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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 December 2014

Management of stray cattle

Purpose

This paper provides background information on issues relating to the management of stray cattle and highlights major views expressed by members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel").

Background

2. 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. According to a territory-wide population survey on stray cattle conducted by the Administration in 2012, there were around 1 200 stray cattle in the rural areas of Hong Kong. The main nuisances associated with stray cattle are their excrement and disturbance to traffic when they stray onto public roads. Cattle sometimes get trapped in water catchment areas or are injured by man-made objects.

3. Since local stray cattle (including brown cattle and buffalo) are not wild animals, they fall outside the ambit of the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). Nor are they regarded in the international arena as endangered animals. That being the case, upon receipt of complaints of nuisance caused by stray cattle in the past, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") used to act on them by deploying officers to conduct on-site inspection for catching and removing the stray cattle in accordance with the power conferred by the Pounds Ordinance (Cap. 168). At present, if no owner can be identified, AFCD will capture the cattle and arrange

it to be sold to a farmer, or rehomed to a suitable farm or slaughtered if the animal is suitable to enter the food chain. Diseased or injured cattle will be euthanized.

4. To enhance the management of stray cattle, AFCD formulated in late 2010 a long-term work plan with a view to striking a balance between minimizing the nuisance to the daily lives of residents and protecting the welfare of the cattle. Without compromising the welfare of the cattle, AFCD has adopted a multi-pronged approach to control and reduce the number of stray cattle so as to minimize the nuisance caused to the community and the potential danger posed to road users and the cattle themselves.

5. In late 2011, AFCD set up the dedicated Cattle Management Team to co-ordinate the planning and implementation of measures for the management of stray cattle in Hong Kong. Under one of the management plans, AFCD officers would actively capture stray cattle, have the cattle sterilized and ear-tagged for identification, and then relocate them to a more remote location in the same district (i.e. the "Capture-Sterilize-Relocate" ("CSR") programme).

Deliberations of the Panel

6. When discussing the subject of the proposed measures to further enhance animal welfare, members were advised that cattle could be classified into two types, namely buffaloes and brown cattle. As buffaloes were likely to be more aggressive when compared to brown cattle and would pose potential threat to human beings, regulatory measure would be taken against them. Stray cattle caught by AFCD would be handled in accordance with statutory procedure. A notice would be published in the Gazette for the owners to reclaim them. If the captured cattle remained unclaimed within seven days of the notice, arrangement would be made for the cattle to be auctioned or adopted. The cattle sold would be slaughtered by the cattle traders if they were considered healthy and suitable for human consumption. To ensure that the adopted cattle were properly treated, inspection/visit to the adopters would be conducted.

7. An enquiry was raised about whether consideration would be given to locating some areas to keep the stray cattle. The Administration advised that AFCD had relocated stray cattle from Sai Kung to some remote areas where the cattle would not cause much nuisance to the public. Some buffaloes captured on Lantau Island had been moved to the wetland to facilitate bird foraging by turning over the soil.

Recent development

8. According to the Administration, AFCD, in implementing the CSR programme, found that many 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 the residents and road users again. Having considered the professional advice from the ecological consultant and made reference to overseas practice, AFCD commenced the "Capture-Sterilization-Translocation" pilot scheme ("the pilot scheme") under the CSR programme in November 2013 whereby some of the stray cattle repeatedly captured on roads or in town areas were relocated to a farther away location in another district. The objective of the pilot scheme was to assess whether cross-district translocation of feral cattle would be an effective measure for reducing the likelihood of them causing nuisance and potential danger to the residents and road users while at the same time it would not impose greater risk of injury or death to the cattle. Under the pilot scheme, the translocation was focused on the two major problematic areas, i.e. Sai Kung and South Lantau. Cattle were translocated from Sai Kung to South Lantau and vice versa.

9. In its reply to Hon LEUNG Che-cheung's written question raised at the Council meeting of 26 March 2014, the Administration advised that prior to the relocation of any stray cattle, AFCD would conduct surveillance and assessment to ensure that they foraged properly and were in good health condition. As calves could not forage on their own, AFCD would not separate them from their mothers. The cattle involved in the pilot scheme were those frequently found to have caused obstruction to traffic and had been wandering on roads. AFCD would conduct a review of the pilot scheme in around mid-2014 to evaluate the impact of the scheme on the community and the health conditions of the cattle, as well as the effectiveness of the scheme.

10. The Administration will brief the Panel on the strategy adopted by the Government in tackling the issue of stray cattle at the meeting on 9 December 2014.

Relevant papers

11. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Relevant papers on the control and management of stray cattle

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	14.6.2011 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	3.7.2013	Written question raised by Hon WONG Kwok-hing
Legislative Council	26.3.2014	Written question raised by Hon LEUNG Chi-cheung

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