

SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

(In association with R.S.P.C.A. England) Patroness: LADY Y.P. McNEICE



8 November 2011

Dear Editor,

I refer to the letter "Why are cats the priority?" (Voices, Today 7 November) and would like to address certain issues raised by Mr. Peter Khaw.

The prohibition on pet cats being kept by residents in Housing and Development Board flats has been in force for many years. Although there was much lobbying by individual animal lovers and interest groups over the years to change that rule (on the proviso that cats be sterilised, micro-chipped and kept indoors) the authorities did not reverse it. The downside of this was that many HDB residents kept cats but as these cats were never micro-chipped or sterilized, there was no accountability - where irresponsible cat ownership was concerned - and as a consequence, pet cats often roamed freely and unwanted litters of kittens were being abandoned, adding to the general cat population.

Right now we have the opportunity to do what is right, and what should have been done in the first place. The SPCA applauds the latest government move to consider changing the rule to accommodate the wishes of many HDB residents, who would like to keep a pet cat in their apartment, legally. Contrary to the writer's statement that reversing the rule may add to the current situation of being unable to control the number of stray cats in Singapore, the SPCA believes that the stray cat population overall, has sharply decreased due to sterilisation of strays in housing estates by volunteer caregivers with the assistance of animal welfare groups and individuals.

We have seen a hundred percent reduction in stray cats numbers taken in by the SPCA in recent years - from over 550 cats in peak years, the SPCA is now taking under 250 in the last financial year. Since 1991, over 27,000 vouchers have been distributed by the SPCA to the volunteer caregivers to have a stray cat sterilised for free. With continued sterilisation of community cats being carried out, it is only a matter of time before the population decreases even further, with fewer litters of kittens being born. This should result in less complaints.

Ultimately both animal lovers and non-animal lovers want a healthy and hygienic environment, but this should not be determined or dependent on whether residents keep a pet cat. Inconsiderate human practices also contribute to refuse and rubbish strewn indiscriminately.

The SPCA is confident that a reversal of the rule would not be introduced without due consideration by the relevant authorities, based on various stakeholders' expectations and feedback. The downside of remaining with the current status quo (that is, no cats in flats) is that irresponsible cat ownership will continue to flourish because there is also no accountability and currently no standards to adhere to.

The SPCA supports the keeping of pet cats in flats provided they are kept responsibly and with the necessary rules and enforcement in place. Pet cats can wander yes, but not if owners are diligent in following the set requirements - to have their felines microchipped, sterilised and kept indoors at all times.

Failure to do so could mean that the cat will be removed from the owner.

Corinne Fong
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Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)

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