

For discussion  
on 9 December 2014

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Strategy Adopted by the Government in Tackling the Issue of Stray Cattle**

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper briefs Members on the strategy adopted by the Government in tackling the issue of stray cattle, including management and control of the population of stray cattle, as well as addressing the nuisance caused to the public.

**BACKGROUND**

***Stray Cattle Population in Hong Kong***

2. Stray cattle were formerly owned and tended by farmers in Hong Kong before the 1970s when the agricultural industry was still thriving. Since the 1970s, however, with rapid urbanisation and economic developments, farmlands and cattle were abandoned by the farmers and the cattle were released to fend for themselves. They continue to reproduce and populate, becoming stray animals now roaming in different townships of Hong Kong. Based on a territory-wide population survey on stray cattle conducted in 2013, there were approximately 1 100 heads of stray cattle in Hong Kong. They are primarily distributed into four areas, namely Lantau Island, Sai Kung/Ma On Shan, Northeast New Territories and Central New Territories. Around 57% of the cattle population were considered as “rural/wild” herds and 43% were “town” herds. More than 70% of the cattle observed under the survey were adults, 23% were adolescents and juveniles, and 7% were calves. Males (49%) and females (51%) constituted similar proportions of the cattle population. Based on the results from the above survey, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

projects that the stray cattle population would stay more or less the same in 2014 as in 2013.

### ***Concerns about Stray Cattle***

3. Over the years, the issue of stray cattle has persistently been a matter of concern to the local community, particularly in the case of South Lantau and Sai Kung town where the stray cattle cause different degrees of nuisance to various aspects of people's lives. AFCD has been engaging the local communities, non-governmental organisations, district councils and rural committees, listening to their views and suggestions on issues related to the management of stray cattle.

4. In recent years, there are divergent views from different sectors of the community on how best stray cattle should be managed. To some quarters such as animal welfare groups and conservation groups, stray cattle are ecologically significant and should be kept in their original dwelling places and wild areas. They also take the view that stray cattle are part of the community concerned and should thus be protected and allowed to live freely within the community. Other quarters such as road users or residents and farmers being affected, however, take the view that stray cattle should be removed because they are causing obstruction to traffic, constitute a source of nuisance to environmental hygiene and to the daily lives of residents, and may damage the crops at times.

### **CATCH AND REMOVAL STRATEGY FOR HANDLING STRAY CATTLE**

5. The stray cattle found in Hong Kong are mainly brown cattle and buffalo. They are generally regarded as domestic animals and hence fall outside the definition of wild animals under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). Nor are they regarded in the international arena as endangered animals. In dealing with these stray cattle, AFCD has adopted a catch and removal strategy in accordance with the power conferred by the Pounds Ordinance (Cap. 168).

6. AFCD has devised a protocol for handling stray cattle that are causing nuisance to the public. Upon receipt of complaints related to nuisance, AFCD staff will first attempt to ascertain whether there is any owner or person responsible for the cattle. If the stray cattle is found to be owned, the owner / responsible person will be advised to keep the cattle under proper control, preventing it from wandering and causing damage to private property or nuisance to the public.

7. On the other hand, if no owner can be identified and the cattle appeared to be lost or causing damage or danger to the public, AFCD staff would conduct on-site inspection for catching and removing the stray cattle. The stray cattle would then be impounded at AFCD's New Territories North Animal Management Centre in accordance with section 2 of Cap. 168<sup>1</sup>, and the intention to sell the animal would be published in the Gazette in accordance with section 4 of Cap. 168<sup>2</sup> prior to the disposal of the cattle. Thereafter, the cattle may be disposed of by way of sale to a farmer through auction, or rehoming to a suitable leisure farm. If the cattle is not suitable for disposal by any of the above means, it may be subject to euthanasia in a humane way by a veterinary officer of AFCD.

8. For cattle that are reported to be injured, AFCD staff will first locate the animal. A veterinary officer of AFCD will assess the degree of injury of the cattle, and decide whether it should be subject to euthanasia or disposed of via auction or rehoming as mentioned in paragraph 7 above depending on the actual circumstances.

---

<sup>1</sup> Section 2 of Cap. 168 provides that “[a]ny animal found at large without any person having the charge thereof, and which in the opinion of any officer appears to have been lost or to be doing damage, may be seized by such officer and impounded in any convenient place, and may be detained therein until the owner thereof has paid to the Director [of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation] the reasonable expenses of impounding and keeping such animal, together with the pound fee.”

<sup>2</sup> Section 4(1) of Cap. 168 stipulates that “[i]f the said expenses and pound fee be not paid within 3 days after such impounding, notice of the intention to sell the animal shall be published in the Gazette.” Section 4(2) of Cap. 168 stipulates that “...If the animal is unsaleable, or if in the opinion of the Director [of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation] it is an unsaleable animal, it may be destroyed or otherwise disposed of as he may direct.”

