



Society for the Prevention
of Cruelty to Animals (HK)
香港愛護動物協會

5 Wan Shing Street
Wanchai, Hong Kong
香港灣仔連盛街五號
Tel/電話：(852) 2802 0501
Fax/傳真：(852) 2802 7229
<http://www.sPCA.org.hk>

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Hon Chui Hoi-dick
Chairman

Subcommittee to Follow Up the Issues Related to the Wang Chau Development Project
Legislative Council
Hong Kong

Dear Chairman and members,

Arrangements for dealing with animals affected by the Wang Chau Development Project
and relevant policy issues - a human and animal friendly approach

The SPCA HK has long advocated for the better treatment of animals and for better consideration of the needs of companion animals and their owners. As such it is vital that a more human and animal friendly approach is adopted by the administration with regards to the displacement of animal owners and their animals during development projects.

Where families have to be displaced and are to be relocated then the whole family unit and structure should be considered and maintained. Accommodation that is offered should meet the needs of the families including accommodating much beloved pets.

Displaced parties should be able to take their pets with them into their new accommodation and the government should work across departments and bureaus to ensure this happens and that any barriers relating to policy are removed. Such an approach is in line with the HK SAR's Government's stated commitment to be more animal friendly. Under no circumstances should owners be forced to give up their companion animals due to outdated policies.

Much of the work of the SPCA over many years has been on responsible pet ownership – educating Hong Kong on this matter - encouraging a life-long commitment to companion

animals and introducing measures aimed at reducing animal abandonment. Lately the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has also supported such efforts with their own focused campaigns.

The current approach to the proposed development in Wang Chau being considered by the Development Bureau and the policy barriers currently in place under the Housing Authority with regards to dog ownership in public housing are at odds with the Government's commitment to an animal friendly approach.

The positive impact of the human-animal bond is now well documented with companion animals contributing to the physical and mental wellbeing of people across all age groups. At what is likely to be a highly stressful time for Wang Chau residents being relocated, the forced removal of a family pet (a major disruption of the family unit) will cause additional significant emotional distress.

If the current approach to relocating residents continues and the Housing Authority remains unmoved and inconsiderate in its policy approach to allowing displaced families to be re-housed with their pets the likely result will be that significant numbers of animals being given up and abandoned, these will then need to be dealt with and cared for. This will result in a serious animal welfare issue with the welfare of the displaced animals being negatively impacted. It will also create an unnecessary burden for AFCD and animal welfare NGOs who may have to step in to try to help.

In general the keeping of pets in public rental housing is not banned. Pet keeping (including keeping dogs) is allowed in public rental housing. General pet keeping (de-sexed cats and small household pets) does not need special permission or pre-registration however dog keeping needs the permission in writing from the estate management.

As dog-keeping **is** currently possible in public rental housing there are also rules and regulations already in place to accommodate this and to help with dog management. As such it is possible for displaced Wang Chau residents to move with their animals into public rental housing with the support of the Housing Authority.

The SPCA recommends the following with specific reference to the Wang Chau development proposal:

- Any displaced families be offered accommodation that allows them to move with their animals

- The Housing Authority adopts a human and animal friendly position, giving specific permission for the displaced Wang Chau residents to keep their pets if they move into housing under their control
- The Housing Authority allows the ‘grandfathering’ of dogs already being kept by Wang Chau residents who may have to move into PRH, providing the residents with the required written permissions

The SPCA opposes any approach that forces displaced residents to abandon their animals.

We understand that there has been some discussion that the animals could be taken on by the AFCD animal management centres, that existing animal rescue organisations could take up the responsibility of helping or that a new animal shelter may be specifically built to house the displaced animals.

In the first instance these solutions are not required as the problem can be avoided at the outset by supporting and working with the displaced residents, placing them in accommodation that allows pet-keeping and giving them the relevant permissions that allow them to keep their beloved pets with them.

Secondly these approaches are not in the best interests of the owners or the animals and will negatively impact their welfare and indeed is neither a suitable nor a sustainable solution. The welfare of companion animals is best ensured when they remain in their original, loving family unit.

In general we have the following comments on policy, town planning, development and housing:

The SPCA has long advocated a more cohesive and coordinated approach to policy and infrastructure development to assist with making Hong Kong as “animal-friendly” as possible. A holistic approach to animal welfare is needed - meaning that legislation, policies and programmes / works of different departments should take into consideration any impact (direct or indirect) these may have on the welfare of animals.

With specific reference to development and housing we note that interest in pet and dog keeping in Hong Kong continues to increase and that the trend is likely to continue.

In the development of the Government's Long Term Housing Strategy it is imperative that pet owners (including dog owners) are accommodated and their needs met alongside those of non-pet owners.

- Animal welfare (and the needs of owners and animals) must be considered in the development of Hong Kong's Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030.
- Animal welfare needs to be considered - animal friendliness should be included in planning, design and implementation.

With respect to the Housing Authority's current policy and approach to keeping dogs in public rental housing we believe that this policy fundamentally undermines a dog (pet) owner's ability to meet standards set, endorsed and expected by different government departments and society at large in terms of responsible pet ownership.

Often people are 'forced' to abandon their dogs when they eventually get offered public housing as currently permission to keep a dog is only given in exceptional cases. Sometimes owners may try to keep their dogs without permission but may eventually be forced to give them up when faced with the threat of eviction.

The current policy also disenfranchises a significant proportion of Hong Kong's population – denying them the choice of being able to benefit from and enjoy the companionship of dogs should they wish to.

Consequently the SPCA recommends:

- The Housing Authority's policy and the rules on pet keeping (including dogs) be reviewed and adjusted to reflect a more positive approach to pet ownership, providing a framework for a fair and enlightened policy that permits all public housing tenants the option of keeping a dog.
- Other subsidised housing's (such as subsidised flats and Housing Society accommodation) restrictive approach to pet ownership, should also similarly change

and that

- Legislative barriers or policy positions that could hinder implementing the above recommendations should be reviewed and removed.

For over a hundred years, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals HK has advocated for animals. We have a deep understanding of the many challenges faced by owners and companion animals living in Hong Kong.

We also see first-hand how other animals in Hong Kong suffer due to a variety of factors, including due to inadequate or no consideration of the potential impact on animals during the planning and implementation of development projects as well as due to a lack of cross bureau and department collaboration and conflicting policies.

We would be delighted to assist and give further input both specifically with respect to the Wang Chau Development project but also in general with respect developing a more animal friendly approach to planning and development (including housing) in Hong Kong.

Should you have any enquiries in relation to this submission please do not hesitate to contact us on 22325563 or by email c/o: fiona.woodhouse@spca.org.hk.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Fiona Woodhouse

(Electronically)

BA. Hons. Vet MB. MVPHMgt

Deputy Director (Welfare)

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