

Executive Summary

Direct Investigation Operation Report

Government's Work in Combating Cruelty to Animals

Introduction

With pet ownership becoming increasingly common in Hong Kong, concern over animal rights and welfare, particularly illegal acts of animal cruelty, has been mounting among the public and across different sectors of society. In recent years, suspected cases of animal cruelty have occasionally arisen in Hong Kong, which shocked and outraged the community. Some of these cases were extremely serious and wholly unacceptable in a civilised society. We consider that all sectors of society, including the general public, should join hands in making every effort to protect animals by reporting any act or indication of suspected cruelty immediately, thereby helping to safeguard animals' lives. There is a strong public consensus that the Government must enforce the law rigorously, strengthen enforcement measures and impose tougher penalties on offenders, ensuring that abusers are held accountable and future offences are deterred. This direct investigation operation examines the effectiveness of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") in combating animal cruelty, its related publicity and promotional efforts, areas for improvement, as well as the regulation of animal traps.

2. AFCD is the department responsible for managing animals, protecting their welfare, and enforcing the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169), which prohibits and penalises acts of animal cruelty. Under the existing legal framework, both AFCD and the Hong Kong Police Force ("HKPF") are tasked with investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty cases.

3. However, we have from time to time received complaints about AFCD's improper or ineffective handling of reports of animal cruelty. We also note that the Government proposed amendments to the Cap. 169 in 2019 to step up efforts against animal cruelty, and briefed the Legislative Council ("LegCo") on these proposals in 2022.

4. As the authority overseeing animal management and welfare, AFCD bears an undeniable responsibility to conscientiously and diligently handle every report of animal

cruelty. Consolidating our findings, we have the following observations and comments regarding AFCD's work in combating animal cruelty.

Our Findings

5. At present, members of the public may report suspected cases of animal cruelty to HKPF or the Hong Kong Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("SPCA"), or to AFCD via 1823. Under the work arrangement agreed between AFCD and HKPF, "urgent cases" are handled by HKPF, while "non-urgent cases" are followed up by AFCD¹. During investigations, HKPF may seek professional advice or assistance from AFCD when required.

6. Although SPCA is not empowered to enforce the Cap. 169, it makes preliminary inquiries into and assessments of reports received from the public, and refers cases to HKPF or AFCD depending on the findings and urgency.

7. Since 2011, HKPF has worked with AFCD, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD"), SPCA, other animal welfare organisations and veterinary bodies to launch the Animal Watch Scheme. The scheme combats animal cruelty through a four-pronged approach of education, publicity, intelligence gathering and investigation. Efforts of HKPF, relevant departments and organisations in this regard merit high commendation and the support of the community.

(I) AMENDMENT OF THE CAP. 169

To Actively Advance the Amendment Work and Promptly Refine the Amendment Proposals

8. According to the public consultation report submitted to LegCo by the then Food and Health Bureau and AFCD in April 2020, most respondents favoured improving animal welfare and supported the overall proposals to amend the Cap. 169.

¹ In general, a "non-urgent case" refers to a situation in which the animals involved are not at immediate risk of injury or death. Examples include cases where they are not provided with adequate food and clean water, the enclosures are too small to allow each animal to move freely in all directions, there is insufficient shelter to protect them from sun or rain, or the premises where they are kept are poorly ventilated and not clean. "Urgent cases", on the other hand, primarily involve critical situations, such as when an animal's life or safety is under immediate threat.

In particular, there was broad support for proposals of tougher penalties for animal cruelty, introduction of an indictable offence, and enhanced enforcement powers to enter premises and seize animals, etc. However, some stakeholders held strong critical opinions on the proposed “Duty of Care”. The Government must give full consideration to the views collected, and the relevant work is still ongoing.

9. We understand that given these circumstances, it would require more time for AFCD and the Environment and Ecology Bureau to communicate and negotiate with stakeholders on the proposed amendments. We consider that the Government should press ahead with the amendment of the Cap. 169, specifically by increasing penalties, seeking consensus, and further refining the amendment proposals.

To Explore Phased Amendments to the Cap. 169

10. If AFCD concludes, after collecting views from different sectors, that it would be difficult for the society to reach consensus on certain proposed amendments in the short term, the Department should consider amending the Cap. 169 in phases. Less controversial proposals, such as strengthening provisions against animal cruelty (including tougher penalties) and enhancing enforcement powers could be advanced first, followed by revisions and refinements to other parts of the Cap. 169 as circumstances and needs require.

