

The Straits Times

29 July 2010

Rein in puppy mills: Animal Welfare Groups

By Grace Chua

Singapore – Animal welfare groups put out a joint call yesterday for higher standards at pet farms to curb unethical dog breeding, or 'puppy mills'. The statement comes four months after rescuers found 85 breeding dogs at a Pasir Ris farm neglected and suffering from severe skin and health issues.

The animal groups also met the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) earlier this month to recommend more stringent dog farm standards, stricter enforcement and a licensing system for breeders.

Organisations which put their names to the statement include the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society, Action for Singapore Dogs, the Cat Welfare Society and the House Rabbit Society of Singapore.

'Puppy mills continue to thrive because the unwitting consumer is unaware of how these operations are run - with minimum care for the breeding animals involved,' the statement said.

SPCA executive officer Deirdre Moss added that industry self-regulation was not sufficient to ensure standards, and that breeders should be licensed for accountability.

In response, the AVA said it has imposed higher pet farm standards for animal health and welfare since January last year, but that it will take time for the industry to adapt.

Pet shop staff here have also been required to take a pet care course at Temasek Polytechnic since January this year, and this requirement is being extended to those working at dog farms.

The authority is also clamping down on those who neglect animals. In a legal first here, a breeder was fined \$30,000 for causing unnecessary pain and suffering to six of his dogs. As he could not pay the fine, he was sentenced to six weeks' jail.

The AVA said that while it is taking a balanced approach to regulating the dog breeding farms, it is open to working with the animal welfare groups and welcomes suggestions on improving the overall standards of the industry.

Breeder Jonathan Tay, 38, has already signed up for the Temasek Polytechnic pet care course. But he said some level of skin problems was unavoidable because of the animals' fur. 'This is a challenge for breeders... In bad weather, even humans get sick.'