## **ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO STRENGTH THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

9. The catch and removal strategy adopted by AFCD has hitherto helped prevent the existing cattle population from surging in number, and has an immediate and positive impact on the resolution of the related complaints. In recent years, in response to the calls from society for better management of the stray cattle population in the long term, AFCD has adopted a multi-pronged approach to better manage the stray cattle population taking into account the characteristics and problems in different areas in the territory. To facilitate the work on this front, AFCD set up in 2011 a dedicated Cattle Management Team to carry out a series of management programmes for stray cattle.

### ***The “Capture-Sterilise-Relocate” (CSR) Programme***

10. Apart from the catch and removal strategy, AFCD has introduced the “Capture-Sterilise-Relocate” (CSR) programme, under which AFCD officers would actively capture stray cattle, have the cattle sterilised and ear-tagged for identification, and then relocate them to a more remote location in the same district.

11. The cattle involved in the CSR programme are those frequently found to have caused obstruction to traffic and have been wandering on roads. Prior to the relocation of any stray cattle, AFCD will conduct surveillance and assessment to ensure that they forage properly and are in good health condition.

12. Under the CSR programme, selected cattle would be fitted with collars with global positioning system (GPS) devices to allow AFCD to track their movements after relocation and study their movement patterns in unfamiliar areas. Besides, AFCD officers conduct weekly on-site inspections of the places to which the cattle are relocated. From late 2011 to September 2014, AFCD has captured a total of 509 stray brown cattle (including those repeatedly captured) under the CSR programme. Preliminary findings reveal that most of the relocated cattle are clinically healthy. AFCD will continue to closely monitor the well-being of these cattle.

***The “Capture-Sterilisation-Translocation” (CST) pilot scheme under the CSR Programme***

13. In implementing the CSR programme, it has been found that some cattle would find their way back to the town centre or roads of the same district in a matter of days or weeks after relocation, and become a source of nuisance to residents and road users again. Some cattle have been captured repeatedly for four to five times after being sterilised and relocated. This shows that the current choice of relocation paths and sites might not be entirely effective in abating the nuisance caused by stray cattle to residents or reducing the danger to road users and themselves.

14. In autumn 2013, AFCD reckoned that the number of stray cattle in Sai Kung was close to saturation. This, coupled with the increasing number of construction projects in the district, resulted in the availability of fewer dwelling places for cattle. As a result, more cattle are lingering on roads, significantly affecting the traffic. To reduce traffic congestion caused by stray cattle and minimise the number of major traffic accidents involving them, AFCD, with reference to the suggestion made by an ecological consultant commissioned for the population survey, launched in November 2013 a pilot scheme under the CSR programme whereby some of the stray cattle repeatedly captured on roads are relocated to a farther away location in another district (“Capture-Sterilisation-Translocation” (CST) pilot scheme).

15. Since the launch of the CST pilot scheme in November 2013, AFCD has captured a total of 50 cattle (46 young and adult cattle as well as four calves accompanying their mothers). Of these cattle, 29 have been relocated from Sai Kung to Shek Pik Reservoir on Lantau, and 21 from South Lantau to Sai Kung High Island Reservoir. According to the follow-up investigations by the AFCD, only two translocated cattle were found on roads in the vicinity of the new residing area during the monitoring period. Most of the cattle under the CST pilot scheme are still dwelling in the areas hitherto anticipated. The scheme has proved to be serving the purpose of easing the traffic congestion problem caused by stray cattle in the areas concerned.

16. According to available data and observations from the past year, the translocated cattle under the CST pilot scheme have been mostly in good condition without major health problems. No specific infectious diseases

have been found to be present in both groups of cattle translocated to Lantau and Sai Kung. Besides, the CST pilot scheme has been found generally effective throughout the past year in avoiding the cattle from moving back to townships and roads, thereby reducing the nuisance and risk of traffic accidents caused by them.

17. Whilst the initial results of the CST pilot scheme have been satisfactory, more information and data, such as the herd structure and movement of stray cattle, are required before we are in a position to fully evaluate the overall effectiveness of the CST concept. Based on the experience gathered from the pilot scheme, the substantive challenges we face when planning and implementing the CST concept lie in whether or not suitable sites and/or support from the local community are available.

## **WAY FORWARD**

18. The existing strategy adopted by the Government in tackling the issues of stray cattle as set out in the above paragraphs has proved to be generally effective. AFCD will continue to engage stakeholders and take into account their views on matters relating to the management of stray cattle. On a territory-wide level, we will keep up our efforts on the catch and removal approach as well as the CSR programme, with emphasis on the sterilisation of the cattle involved. The primary aim is to keep the stray cattle population under control and tackle the nuisances caused to the public, especially local residents and road users. Consideration will be given to adopting the CST approach in specific districts where appropriate.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

19. Members are invited to note the content of this paper. Comments on the strategy currently adopted by the Government in tackling the issues associated with stray cattle will be welcome.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
December 2014**