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30 November 1999

**Re: Resolution under Section 3 of the Dogs & Cats Ordinance (Cap. 167) and Dogs & Cats (Amendment) Ordinance 1997 (97 of 1997) (Commencement) Notice 1999.**

Dear Sir,

I am writing regarding the above resolution and in respect of the meeting at the Legco building on the 16 November 1999. Specifically my concerns are with regard to the proposed legislation regarding 'large dogs', ie over 20kgs. My previous letters to the Legco on this matter are documented and all Legco members on the sub-committee should have copies in their possession along with articles from other interested parties.

It is quite clear from the meeting on 16 November that there is no justification for the category of dogs over 20 kgs ('large dogs') to require to be muzzled in indoor public places. The Agriculture and Fisheries Department has never provided any facts to justify this. The statistics they provided previously, whilst appearing alarming at first glance, reveal with closer examination that only a minute percentage of the total dog bites, serious or otherwise, are caused by properly licensed & owned 'large' dogs.

Dr Sims of Agriculture and Fisheries Department stated at the December 6 meeting that "licensing is not the issue, ownership is." Existing laws if enforced properly, can deal perfectly adequately with irresponsible ownership. **It would seem then that the main objective of the proposed muzzling of large dogs etc is merely a 'catch-all' measure and is about apportioning blame rather than promoting responsible ownership and trying to solve the real problem.**

The Agriculture and Fisheries Department Officials recognize that large dogs require frequent exercise, (preferably daily). I note that Country Parks are excluded from the proposed leash laws. What about all the other hills, beaches and open areas that are available to the public but void of people, especially during the week? Does this mean that owners will not be allowed to let their 'large' dogs off the leash in such places? This would be absurd. Once again I reiterate comments from previous correspondence. **Discriminatory measures against dogs based purely on weight are arbitrary, unjustified, and unnecessary. Current legislation deals with the responsibility of dog control already and these proposals based on weight will not solve the problem. Size and weight do not determine aggressive behaviour in dogs or any other animal.** These measurements are irrelevant. The statistics provided by Agriculture and Fisheries Department in attempting to justify their proposals are misleading. Were the District Councils aware of the *real facts* before they offered their support to the proposals? Muzzling addresses the symptoms and not the problem.

I note dogs that pass a 'Government test' will be exempt from the proposed Dangerous Dog regulations. I have read the guidelines of the 'test' and can just about guarantee a 100% failure rate, even for dogs that are under complete control. Perhaps this is the intention.

**In conclusion:**

- It is clear that the muzzling section for 'large dogs' should not be allowed to proceed into legislation as is. It is absolutely not justified. The SPCA is in full agreement as are many other interested parties.

- The exercising of large dogs without a leash must not be limited to Country Parks. It is the responsibility of the owner to keep his dog under control and current legislation covers this already.

**All responsible dog owners would welcome legislation that would help sort out the Hong Kong dog problems, especially against known dangerous dogs. However, blanket laws, especially those pertaining to weight, simply cannot be tolerated.**

*I urge Legco members not to agree to the proposals as they stand simply to put an end to this protracted issue. Nor should they do so because it has a Public Safety connotation. Please look at the facts.*

**Remember, from the figures produced by Agriculture and Fisheries Department, from 1995-1997, less than 0.1% of serious dog bites presented to hospitals were caused by properly licensed dogs!**

Yours sincerely,

P C Sanderson