

**For discussion
on 24 April 2017**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

Management of stray animals

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on the policy and measures adopted by the Government on the management of stray animals.

POLICY ON STRAY ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

2. Our policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist in a harmonious way in Hong Kong. In achieving this, we need to strike a balance between the well-being of people, and the welfare of animals in a pragmatic way. When safeguarding animal welfare, we also take appropriate measures in line with the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to properly deal with the possible nuisance and public health problems caused by animals, especially the stray ones, with a view to effectively preventing the outbreak of animal transmitted diseases and safeguarding public hygiene and safety in Hong Kong.

GENERAL MEASURES ON STRAY ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

Strengthening public education on responsible pet ownership

3. As pointed out by the OIE, the promotion of responsible pet ownership can significantly reduce the number of stray dogs and the incidence of zoonotic diseases. To this end, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been actively promoting the serious responsibility and commitment that go with pet keeping, and educating the public how to be a responsible pet owner. Details were set out in LC Paper No. CB(2)813/16-17(01) discussed by the Subcommittee at the meeting on 21 February 2017.

Identification and registration of dogs

4. Under the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A), dogs aged over five months shall be licensed, microchipped and vaccinated against rabies. Apart from preventing and controlling the spread of rabies more effectively, the requirement may also help owners locate their dogs that have gone lost, thereby reducing the possibility of these dogs going astray. According to the survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2011, around 82% of the dogs in Hong Kong were vaccinated, licensed and microchipped.

Catch and Removal Approach

5. AFCD adopts a catch and removal approach that aims at reducing the nuisance at source and controlling the population of stray animals. Upon receipt of complaints against stray animals, AFCD will try to locate and catch the animals, which will be put in one of the four Animal Management Centres (AMCs) of AFCD. AMCs will try to contact the owner of animals implanted with microchip based on the information thereon. In general, these animals will stay in AMCs temporarily for about 10 to 20 days. Those without a microchip will be put in AMCs for at least four days, pending reclaim by their owners.

6. Animals left unclaimed and in good health and assessed by a veterinary surgeon as having a gentle temperament and suitable for adoption are transferred to the animal welfare organisations (AWOs) for adoption by members of the public. In parallel, AFCD also actively encourages members of the public to adopt stray animals (more details on rehoming of animals are set out in paragraph 8 below).

7. Only animals that remain unclaimed or assessed as not suitable for adoption due to health or temperament will be euthanised. A number of international animal organisations, including the OIE, agree that in situations where the number of stray dogs caught remain high or the dogs are not fit for adoption despite the deployment of various stray dog management measures, euthanasia would be an appropriate and humane solution¹.

¹ In 2007, the World Society for Protection of Animals and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals International published a report on the controlling method of stray cats and dogs in around 30 European countries. The report pointed out that these countries had to use euthanasia

Enhancing rehoming and neutering services

8. AFCD has been working in close collaboration with various AWOs in promoting rehoming, neutering and proper management of animals, and providing rehoming services for animals. AFCD provides financial support to these AWOs, covering the cost of neutering service for animals rehomed, and for the establishment and improvement of animal rehoming centres which provide temporary shelters for stray animals awaiting rehoming. Currently, 15 AWOs are partnering with AFCD in this respect.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEASURES

9. Persistent application of the above-mentioned measures is bearing fruit in controlling the stray animal population and in encouraging adoption. In the past five years, the number of stray dogs and cats caught by AFCD has decreased by 59% and 71% respectively, while the number of dogs and cats euthanised has dropped by 68% and 77% respectively. The percentage of dogs and cats provided by AFCD to AWOs for rehoming has increased by 6.7% and 8.9% respectively. We will continue to implement and enhance the measures on this front with a view to further reducing the stray animal population.

