

10 November 2014

To: BILLS COMMITTEE ON VETERINARY SURGEONS REGISTRATION
(AMENDMENT) BILL 2014

SUBJECT:

Support of Proposals to Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (VSRO)
(Chapter 529)

Veterinary Surgeons Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014

1. On behalf of the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB), this is to express a strong support to the proposed amendment VSRO which includes the expansion and modification of the membership of the VSB including the addition of 3 lay persons and election of six veterinary surgeons, establishment of a panel of assessors which increases the complaint-handling capacity of the board, streamline the complaint-handling procedure by direct referral of complaint cases from preliminary investigation committee to the inquiry committee to conduct an inquiry, and stipulate the establishment and function of preliminary investigation committee. We uphold the proposal in particular to the election of six veterinary surgeons into VSB, and at the same time maintaining the ratio of veterinary members to non-veterinary members at 2:1 among the several main proposed amendments.

2. Since VSRO was enacted in 1997, there have been significant changes in circumstances. The number of registered veterinary surgeons has grown from around 150 to around 740. The number of complaints received by VSB in recent years has grown markedly, the complaints have also become more complex with the advancement of new clinical diagnostic and treatment options over the past decade. The proposed amendments to VSRO will expand the size of the board from 10 to 19 persons as to enhance its capacity and efficiency in dealing with complaints and performing its statutory functions.

3. The VSB is established under section 3 of VSRO. Currently under VSB there are Registration Committee, Accreditation Committee, Ethics Committee, Committee on Applications for Authorization to Advertise as and Profess to be a Veterinary Specialist, Committee on Veterinary Professional Standards, Committee on Continuing Professional Development in the Veterinary Profession and Committee on Lay Involvement in Veterinary Practices in addition to Preliminary Investigation Committee and Inquiry Committee. VSB and the committees carry the responsibilities to set professional standards for the profession, deal with registration matters, devise

measures to encourage the continued professional development of the registered veterinary surgeons, as well as deal with disciplinary matters of regulatory veterinary surgeons. In this connection, while it is important in having lay person in representing the needs and interest of veterinary services users, it is vital to maintain sufficient representation of the veterinary profession in the composition of the board in carrying out the duty of all the committees in order to offer advice in a professional respect for regulating the profession.

4. The current ratio of veterinary members to non-veterinary members at VSB is at 2:1 (excluding the Chairman). Under the proposal, this ratio will be remained the same. This is similar to the practice of a number of established local and overseas relevant regulatory bodies, such as the Dental Council of Hong Kong, the Nursing Council of Hong Kong, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) of the UK, the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Board of the USA and most of the Veterinary Surgeons Boards in Australia.

5. The proposal has been subjected to a two-month extensive public consultation in October 2012 on the proposals. During the consultation period, about 700 letters/emails together with links to the consultation documents were sent to relevant stakeholders, including all registered veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong, Hong Kong Veterinary Association, the China (Hong Kong) Veterinary Association, Hong Kong Veterinary Nurse Association, universities running animal-related courses and animal welfare organisations and related boards, kennel clubs and pet associations. In addition, three public consultation forums were held. Constructive views from different sectors were received through various channels. The comments received have indicated that the vast majority of respondents were in support of the proposals as set out in the consultation document.

6. The public and various stakeholders, especially the veterinary community, expressed strong support for the proposal to increase the membership of the VSB. VSB believed that the current proposal of maintain the ratio of veterinary members to non-veterinary members at 2:1 has struck a reasonable balance after taken into account of different views of various stakeholders and public.

7. VSB also expresses strong support in the proposal that six newly added members who are registered veterinary surgeons be elected by the registered veterinary surgeons in order to enhance the representativeness of the board and to encourage greater involvement of the veterinary profession in managing its own

affairs. The practice of having members elected by own profession is also in line with not only numbers of overseas veterinary regulatory bodies such as the RCVS of the UK and veterinary surgeons boards in Australia, but also in line with other professional regulatory bodies in Hong Kong such as the Medical Council of Hong Kong.

8. VSB believed that the current proposals have carefully balanced the veterinary profession's practical needs, the interests of persons who utilise veterinary services and those of the general public, which has met the interests of the community as a whole.