11. We recommend that AFCD, upon completion of the legislative amendment to increase such penalties, consider engaging with the Judiciary to let judicial officers handling animal cruelty cases know about the strengthened penalties.

(II) FOLLOW-UP ON SUSPECTED ANIMAL CRUELTY CASES

To Strengthen AFCD Staff’s Enforcement Powers to Address Inefficient Investigations and Insufficient Prosecutions

12. Currently, when AFCD staff receive a report or complaint of suspected animal cruelty, they will attend the scene to assess whether there is evidence of animal cruelty. This process includes entering the flat or premises concerned to inspect the environment and identify the animals’ observable signs and behaviour, thereby assessing their physical and mental condition. However, our investigation revealed that in many cases AFCD staff were unable to enter the flat or premises to investigate or inspect the animals

involved. In those cases where entry failed, staff relied on the information available at the time to decide whether there was evidence of animal cruelty, and then replied to the complainants.

13. In our opinion, where AFCD staff cease follow-up actions without first ascertaining the actual condition of the animals involved, it calls into questions whether the Department has handled public reports seriously and properly. This practice may potentially create serious loopholes, allowing evidence to be concealed, and may directly undermines the Department's effectiveness in prosecution. Between 2020 and June 2025, AFCD received 1,633 reports of suspected animal cruelty, yet only six prosecutions arose from these reports during the same period.

14. AFCD explained that under the Cap. 169, its staff may only enter premises for investigation with the occupier's consent, and the ordinance does not authorise the Department to seek court warrants for enforcement. While we acknowledge the existing constraints, we consider that the proposed amendments would greatly enhance the Department's enforcement effectiveness. Hence, the Government should actively consider adding relevant provisions, for example by introducing procedures that allow entry into private premises for investigation without the occupier's consent, so as to increase the chances of collecting evidence and initiate prosecutions against the offence.

15. Furthermore, under the Cap. 169, only senior veterinary officers, or veterinary officers authorised by the Director of AFCD to perform the duties of senior veterinary officers under the ordinance, may enter and search premises. Given the limited number of such officers, we consider that if other AFCD officers are unable to gain prompt entry to conduct searches, the best opportunity for evidence collection may be missed, thereby greatly reducing enforcement effectiveness. We, therefore, recommend that in amending the Cap. 169, AFCD explore expanding the scope of authorisation so that more officers are empowered to enter and search premises.

16. We also recommend that the Government consider prioritising the introduction of an indictable offence in the first phase of amendment, so that law enforcement officers could have more time to instigate prosecutions in complicated or serious cases of cruelty.

17. We are pleased to note that AFCD has indicated its intention to strengthen collaboration with HKPF within the powers conferred under the current legislation. The Department will identify cases where premises with higher risk of animal cruelty but cannot be entered for investigation, and seek police assistance as necessary, for example

by conducting joint operations to enter premises with the occupier's consent. We recommend that AFCD expedite the implementation of these measures.

18. According to AFCD, most reports, upon investigation, were found not to involve animal cruelty, but were mainly related to nuisances or environmental hygiene issues. Under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, FEHD officers are authorised to enter private premises to investigate hygiene nuisances. We recommend that where reports of animal cruelty received by AFCD also involve serious environmental hygiene nuisances, the Department should refer the nuisance issues to FEHD for follow-up, and consider exploring with FEHD the feasibility of conducting joint inspections in appropriate cases.

Lack of Guidelines for Handling General Cases

19. AFCD investigates public reports and referrals of suspected animal cruelty. However, our investigation found that the Department had not established guidelines for handling general cases of suspected animal cruelty. Without such guidelines, AFCD staff have to rely on their own experience and judgement, which may result in inconsistent standards in investigation and enforcement, reduced effectiveness, and even unfair or unreasonable enforcement of the law.

20. It is unsatisfactory that AFCD only began drafting comprehensive guidelines ("New Guidelines") covering all reports of suspected animal cruelty after we launched this direct investigation operation. In our view, AFCD should continue offering regular training on the New Guidelines and refine the training content as needed. The Department must also closely monitor the implementation of the New Guidelines, organise staff exchange and sharing sessions to collect frontline feedback, and conduct timely reviews of the Guidelines to optimise workflows and improve their content.

