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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 8 May 2018**

"Trap-Neuter-Return" trial programme for stray dogs

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the "Trap-Neuter-Return" ("TNR") trial programme for stray dogs, and summarizes major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") and two subcommittees on policy issues formed under the Panel in the Fifth and Sixth Legislative Council ("LegCo") on the subject.

Background

2. According to the Administration, its policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist in a harmonious way in Hong Kong. In achieving this, the Administration aims to strike a balance between the well-being of people and the welfare of animals in a pragmatic way. When safeguarding animal welfare, the Administration is mindful of the fact that animals, especially stray ones, may be a source of nuisances to members of the public. In order to address the possible nuisances at source and to control public health problems caused by stray animals, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") has put in place a series of measures in line with the recommendations of the World Organisation for Animal Health¹ ("OIE") for the

¹ OIE is an inter-governmental organization responsible for improving animal health worldwide, with 180 member countries. OIE promulgates standards and practices for better protection of animal health and promotion of animal welfare. Since 2004, OIE has been developing animal welfare standards for inclusion in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code ("the Code"). In Article 7.7.6 of the Code, OIE sets out a number of control measures for stray and feral dogs which can be considered after taking into account the local circumstances and context.

management of stray animals, with a view to effectively preventing the outbreak of animal-transmitted diseases and safeguarding public hygiene and safety in Hong Kong.

The TNR trial programme for stray dogs

3. In recent years, some animal welfare organizations ("AWOs") advocate the TNR concept to gradually reduce stray dog population. It is believed that TNR can slow down the continuous reproduction of stray dogs through neutering them before returning them to their habitats to continue their lives and with the death of stray dogs by natural causes over time, their population will gradually decline. In this way, the number of stray dogs can be controlled without resorting to euthanasia. As neutered dogs are generally less aggressive, the nuisance caused by them may also subside.

4. With a view to assessing the effectiveness of TNR in Hong Kong, AFCD has lent support to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("SPCA") and the Society for Abandoned Animals ("SAA") in implementing a three-year TNR trial programme for stray dogs starting from January 2015 in designated sites in Cheung Chau and Tai Tong, Yuen Long ("the trial sites"). SPCA and SAA, acting as the Programme Coordinators, have recruited 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 sites. Dogs selected for the TNR trial 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.

5. AFCD has commissioned an independent consultant to monitor the progress and assess the effectiveness of the TNR trial programme with reference to the performance targets set out in the protocol for the trial programme, including:

- (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.

Members' concerns

6. The major views and concerns of Panel and Subcommittee members are summarized below.

Scale and coverage of the TNR trial programme

7. There was a consensus view that the TNR trial programme should be extended to other districts. Noting that several District Councils ("DCs") did not support the TNR trial programme when the Administration conducted a consultation exercise on the programme in 2007, members urged the Administration to endeavor to lobby for the support of DCs.

8. According to the Administration, the TNR trial programme would be completed in 2018. The independent consultant commissioned by AFCD to monitor the progress and assess the effectiveness of the trial programme had advised that there was no clear trend of change in the dog population over the first two years of the trial programme. As the three-year TNR trial programme was in progress and its effectiveness would need to be further assessed when more data were available, it was premature to draw any conclusion. AFCD would consider the way forward upon reviewing the consultant's assessment after the trial programme was completed. The Administration stressed that it was open-minded about introducing the trial programme in other districts and the current trial programme would provide useful information for considering the way forward.

Support to AWOs operating voluntary TNR programmes

9. Noting that some AWOs had successful experience in operating voluntary TNR programmes in some districts with their own limited resources, some members were concerned about the support that the Administration could provide to these AWOs. These members suggested that the Administration should consider cooperating with DCs and AWOs to extend the TNR trial programme across the territory.

10. The Administration advised that the statistical and empirical data collected in the voluntary TNR programmes operated by some AWOs were not sufficient to support the implementation of a territory-wide TNR programme. Successful results of the voluntary TNR programmes in certain sites might not be readily applicable to other places in Hong Kong, having regard to the differences in places in terms of dog population dynamics, human population densities, traffic conditions, public health, as well as animal health and welfare concerns. The trial programme pioneered by SPCA and SAA would be able to provide reference for consideration of whether TNR could effectively tackle the problems posed by stray dogs and associated nuisances in different districts.

The Administration reassured members that it would consider the way forward after completion of the trial programme taking into account the outcome of the programme.

11. The Administration further advised that AFCD had been working in close collaboration with various AWOs in promoting animal welfare and better animal management. The Administration had been providing financial support to non-profit-making AWOs to support their work, such as for establishing animal adoption centres and education resources centres, renovating adoption centre facilities and building kennels, providing neutering and medical services to animals (including those pending re-homing), and organizing educational and publicity programmes for promoting adoption service and disseminating the message of responsible pet ownership. In 2017-2018, AFCD had set aside \$1.5 million for application by AWOs.

Implementation of the TNR trial programme

12. Some members were concerned that the provisions of certain Ordinances such as the Pleasure Grounds Regulation (Cap. 132BC) and the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421) which restricted the feeding of animals were impeding the implementation of voluntary TNR programmes conducted by AWOs. According to the Administration, the purpose of restricting the feeding of animals under section 20 of Cap. 421 was to discourage the congregation of animals and gathering of stray dogs so as to control the spreading of rabies disease in Hong Kong. To clear way for the implementation of the TNR trial programme, the Administration had made certain legislative exemption and would make appropriate arrangements if the TNR programme was to be extended to other districts in future.

Latest development

13. The three-year TNR trial programme was completed in early 2018. The Administration plans to brief members on the outcome of the trial programme at the Panel meeting on 8 May 2018.

Relevant papers

14. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on the "Trap-Neuter-Return"
trial programme for stray dogs**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	14.1.2014 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals	---	<u>Report of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Animal Welfare and Cruelty to Animals (LC Paper No. CB(2)1704/15-16)</u>
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights	---	<u>Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights (LC Paper No. CB(2)689/17-18)</u>
Legislative Council	11.4.2018	<u>Oral question raised by Hon CHU Hoi-dick on "Protection of the welfare of rural animals affected by development projects"</u>