ST Online, 26/11/14
[Reply] Safeguarding animal welfare is a shared responsibility

We thank Mr Chew Eng Soo for his feedback “Penalise those who abandon pet dogs” (ST Online, 12/11).

2 A pet is a lifelong commitment and potential owners should seriously consider the many responsibilities involved before getting a pet. The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) believes that pet abandonment can be minimised through the combined effort of public education, legislation and cooperation of community and industry stakeholders. To educate pet owners on the care and commitment required, AVA has been actively promoting responsible pet ownership through road shows, community events and school talks.

3 On the retail end, AVA has also introduced new licensing requirements. As of 1 January 2014, pet retailers are not allowed to sell pets to individuals below 16 years of age and must conduct pre-sale screening to assess suitability of their customers as pet owners prior to sale of the pet. These conditions are aimed at minimising potential problems of pet abandonment or poor pet care.

4 The Private Member’s Bill to amend the Animals and Birds Act, recently passed in Parliament, now makes the act of abandonment an offence without having to prove if the animal is suffering or in distress.

5 Individuals who abandon a pet will be liable to a maximum fine of $10,000 and/or 1 year jail term for first convictions, and a maximum fine of $20,000 and/or 2 years jail term for second and subsequent convictions. In addition, individuals may also face a possible disqualification order against owning animals for up to 1 year. Pet retailers who abandon animals will also be liable to a maximum fine of $40,000 and/or 2 years jail term for first convictions, and maximum fine of $100,000 and/or 3 years jail term for second and subsequent convictions. Pet retailers also face a possible disqualification order against engaging in animal-related businesses for up to 1 year. These penalties are higher than the pre-existing legislation which imposes a maximum fine of $10,000 and/or 1 year jail term.

6 Safeguarding animal welfare is a shared social responsibility which requires the cooperation of all stakeholders. Members of the public can play their part and contact AVA via 1800-476-1600 if they have information on pet abandonment cases. AVA investigates all feedback on animal cruelty, including pet abandonment, and will take action against anyone who has committed these offences.

Mr Yeo Guat Kwang
Chairman
Animal Welfare Legislation Review Committee

Dr Wong Hon Mun
Group Director
Agri Establishment Regulation Group
Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority
The issue of animal welfare was discussed in Parliament last week ("More teeth for law to protect animals"; last Thursday).

The penalties for abandoning pets also need to be reviewed, as abandoning a dog and leaving it to fend for itself are significantly cruel acts.

I propose that when a pet shop sells a dog, it should be responsible for taking the animal back - for a fee - if the buyer wishes to return it.

Likewise, the buyer should be responsible for returning the dog if he does not want it any more.

If the pet shop is no longer in existence, the owner should take the dog to an animal shelter recognised by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority, so the animal can be cared for.

This rule should also apply to those who adopt dogs.

It is time the industry and pet owners take responsibility and not worsen the stray dog problem.

Stiff penalties should be considered if sellers or pet owners flout the rule.

- Chew Eng Soo