To Review the Guidelines for Handling Large-scale Cases

21. In view of the large number of animals involved and the substantial manpower required, large-scale cases are usually handled jointly by AFCD, HKPF and SPCA. AFCD has issued the Operational Guidelines on Large Scale Suspected Animal Cruelty Case Investigation for staff compliance. However, our investigation revealed that the then guidelines neither set out clear criteria for initiating such procedures nor specify which officer ranks are authorised to decide when to initiate the procedures.

22. To ensure consistent staff practices, AFCD should clearly define in the New Guidelines the factors to be considered when initiating large-scale case procedures and the officer ranks authorised to make such decisions. Moreover, the then Operational Guidelines on Large-Scale Suspected Animal Cruelty Case Investigation only covered procedures for AFCD officers to collect evidence and handle animals. We consider that AFCD should discuss with HKPF and SPCA on the need of developing guidelines for tripartite partnership that clearly set out the collaboration framework, division of responsibilities and workflows of each party.

To Remain Vigilant and Proactively Detect Acts of Animal Cruelty

23. We note that smugglers, in order to evade detection by law enforcement agencies, often transport animals in ways that cause severe suffering, which potentially violates the Cap. 169. According to AFCD's records, six of the 11 successful prosecutions between 2020 and June 2025 were related to animal smuggling. We recommend that AFCD require its staff to remain vigilant in the course of routine duties, especially those related to animal smuggling, proactively looking for signs of animal cruelty, and promptly initiating investigations whenever such signs are identified. AFCD should also consider enhancing intelligence sharing and collaboration with the Customs and Excise Department ("C&ED") to gain a deeper understanding of animal smuggling activities and better protect animals from harm.

To Strengthen Staff Training and Remind Staff to Actively Follow Up on Reports

24. We note that AFCD staff must obtain the occupier's consent before entering premises to conduct investigations. Given the existing constraints on entering premises, we consider it important for AFCD staff to adopt a proactive approach, making repeated visits and patiently persuading the occupier to cooperate. This would increase the chances of gaining entry to the premises or getting to see the animals involved on site, thereby helping to overcome the current enforcement constraints on investigations inside such premises. In one case, AFCD had already confirmed that a dog was being kept in the flat, but ceased follow-up action after the occupier refused to provide information about the dog or allow entry for inspection. We consider that AFCD should have tried to visit the flat to assess the dog's condition and living environment, or returned on another occasion to collect relevant evidence, rather than giving up too readily. In fact, the owner's refusal to provide information or allow entry for inspection may be considered as a warning sign, calling for greater vigilance in AFCD's subsequent follow-up.

25. In another case, AFCD staff negotiated multiple times with the dog owner to fix a date for inspection. Although the owner appeared to agree, he kept putting off the inspection under various pretexts. We consider that the staff should have taken a more proactive approach and should not have cancelled the inspection or ceased pursuing the case simply because agreement on a date for inspection could not be reached with the dog owner despite repeated attempts. In addition, the dog owner in this case had not applied for a dog licence. We also cannot rule out the possibility that the dog had not been vaccinated, which would violate the Rabies Regulation and pose a potential threat to both the dog's health and public health. AFCD should have, therefore, taken more serious and proactive follow-up action.

26. Each suspected animal cruelty case involves precious lives, and follow-up work must never be taken lightly. AFCD should remain vigilant at all times and to handle each case with a proactive, conscientious and serious attitude. AFCD should also promptly strengthen staff training on investigation and communication skills, so that its staff can handle uncooperative residents or pet keepers more effectively. Furthermore, we note in other cases that AFCD officers were sometimes obstructed by building security guards from reaching the flats concerned during investigations. We recommend that AFCD consider enhancing communication with the property management sector to improve their understanding of AFCD's investigations and enforcement work against animal cruelty, and to encourage cooperation and support from the sector.

To Enhance Monitoring of Case Follow-up

27. AFCD has put in place a monitoring mechanism under which all suspected animal cruelty cases must be reviewed and approved for closure by the case officer's supervisor. The Department's veterinary officers are also expected to periodically check the follow-up actions of frontline staff to ensure that enforcement is conducted with consistent procedures and uniform standards. That said, we found in several cases that supervisors readily approved the closure of poorly handled cases without raising any queries or requesting further follow-up, hampering the proper functioning of the Department's monitoring mechanism.

