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ST Forum Page

Dear Editor,

We refer to the article “Supermarkets go LIVE” (ST, April 11) which describes how the sale of live animals such as razor clams, soft-shell turtles and eels is becoming increasingly common in Singapore. This is a disheartening trend; as such practices have serious environmental, ecological and ethical disadvantages. We would like to draw the attention of retailers and consumers to these issues.

The humane slaughter of live animals is a carefully regulated process, but with the widespread sale of live animals in supermarkets, it becomes increasingly difficult to monitor and enforce these regulations. While regulatory efforts are in place, there is no guarantee for the humane killing of these animals. Even where slaughtering practices are in accordance with stipulated guidelines, the storage conditions these animals are kept in are often overcrowded, unclean and inhumane. As a result, the SPCA has been appealing to authorities since 2001 to stop unregulated slaughter, and relies on public feedback to aid their efforts.

Increased sales of live, exotic animals such as soft-shell turtles and razor clams also increase the total volume of live animals being imported into Singapore. While the animals being currently imported are not endangered or threatened species, the growth in international trade of animals certainly paves the path for more ‘exotic’ and possibly endangered types of animals to be brought in. According to WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), this would encourage the illegal wildlife trade, hence threatening more species to extinction.

The demand for and sale of exotic live animals is also environmentally and economically unsustainable. Animals such as crabs, oysters and prawns are flown in from a wide range of countries, including Myanmar, Norway, Australia and Canada. As such, the ecological footprint of these exotic foods is very high. Consuming such food on a regular basis would have a negative environmental impact in the long run. Local businesses, such as wet markets and fishmongers are also suffering due to the rising demand of imported exotic seafood.

The sale and consumption of live seafood poses ethical, environmental and economic problems beyond the initial impression of having a convenient source of fresh, exotic food. Along with the immediate need to curb these problems, it is also important to inculcate the values of conservation and respect for nature in future generations. If this worrying trend continues, it is likely that society will become increasingly desensitised to practices such as the exploitation of exotic animal species, and cruelty to animals.

We hope this letter has brought some of the issues to the attention of readers, and wish to stress the importance of shopping responsibly to minimise the negative impact of our choices.

Howard Shaw

on behalf of Singapore Environment Council, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society, WWF-World Wide Fund for Nature (Singapore) and Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals