

# The HKVA and Animal Welfare.

## A policy statement on Animal Welfare in Hong Kong

### Introduction.

Animals are an essential part of our lives. Our treatment of them is inseparable from the way in which we regard the planet we share. Indeed, our attitude towards non-human animals is a measure of the kind of society we are.

While, on the one hand, we enjoy the company and love of pets and the beauty of wildlife, we also use animals for our own ends, as food or fibre or for research. This negative side of our relationship with animals has important moral consequences. We are under a duty to treat our fellow inhabitants of the earth with respect and compassion. We must move towards the eradication of exploitation and cruelty

This requires, at the very least:

- Sympathy for the psychological needs of animals
- Provision for the physical requirements of animals, and
- A demonstration of tenderness towards our fellow creatures

### Animal Welfare Priorities.

The HKVA believes that in order to improve animal welfare, resources must be allocated according to priorities. These priorities can be divided into categories according to the use of the animals.

#### **Companion Animals.**

All adults should have the opportunity to own a pet, but owners must be held responsible and accountable for their pets. The HKVA advocates the lifting of the ban on pets in public housing and replacing it with a policy that enables a resident of public housing to own a pet that is suited to their individual circumstances.

The HKVA would encourage the Government to establish **an education and information service** for pet owners. The service would be

- A resource centre for pet owners wanting to learn more about the care and welfare of their pets
- An advocacy centre for pet owners instructing them of their legal responsibilities in keeping pets
- An education centre instructing people about the perils of dumping unwanted pets and discouraging the practice of keeping dogs on building sites.

The HKVA understands the need to control stray animals but strongly advocates the use of humane methods of capture and destruction. It urges the Government to ensure its Animal Control Officers are properly trained and given every opportunity for continual professional development in order to keep up with developments in humane population control technology.

The cruel practice of importing young puppies must be stopped.

The HKVA is opposed to the recent expansion in the sale of pets in Hong Kong. The police must prosecute hawkers who sell puppies and other young animals on the street. A rigorous system of control over pet shops must be introduced to ensure shop premises are suitable for the holding of animals. Their environment must be hygienic, and safe, with regular checks conducted in respect of matters such as temperature, noise, food and water.

The Legislative Council is urged to increase the fines for the offence of cruelty to animals substantially. At present they do not deter those who inflict suffering on animals. It is imperative that prosecutors and magistrates be educated in the nature and extent of this problem in Hong Kong, and recognise the need for proper investigation, prosecution and, where appropriate, deterrent sentences.

### **Farm Animals.**

The eating of animal products is, for some, an unacceptable practice on moral grounds. The HKVA acknowledges that, at least for the foreseeable future, a large majority of people will continue to consume meat, fish, and poultry. But it strongly believes that intensive farming practices deprive animals of their psychological and physical needs and is deeply concerned about the growth of intensive farming practices in the HKSAR.

It therefore urges the Government to investigate alternative farming methods, for example large-caged and/or barn-housed poultry farming in preference to battery-caged poultry farming and the prohibition of tethering of female breeding pigs. The HKVA would exhort the Government urgently to prepare **Codes of Practice for the pig and poultry industry** drawing upon the expertise of animal welfare consultants as well as industry consultants. The HKVA envisages that such codes would have due regard for the needs of the farmed animals to fulfil their basic behavioral repertoire.

The HKVA is concerned also about the transport of animals to slaughter and their handling up to the time of slaughter. The HKVA urges the Government to ensure transport Codes of Practice are updated regularly to reflect international best-practice methods for the transport of animals. The Government must also consult with an acknowledged animal welfarist to ensure that any new abattoir is designed and constructed with facilities that minimise the stress of animals going to slaughter.

### **Animal Experimentation.**

The HKVA believes that a humane society should eradicate the practice of animal experiments. It recognises, however, that the use of animals in the laboratory is unlikely to end soon, but wishes to see it being brought under stringent controls. The underlying philosophy for permitting animal research is outlined in Russell and Burch's<sup>1</sup> concept of

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<sup>1</sup> Russell WMS, Burch RL (1992). *The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique*, Special Edition. UFAW, London.

the 3 R's: Replacement, Refinement and Reduction. The HKVA believes bio-medical research should find suitable **replacements** for animals and where this is not possible then the research should be **refined** to minimise suffering to animals and in all cases of research that uses animals the number must be **reduced** to the minimum required. The HKVA believes that current legislation is out of date and does not provide satisfactory checks and balances on animal research in HKSAR. The HKVA strongly advocates a comprehensive review of this practice and substantial amendment to the Animal (Control of Experiments) Ordinance. A central feature of any new legislation must be the mandatory creation of **animal experimentation ethics committees** in all institutions conducting animal research.

The legislation should have five main objectives:

- To define the legitimate purposes for which animals may be used
- To exert control over permissible levels of pain and distress
- To provide for inspection of facilities and procedures
- To ensure humane standards of animal husbandry and care
- To provide for public accountability.

A useful model is the United Kingdom's Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986.

### **Wild Animals**

Where humans interfere in any way with the natural environment of animals it is incumbent upon them to protect the wellbeing of the animals affected.

The HKVA is strongly opposed to the unchecked destruction of the environment. It advocates the development of a Government policy on sustainable development in which the existing biosphere is preserved in order to protect the remaining habitats of our native fauna; this includes the scaling back of land reclamation in order to preserve our marine environment.

The HKVA is totally opposed to the exploitation of wild animals for blood sports, traditional Chinese medicines or entertainment. It urges the Government to fund research to find alternatives to wild animal products used in TCM.

The HKVA cannot support the control of wild animals by ill-conceived and frequently inhumane methods such as shooting and trapping. The HKVA urges the Government to investigate humane methods of population control such as immuno-castration or chemical-sterilisation.

### **A final word.**

The HKVA believes that a measure of a society's maturity is the way it treats those who are most vulnerable and defenceless. Any animal welfare legislation must recognise the following freedoms:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> RSPCA Australia. Animal Charter.

- **Freedom from Hunger and Thirst**  
by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- **Freedom from Discomfort**  
by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- **Freedom from Pain, Injury and Disease**  
by prevention and by rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- **Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour**  
by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals own kind.
- **Freedom from Fear and Distress**  
by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

These freedoms must form the minimum of Hong Kong's new legislative and administrative framework for the protection of animals and should be incorporated in a revised Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance.

### **Endangered species**

Something needs to be written on this subject.

### **Other Links.**

For visitors interested in investigating animal welfare issues in HK please go to the following sites:

**Animals Asia Foundation** <<http://www.animalsasia.org>>

**Animal Welfare Advisory Group.**

**SPCA (HK)**< <http://www.sPCA.org.hk>>

**World Wide Fund for Nature (HK)** <<http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/>>