“Trap-Neuter-Return” (TNR) Trial Programme for Stray Dogs

Background

10. In addition to the general measures outlined above, we are also implementing the TNR trial programme, the approach of which was introduced to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene in January 2014 (LC Paper No. CB(2)621/13-14(03)).

to handle animals with diseases and injuries, and to control the number of stray animals. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Japan and Singapore, etc. have also adopted euthanasia in handling stray animals. In fact, several internationally renowned animal welfare organisations support the use of euthanasia in handling stray animals. According to the Animal Health Code issued by the OIE (http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre_aw_stray_dog.htm), when various stray dog management measures have been deployed, euthanasia of stray dogs caught should be an effective way of controlling their population.

11. In short, under TNR, stray dogs are caught, neutered and then returned to their original habitat. Proponents believe that, through TNR, the stray dog population will gradually decline over time in keeping with death by natural causes, and thus may be controlled without resorting to euthanasia. It is however noted that so far there is a lack of scientific study in other places to prove the effectiveness of TNR in reducing stray dog population.

12. The TNR trial programme was launched in January 2015 for a period of three years to assess the effectiveness of TNR in reducing stray dog population and associated nuisance in designated trial sites in Hong Kong. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and the Society for Abandoned Animals (SAA), acting as the Programme Coordinators (PCs), implement the programme in the trial sites in Cheung Chau and Tai Tong, Yuen Long respectively. The PCs recruit carers to feed and catch stray dogs within the trial sites. Dogs caught will undergo temperament assessment. Aggressive dogs or dogs with serious disease will not be returned to the trial site. Dogs selected for the programme will be dewormed, neutered, microchipped and given anti-rabies vaccination and other vaccines for the control of major infectious diseases of dog in Hong Kong.

13. The following three performance targets have been set out in the protocol for the trial programme:

- (a) catching at least 80% of stray dogs in the trial sites during the first six months of the programme;
- (b) achieving an average of 10% annual decrease in the population of stray dogs in the trial sites during the trial period; and
- (c) complaints received should be matching with, or lower than, the territory-wide average during the trial period.

Initial findings

14. AFCD has commissioned an independent consultant to monitor the progress and assess the effectiveness of the trial programme. The Consultant's preliminary findings, covering the first two years of the trial period (i.e. January 2015 –January 2017), showed that it took the two

PCs 10 to 11 months to achieve the target of neutering over 80% of the stray dogs in their respective trial sites (i.e. four to five months longer than expected) as it was difficult to capture some of the dogs that were more alert to the trap. This may have left a larger window for reproduction by stray dogs in the sites during the initial period of the study².

15. The Consultant has been observing the numbers of stray dogs in the trial sites on a monthly basis. It is noted that the number of dogs recorded fluctuated from month to month. The wide range in counts may be due to a number of reasons including weather and seasonal effect, extra food supplies during festive periods and movement of dogs in and out of the areas during the study period, etc. Based on the observation so far, the Consultant is of the view that there is no clear trend of change in the dog population over the first two years of the trial programme. The number of dogs recorded by the Consultant in the trial sites in Cheung Chau and Tai Tong from February 2015 to January 2017 is summarised in **Annexes A** and **B** respectively.

16. The number of stray dog complaints was found to have increased in the Cheung Chau trial site but decreased in the Tai Tong trial site (see the table below).

Number of Complaints Received Annually		
	Cheung Chau	Tai Tong
Feb 2014 to Jan 2015 (i.e. before the commencement of the study)	19	14
Feb 2015 to Jan 2016	39	8
Feb 2016 to Jan 2017	27	1

Preliminary Observations

17. The stray dog population in the two trial sites did not show a trend of reduction. This might be due to-

- (a) difficulty in recording accurately the number of dogs in the sites;
- (b) new dogs entering the areas;

² 22 puppies were found in the Cheung Chau site and were rehomed by AWOs.

- (c) the number of dogs died of natural cause is small during the relatively short period of study when compared to the average life span of dogs (around 10-12 years for pet dogs), as well as the improved health condition of stray dogs under the caring of and medical treatment given by the PCs. Moreover, the number of stray dog in the Cheung Chau site may have even increased if the new puppies found in that site (footnote 2 refers) were not rehomed by the concerned PC.

