

**13 January 2015**

**To: LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS**

**c.c. Secretary for Food and Health**

**SUBJECT:**

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

**Veterinary Surgeons Registration (Amendment) Bill 2014**

**(LEGCO Reference: LS77/13-14)**

**Considering that**

1. Having served at the Veterinary Surgeons Board as Member and Chairman of the VSB Registration Committee over a period of 6 years with extensive involvement in a number of disciplinary hearings, I support the proposal by VSB to expand the VSB membership by adding three lay persons and six veterinary surgeons to the board so as to broaden the representation of the VSB and to enhance its capacity and efficiency in dealing with complaints and performing its statutory functions.
2. Under the proposal, the ratio of veterinary surgeons to non-veterinary members at VSB will be maintained at 2:1. This is in line with established local and overseas reference standards from the practice of relevant regulatory bodies, including the Medical Council of Hong Kong (the Medical Council), the Dental Council of Hong Kong (the Dental Council), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) of the UK, the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Board of the USA and the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland in Australia. Therefore the proposal that a greater proportion of the Committee should be members of the veterinary profession is justified. Similar to other professions with a specialised body of knowledge, veterinary surgeon is in an appropriate position to make professional judgment on the practice and conduct of their peers, provided that there are adequate checks and balances with the involvement of lay members to maintain the transparency, credibility and independence of the disciplinary procedures.
3. On the other hand, with the increasing global threats of zoonotic and new and emerging diseases, also coupled with food safety issues and increasing demand for animal products arising from increasing economic growth and human populations, the role of veterinary surgeons in the community has evolved and are central to the human-animal relationship. There is a greater need for veterinary surgeons to play a leading role in disease surveillance and to mitigate these risks at their source in animals, regardless of whether they threaten animals, humans or both. Thus, the demand for quality veterinary services

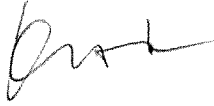
is not only for the care of companion animals, but for the prevention of zoonoses and advancement of public health as well.

4. 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 and to safeguard the interest of public as a whole.
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, animal welfare organisations and related boards, kennel clubs and pet associations, and other related organisations such as the Consumer Council. In addition, three public consultation forums were held. The Administration received 76 written submissions from individuals and organisations.
6. 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.
7. The Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (FSEH Panel) was briefed on the proposals set out in the consultation document on 13 November 2012. Deputations were invited to attend the Panel meeting and give their views. Their views have been taken into account when finalising the proposals. The FSEH Panel was consulted on the package of proposed amendments to the Ordinance on 8 April 2014. Panel Members were generally in support.

#### **Recommending that**

8. 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. VSB and Government have made reference to other regulatory bodies of relevant professions in Hong Kong and overseas. The local circumstances have also been duly taken into account and most importantly, the objective of protecting animal health and welfare. The proposed amendments to the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) ("VSRO") do not undermine the standard and availability of veterinary care which is currently provided in Hong Kong.

9. The current proposal has struck a reasonable balance in the ratio of veterinary surgeons to non-veterinary members. This is in line with the professional regulatory standards for local and overseas medical, dental and veterinary professionals.



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