I refer to the letter 'Killing strays is not an act of kindness' by Fiona Yuen (Jan 19). Reference was made to how the SPCA should learn from Albuquerque's Mayor Martin Chavez and the Canadian authorities who are working towards ending euthanasia.

The SPCA wholeheartedly supports the idea of not having to euthanase stray animals or abandoned pets. No one would wish that more than our society, which has the dreaded task of dealing with half of Singapore's annual unwanted animal population, of which over half are strays.

Being the only animal welfare organisation that has a shelter taking in 900 animals monthly, (Singapore, unlike countries such as Canada, has no alternative shelters/private organisations taking in masses of strays/unwanted pets), euthanasia has become a necessity.

As long as there are hundreds of strays proliferating on the streets, without a mass sterilisation programme, and as long as there is no restriction on the commercial breeding and sale of pets (SPCA animals are having to compete for homes with the masses of pets on sale), the problem of having to put down surplus animals is going to be with us.

Restrictions on the keeping of cats and medium-sized dogs in Housing and Development Board flats is another obstacle to our goal of euthanasing fewer animals. For years, the SPCA has been lobbying the authorities to change the HDB policies to accommodate more pets, so that the surplus population of strays can be reduced.

Since 1991, the SPCA has had a voucher programme for the sterilisation of stray cats at participating veterinary practices, which enables stray caretakers to sterilise a stray and put it back at its original location, with SPCA footing the bill; \$4,800 is channeled to this project monthly, translating to 140 free vouchers monthly.

Without the Government's co-operation, animal welfare organisations cannot hope to make a reasonable dent in the stray population because sterilisation on a large scale must be carried out across the island.

The SPCA has been writing in to the authorities, and asking its members and friends to request that the Stray Cat Rehabilitation Programme -- halted during the Sars outbreak – be reinstated.

The SPCA agrees that euthanasia does not get to the root cause of the problem, which is that too many animals are being born or imported. Our website www.spca.org.sg and our staff also inform those considering bringing a stray or unwanted pet to our premises, to please exhaust all other possibilities first.

If owners could shoulder the responsibility of finding a home for their unwanted pets, and if those finding stray animals could do the same, the SPCA statistics of putting down animals would drop dramatically from its present rate of 82 per cent.

For now, SPCA must continue to shoulder the burden of putting excess animals to sleep – the alternative being to turn people with unwanted animals away. This notion has been deliberated on over the years; but most of our members baulk at turning animals away, as this would result in many being dumped back on the street where they may suffer a fate worse than death.

The SPCA sincerely hopes the Government is listening to all pleas to institute a mass programme for the sterilisation of strays, in addition to being more flexible in its HDB policies on pets, so that culling and euthanasing can become a thing of the past.

Only with proactive and more humane approaches plus organizations and individuals working together, can we hope to become a truly compassionate society.

Deirdre Moss (Ms.)

Executive Officer

SPCA