18. The complaint numbers due to stray dogs could be subject to a number of factors and might not necessarily be related to TNR. For instance, according to the Consultant and PCs, the increase in complaints in the Cheung Chau trial site might be a result of increased amount of nuisance to the nearby residential area caused by dogs attracted to the area by the dog food supplied by the concerned PC and other people in the vicinity. The decrease in complaints in the Tai Tong trial site, on the other hand, might be a result of relocation of some dogs to a nearby shelter by the concerned PC from time to time having regard to the health condition of the dogs during the study period.

19. The three-year trial programme will be completed in 2018. It is premature to draw any conclusion at this stage as the effectiveness of the programme will need to be further assessed when more data is available. AFCD will closely monitor the progress and consider the way forward upon reviewing the Consultant's assessment after the trial programme is completed.

ADVICE SOUGHT

20. Members are invited to note the policy and measures on the management of stray animals.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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Table 1 Summary of population surveys in the Cheung Chau trial site from February 2015 to January 2017

	Feb 2015	Mar 2015	Apr 2015	May 2015	Jun 2015	July 2015	Aug 2015	Sep 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016
Total no. of dogs recorded*	20	22	9	6	31	30	32	25	34	36	19	22
Total no. of dogs for TNR study**	14	18	6	6	26	24	28	18	27	29	17	18
No. of new dogs***	NA	NA	2	2	6	0	0	2	1	5	0	1
Cumulative no. of neutered and returned dogs	0	3	6	13	24	25	31	34	37	43	50	60

Table 1 (continued)

	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016	Nov 2016	Dec 2016	Jan 2017
Total no. of dogs recorded*	44	50	52	42	43	36	45	41	49	33	38	46
Total no. of dogs for TNR study**	37	42	41	35	35	31	37	33	41	25	30	38
No. of new dogs***	12	5	3	0	0	1	1	0	5	0	0	5
Cumulative no. of neutered and returned dogs	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	61	64	64	64	64

Remarks:

*Total no. of dogs recorded = number of dogs seen during the monthly survey

**Total no. of dogs for TNR study: Total no. of dogs recorded minus number of dogs previously identified as neutered before the trial commenced or as owned dog (i.e. dog found with microchip) during the study

***No. of new dogs: number of dogs that had not appeared in previous surveys

Table 2 Total number of dogs recorded in the Tai Tong trial site from February 2015 to January 2017

	Feb 2015	Mar 2015	Apr 2015	May 2015	Jun 2015	Jul 2015	Aug 2015	Sep 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015	Jan 2016
Total no. of dogs recorded*	12	26	17	31	26	24	26	26	24	22	26	23
Total no. of dogs for TNR study**	12	22	15	27	24	21	24	24	22	20	24	21
No. of new dogs***	2	3	0	4	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	2
Cumulative no. of neutered and returned dogs	2	9	14	14	15	15	23	24	37	37	37	37

Table 2 (continued)

	Feb 2016	Mar 2016	Apr 2016	May 2016	Jun 2016	Jul 2016	Aug 2016	Sep 2016	Oct 2016	Nov 2016	Dec 2016	Jan 2017
Total no. of dogs recorded*	27	25	20	26	30	23	35	35	34	27	27	30
Total no. of dogs for TNR study**	25	23	18	24	28	21	33	33	32	25	25	28
No. of new dogs***	2	1	0	0	1	1	5	0	0	0	0	0
Cumulative no. of neutered and returned dogs	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37	37

Remarks:

**Total no. of dogs recorded: number of dogs seen during the monthly survey*

***Total no. of dogs for TNR study: Total no. of dogs recorded minus number of dogs previously identified as neutered before the trial commenced or as owned dog (i.e. dog found with microchip) during the study*

****No. of new dogs: number of dogs that had not appeared in previous surveys*