28. For example, in one case, AFCD staff refrained from conducting an inspection because of the tenant's dissatisfaction and did not adopt other feasible means to complete the investigation. Without confirming whether animal cruelty had occurred, the staff recommended ceasing follow-up action based on the findings of an investigation

conducted a year earlier, a single site inspection and other information available at the time. Yet, the supervisor did not question this recommendation and approved the closure of case. This inevitably casts doubt on whether it was prudent, or even reasonable, for AFCD to close the case under such circumstances.

29. We recommend that AFCD quickly review and strengthen its current monitoring mechanism by specifying the information frontline staff are required to submit to their supervisors in investigation reports, and setting out the factors supervisors must consider when approving cases. Where shortcomings or unreasonable aspects are identified, frontline staff should be required to provide clarification and carry out further follow-up, ensuring effective monitoring of each case. In addition, to facilitate the implementation of the New Guidelines, AFCD should incorporate the procedures, required information and considerations for case review into the New Guidelines, so that all relevant staff apply consistent standards in case approval.

To Use Dog Licence Records to Assist Investigations

30. During our investigation, we found that in response to reports of repeated dog whimpering from certain flats and suspected cruelty to animals, AFCD would respond to the complainant if, after several visits to the flat or premises concerned, they neither found any dogs nor heard barking. In our view, AFCD should make proactive use of the existing dog registration system by reviewing dog licence records to ascertain whether a flat or premises has registered keeping dogs, so as to facilitate investigations into suspected cruelty cases. We are pleased to note that AFCD has responded positively. The Department should also incorporate these procedures into the New Guidelines, remind frontline staff to follow them, and review their effectiveness after a period of implementation.

To Improve Records Management

31. During our site inspections at AFCD's animal management centres, we found that the number of files on suspected animal cruelty reports did not match the number of reports received by the Department. AFCD explained that this discrepancy was attributable to inconsistent criteria adopted by the centres in classifying and recording reports. The Department confirmed that all reports received had been followed up and it has reminded the centres to improve their practices.

32. We are pleased to note that AFCD has already introduced measures to address the aforesaid issue. We recommend that the Department continue to monitor how animal

management centres classify cases and maintain case records. Random checks of file records should be conducted regularly to ensure that all centres file reports and record report figures in accordance with uniform criteria.

33. We also note that different animal management centres adopt varying methods of maintaining case records and storing case information and documents. For example, one of the centres keep case details and investigation actions in report form, and then simply staples the relevant documents together as a file. Some documents within these files are missing or detached, making the collection disorganised. In another centre, simple tables are employed to record case details with attachment of the corresponding work records.

34. Sound records management and archiving are essential to good public administration. The current inconsistent and inadequate practices across animal management centres not only hinder follow-up by frontline staff, but also compromise AFCD's monitoring of the centres' work. We recommend that all centres adopt consistent standards and procedures for recording and archiving cases, as well as document management. AFCD should review the relevant records management practices, establish clear requirements, and require compliance by all animal management centres.

To Strengthen Enforcement Against Illegal Use of Animal Traps

35. Animal traps pose a grave threat to the safety of animals, including pets, strays and wildlife, inflicting immense suffering and even death. Some traps are extremely fatal and equally dangerous to humans, posing serious risks to hikers and members of the public, particularly children and the elderly, who may accidentally step on them. These offences should be a target of vigorous enforcement. In our view, AFCD must strengthen enforcement against illegal possession or use of animal traps, through regular patrols and targeted inspections of high-risk black spots, so that animal traps can be detected and removed promptly. The maximum penalty in force for illegal possession or use of animal traps is only a fine at level 5 (i.e. \$50,000), with no provision for imprisonment, which does not adequately reflect the gravity of the offence. AFCD should review whether the current penalty is appropriate and, with reference to the penalties for illegal possession and use of offensive weapons, actively consider raising the penalties for illegal possession and use of animal traps, for example, by introducing immediate imprisonment as a strong deterrent.

36. On the other hand, AFCD should address the problem at its source by considering closer collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies, including C&ED. In response to special circumstances, AFCD should conduct joint operations to step up publicity and keep watch on illegal imports of animal traps. It should also explore with relevant departments how regulation of animal traps can be tightened by enhancing intelligence gathering and introducing positive incentives, for example a commendation scheme, in other areas such as import, sale and manufacture.

