

LCQ9: Illegal sales of pets

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

According to the data of the most recent survey on keeping of cats and dogs by households conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2018, some 241 900 households were keeping cats or dogs in Hong Kong (involving some 184 100 cats and some 221 100 dogs), representing 9.4 per cent of all households. It is learnt that the pet market is still expanding. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that incidents involving illegal sales of pet cats and dogs occur from time to time, of the major measures currently adopted by the authorities as well as the channels involved to combat illegal sales of pets;

(2) of the number of cases in which the authorities successfully combated illegal sales of pet cats and dogs in the past three years, as well as the major obstacles and difficulties encountered in the process; and

(3) how the authorities handle pet cats and dogs seized in the course of combating illegal sales activities, and whether they will co-operate with social organisations to provide immediate treatment for sick cats and dogs found during seizure?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Security Bureau, the reply to the question from the Hon Chan Chun-ying is as follows:

(1) The Government is adopting a multi-pronged approach to combat illegal sales of dogs and cats, including the following measures:

(i) Regulation of animal trading

In accordance with the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Trading and Breeding) Regulations (Regulations), the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) controls the business of animal traders and dog breeding premises, whether in physical shops or online, through a licensing system. The AFCD conducts regular and surprise inspections where necessary to ensure that licensees comply with the relevant licensing conditions and codes of practice. If there is evidence that any person has breached the Regulations or the relevant licensing requirements, the AFCD will instigate prosecution.

(ii) Combating illegal sales of cats and dogs on the Internet

To combat the sales of smuggled cats and dogs on social media platforms, the AFCD has a dedicated investigation team, responsible for regular monitoring of online advertisements related to animal trading and breeding, and handling relevant complaints. When there were suspected cases or upon receiving complaints, the investigation team would conduct investigation and adopt suitable enforcement strategies, including conducting "mystery shoppers (decoy operations)".

The investigation team maintains close communications with the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) from time to time to exchange intelligence on cases and make every endeavour to combat such activities.

(iii) Combating smuggling of cats and dogs

The AFCD, the HKPF and the C&ED have been working closely to combat the smuggling of live animals and animal products by adopting a proactive risk management and intelligence-based enforcement strategies, including conducting joint operations at Hong Kong International Airport and major import/export land boundary control points. The AFCD also deploys quarantine detector dogs to the airport, the Air Mail Centre and various import/export boundary control points to conduct detection operations. In addition, local law enforcement agencies will strengthen intelligence exchange and co-operation with Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies to conduct targeted investigations and joint operations against smuggling activities to fiercely combat relevant activities.

(iv) Publicity and education

Through public education and publicity programmes, the AFCD has continued to enhance public awareness of not to purchase pets online rashly, in particular not to purchase pets of dubious origins, so as to safeguard public health, animal welfare and consumer rights and interests. In this regard, the AFCD has publicised the relevant messages on popular animal trading platforms, online pet shops and social media, also launched a new website and will place advertisements on public transport and bus stops, etc, to remind members of the public of the risks to be aware of when purchasing cats and dogs online.

(2) In the past three years, the number of successful prosecutions instituted by the AFCD each year in relation to the suspected sales of cats and dogs without valid licences is tabulated as follows:

Year	Number of successful prosecutions
2022	20
2023	32

2024 (as at end-November)	35
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On the illegal import of cats and dogs, in the past three years, the number of cases of illegally imported cats and dogs seized by the C&ED, the HKPF and the AFCD, and number of cats and dogs involved are tabulated as follows:

Year	Number of cases	Number of cats and dogs involved
2022	2	200
2023	13	32
2024 (as at end-November)	24	39

In recent years, the AFCD found that some online shops sell sick cats and dogs from unknown sources. After detailed investigations by the C&ED, the HKPF and the AFCD, individual cases are suspected to involve dogs and cats imported into Hong Kong through illegal channels. As the persons involved are not physically present in Hong Kong, it has added to the difficulties in investigation. We will continue to maintain exchanges and co-operation with Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies to step up efforts in combating such cases.

(3) For cases of illegal import or sales of animals, depending on the circumstances of the cases, the animals concerned may be regarded as exhibits and arrangements have to be made in accordance with the instructions of the law enforcement agency. Generally speaking, the AFCD or its partnering animal welfare organisations will take care of the animals involved during the investigation of the case. Upon completion of the cases, the AFCD will make re-homing arrangements for the animals as necessary and contact its partnering animal welfare organisations to arrange adoption of the animals having regard to their health conditions.

If the animals concerned show abnormal health conditions while they are housed in the AFCD's Animal Management Centres or partnering animal welfare organisations, the AFCD and the relevant organisations will arrange the animals to undergo veterinary examinations and treatments.