

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References:

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