(III) DIVISION OF ROLES AND COLLABORATION AMONG AFCD, HKPF AND SPCA

To Strengthen the Tripartite Collaboration Mechanism with SPCA and HKPF, and to facilitate the exchange and good use of information

37. Members of the public may report suspected animal cruelty to HKPF, AFCD or SPCA. Statistics show that between 2020 and June 2025, AFCD received 45 case referrals from SPCA, while SPCA handled an annual average of 781 cases. This implies that AFCD was unaware of the details of over 700 reports each year. Similarly, AFCD's knowledge of animal cruelty cases handled by HKPF is largely limited to overall statistics and exchanges on certain cases. The current tripartite collaboration among AFCD, HKPF and SPCA has helped combat animal cruelty, but as the department responsible for implementing animal management and welfare policies, AFCD should have had a complete picture of all suspected animal cruelty cases in Hong Kong.

38. We believe that the details and follow-up findings of the reports handled by SPCA each year should help AFCD stay updated on the latest situation and trends in animal cruelty. To further optimise the tripartite collaboration mechanism, AFCD should consider inviting SPCA and HKPF to regularly share information on the cases they receive or handle. AFCD should then collate and analyse this information in detail to assess how relevant policies are being implemented and to identify prevailing trends. Based on these insights, AFCD could adjust enforcement strategies and formulate appropriate work directions and specific measures. We also recommend that AFCD proactively take the lead in discussions with HKPF and SPCA to increase the frequency of regular meetings, thereby reinforcing tripartite collaboration.

39. Moreover, we note with appreciation that HKPF has set up a dedicated criminal investigation team to handle animal cruelty cases. An online database has been created for the team to share experience and knowledge, and relevant training has been

arranged for the team members. We believe that HKPF's skills and experience in investigating animal cruelty cases offer valuable reference for AFCD staff on following up on reports. We recommend that AFCD discuss with HKPF and proactively invite the latter to share useful information from the online database, so as to enhance AFCD staff's capability to investigate animal cruelty reports.

40. In addition, under the collaboration arrangement, SPCA will refer cases to AFCD after conducting preliminary inquiries based on the circumstances and nature of each case. In this regard, we recommend that AFCD review and consolidate its collaboration experience with SPCA and clearly define a case referral mechanism, such as referral criteria and timeframes, to regularise the collaboration mechanism.

41. Members of the public may report the same suspected animal cruelty incident concurrently to AFCD, HKPF and SPCA. Without a platform for sharing case information regarding complaints or reports, the three bodies risk duplicating follow-up actions on the same case. To optimise resources and strengthen collaboration, we recommend that AFCD take the initiative to discuss with HKPF and SPCA the establishment of an information-sharing platform or mechanism for animal cruelty reports, with regular updates.

To Explore Ways to Enhance SPCA's Involvement and Support

42. Although the Cap. 169 does not confer enforcement powers on SPCA, the organisation plays a vital role in combating animal cruelty and safeguarding animal welfare, and assists both AFCD and HKPF. To better capitalise on SPCA's strengths and experience, AFCD may consider exploring ways to increase SPCA's involvement in other areas, such as prevention and education, thereby enabling SPCA to provide further support in anti-cruelty work. The Department may also consider discussing with SPCA to clearly define collaboration arrangements, relevant procedures and standards, etc.

To Enhance Collaboration and Communication with 1823

43. Under the current arrangement, when 1823 receives a report of animal cruelty from the public, it decides whether the case is "urgent" or "non-urgent" based on AFCD's guidelines. It then advises the informant to report the case directly to HKPF, or refers it to AFCD for follow-up as appropriate. Determining the urgency of a case is, however, partly subjective, and the accuracy of case referrals depends on the knowledge

and experience of 1823 staff. We recommend that AFCD maintain regular communication with 1823, provide training to 1823 staff where necessary, and review the guidelines periodically to keep the referral mechanism effective.

(IV) PUBLICITY AND EDUCATION

To Strengthen Publicity and Education, and Explore the Introduction of a Commendation Scheme

44. For effective combat of animal cruelty, it is equally vital to raise public awareness of animal welfare and encourage members of the public to act as “friends of animals” in addition to stringent enforcement by AFCD and other law enforcement agencies. We consider that beyond current publicity and education efforts, AFCD should explore ways to further strengthen outreach and education in schools, helping students and young people build an awareness of animal protection from childhood.

45. With reports of animal cruelty on the rise and serious cases occasionally occurring, we recommend that AFCD consider stepping up publicity on the penalties under the Cap. 169 while continuing to promote animal welfare.

46. Furthermore, to encourage public participation as “friends of animals”, AFCD should consider introducing a commendation scheme to recognise members of the public who report suspected cruelty. Such a scheme would help foster a culture of shared responsibility for protecting animals and build a collective commitment to opposing animal cruelty across society.

To Clarify Roles and Responsibilities to the Public, and Expand Reporting or Complaint Channels

47. On its website, AFCD advises the public to report suspected animal cruelty to HKPF, SPCA, or to AFCD via 1823. However, there is no mention of the division of roles and responsibilities among the three bodies in handling such cases. We recommend that AFCD clearly state on its website the respective roles and responsibilities of AFCD, HKPF and SPCA to improve transparency and help the public seek assistance from the appropriate authority according to the nature of the case.

48. To facilitate the submission of supporting materials such as photos, videos and web links, AFCD should consider offering reporting channels beyond hotlines, for example online forms, so that reports can be lodged through multiple channels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

49. In the light of the above, The Ombudsman recommends that AFCD:

Amendments to the Cap. 169

- (1) press ahead with the amendment of the Cap. 169 and foster better communication and clearer explanation with the industry and stakeholders to secure the widest consensus as soon as possible;
- (2) further refine the proposed amendments to the Cap. 169, taking into account the views of the industry and stakeholders;
- (3) consider amending the Cap. 169 in phases. Less controversial proposals, such as strengthening provisions against animal cruelty (including tougher penalties) and enhancing enforcement powers could be advanced first, followed by revisions and refinements to other parts of the Cap. 169 as circumstances and needs require;
- (4) upon completion of the legislative amendment to increase penalties for animal cruelty, consider engaging with the Judiciary to brief judicial officers handling animal cruelty cases on the strengthened penalties, encouraging corresponding considerations in sentencing and enhancing the deterrent effect of the Cap. 169;
- (5) in preparing amendments to the Cap. 169, actively consider adding provisions to strengthen the enforcement powers of AFCD's staff, for example, by introducing procedures that allow them to enter private premises for investigation without the occupier's consent;
- (6) in preparing amendments to the Cap. 169, also explore expanding the scope of authorisation so that more officers are authorised to enter and search premises, thereby enhancing enforcement effectiveness;

- (7) in considering phased amendments to the Cap. 169, prioritise the introduction of an indictable offence in the first phase;

Guidelines for Handling Suspected Animal Cruelty Cases

- (8) implement the New Guidelines;
- (9) continue to provide regular and appropriate training on the New Guidelines and refine the training content as needed to ensure staff are fully aware of the guidelines and related procedures;
- (10) closely monitor the implementation of the New Guidelines, organise exchange and sharing sessions for staff to summarise experiences and collect frontline views;
- (11) drawing on these experience and views, conduct timely reviews of the Guidelines to optimise workflows and improve their content;
- (12) define in the New Guidelines the factors to be considered when initiating the relevant procedures for large-scale cases;
- (13) **further to (12)**, define in the New Guidelines the rank of officers authorised to decide on initiating the procedures, so as to ensure clarity of responsibilities and enhance internal efficiency;
- (14) discuss with HKPF and SPCA whether tripartite guidelines should be developed for large-scale cases, with a clear delineation of the collaboration framework, division of responsibilities and workflows of each party;

Case Handling and Monitoring

- (15) require staff to remain vigilant when assisting in anti-smuggling operations and performing routine duties, proactively looking for indications of animal cruelty, and promptly initiating investigations whenever such indications are identified;

- (16) consider enhancing intelligence sharing and collaboration with C&ED so as to gain a deeper understanding of animal smuggling activities and better protect animals from harm;
- (17) continue to remind staff to stay alert at all times and to handle every report of suspected animal cruelty with a proactive, conscientious, and serious attitude;
- (18) enhance training on investigation and communication skills, so that its staff can handle uncooperative residents or pet keepers more effectively;
- (19) where reports of animal cruelty received by AFCD also involve serious environmental hygiene nuisances, refer the nuisance issues to FEHD for follow-up, and consider exploring with FEHD the feasibility of conducting joint inspections in appropriate cases;
- (20) consider enhancing communication with the property management sector to improve their understanding of AFCD's investigations and enforcement work against animal cruelty, and to encourage cooperation and support from the sector;
- (21) review and strengthen its current monitoring mechanism by specifying the information frontline staff are required to submit to their supervisors in investigation reports, and setting out the factors supervisors must consider when approving cases. Where shortcomings or unreasonable aspects are identified, frontline staff should be required to provide clarification and carry out further follow-up, ensuring effective monitoring of each case;
- (22) to facilitate the implementation of the New Guidelines, incorporate the procedures, required information and considerations for case review into the New Guidelines, so that all relevant staff apply consistent standards in case approval;
- (23) make proactive use of the existing dog registration system by reviewing licence records to ascertain whether a flat or premises has registered keeping dogs to facilitate investigations into cruelty cases;

- (24) **further to (23)**, incorporate these procedures into the New Guidelines, ensure frontline staff's compliance with the guidelines, and review their effectiveness after a period of implementation;
- (25) continue to monitor how animal management centres classify cases and maintain case records, and conduct random checks of file records regularly to ensure that all centres file reports and record report figures in accordance with uniform criteria;
- (26) review the records management practices for animal cruelty cases, stipulate procedures for recording and storing case information and related documents, and require compliance by all animal management centres, with a view to strengthening internal monitoring, improving records management efficiency, and facilitating the compilation of accurate statistics to monitor the overall enforcement performance;

Tripartite Collaboration Mechanism with HKPF and SPCA

- (27) identify cases where premises cannot be entered for investigation and where there is a higher risk of animal cruelty, and seek police assistance as necessary;
- (28) consider inviting SPCA and HKPF to regularly share information on the cases they receive or handle;
- (29) collate and analyse this information in detail to assess how relevant policies are being implemented and to identify prevailing trends and, based on these insights, adjust enforcement strategies and formulate appropriate work directions and specific measures to combat animal cruelty more effectively;
- (30) proactively discuss with HKPF and SPCA to increase the frequency of regular meetings, thereby strengthening tripartite collaboration against animal cruelty;
- (31) proactively discuss with HKPF and invite the latter to share useful information from the online database, so as to enhance AFCD staff's capability to investigate reports of animal cruelty;

- (32) review and consolidate its collaboration experience with SPCA and clearly define a case referral mechanism, such as referral criteria and timeframes, to regularise the collaboration mechanism;
- (33) take the initiative to discuss with HKPF and SPCA the establishment of an information-sharing platform or mechanism for animal cruelty reports, with regular updates;
- (34) consider exploring ways to increase SPCA's involvement in other areas, such as prevention and education, thereby enabling SPCA to provide further support in anti-cruelty work;
- (35) consider discussing with SPCA to clearly define collaboration arrangements, relevant procedures and standards;
- (36) maintain regular communication with 1823 to review referral practices and challenges, provide training to 1823 staff where needed, and review the guidelines periodically to keep the referral mechanism effective;

Public Education and Outreach

- (37) beyond the current publicity and education efforts, explore ways to further strengthen outreach and education in schools, helping students and young people build an awareness of animal protection from childhood;
- (38) consider stepping up publicity on the penalties under the Cap. 169 to remind the public of the serious consequences of breaking the law;
- (39) consider introducing a commendation scheme to recognise members of the public who report suspected animal cruelty;
- (40) clearly state on its website the respective roles and responsibilities of AFCD, HKPF and SPCA to improve transparency and help the public seek assistance from the appropriate authority according to the nature of the case;

- (41) consider offering reporting channels beyond hotlines, for example online forms, so that reports can be lodged through multiple channels;

Enforcement against Illegal Use of Animal Traps

- (42) make greater efforts through regular patrols and targeted inspections of high-risk black spots to detect and remove animal traps at an early stage, thereby protecting animals and hikers from harm;
- (43) with reference to the penalties for illegal possession and use of offensive weapons, actively consider raising the penalties for illegal possession and use of animal traps, for example by introducing immediate imprisonment as a strong deterrent, to underscore the seriousness and danger of such offences;
- (44) consider closer collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies, including C&ED, and in response to special circumstances, such as autumn and winter, the peak seasons for the use of animal traps, conduct joint operations to step up publicity and keep watch on illegal imports of traps; and
- (45) explore with relevant departments how regulation of animal traps can be tightened by enhancing intelligence gathering and introducing positive incentives, for example a commendation scheme, in other areas such as import, sale and manufacture.

Office of The Ombudsman

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