



**UEVP** | Union Européenne des Vétérinaires Praticiens  
Union of European Veterinary Practitioners



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#### **PROMOTING VETERINARY LEADERSHIP IN STRAY DOG CONTROL IN EUROPE**

#### **'EVERY DOG DESERVES A CARING OWNER': THE VETERINARY VISION ON STRAY DOG MANAGEMENT**

**FECAVA, the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations,  
UEVP, the Union of European Veterinary Practitioners, and  
FVE, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe**

#### **CONSIDERING THAT:**

- In several European regions, in urban as well as rural areas, large numbers of dogs stray freely. Although generally called “*stray dogs*<sup>1</sup>”, distinct categories of dogs can be identified, such as dogs with an owner, dogs without an owner, dogs abandoned by their owner, dogs that were never owned, etc.
- These stray dogs can pose serious risks for animal health and animal welfare as well as for public health and welfare.
- A wide range of pathogens, influenced by region and habitat, can be hosted, carried around and transmitted to other animals and to people. Diseases that can be spread in this way vary from relatively mild ones that might go unnoticed to severe chronic disorders (e.g. echinococcosis) and fatal diseases (e.g. rabies!).

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<sup>1</sup> Stray dog: There is no statutory definition of a stray dog. The definition used by the OIE is: Stray dog means any dog not under direct control by a person or not prevented from roaming. There are three types of stray dog: - free-roaming owned dog not under direct control or restriction at a particular time; - free-roaming dog with no owner; - feral dog: domestic dog that has reverted to the wild state and is no longer directly dependent upon humans for successful reproduction.

- Stray dogs can be vicious and attack other animals including livestock, and people. Moreover stray animals are frequently involved in road accidents.
- Animal health and welfare can be seriously affected, directly when the stray animals themselves live under poor conditions (e.g. hunger, chronic skin disorders, lack of shelter, etc) and indirectly when inappropriate dog population control measures (e.g. shooting, poisoning, inhumane handling) are used. The health and welfare of other animals, like sheep and goats, can be endangered by stray dogs attacking them.
- Various reasons lay behind the large numbers of stray dogs. Cultural and socio-economic reasons, insufficient knowledge and understanding of prevention and control measures, lack of communication and coordination amongst stakeholders and decision makers and many more play a role.
- The way stray dog problems are addressed varies a lot. At EU level there is no legal framework or guidelines. Decisions about legislation and enforcement measures fall under the competence of the Member States. In most countries the issue is handled at municipality level, often without much coordination in and between municipalities.
- The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), in Chapter 7.7 of the Terrestrial animal Health Code<sup>1</sup>, recognizes the importance of controlling dog populations without causing unnecessary animal suffering and gives recommendations for the prevention of zoonotic diseases and dog population control.
- Evidence based knowledge and understanding of best practices in the field of dog population management is growing but still limited.
- As a well educated professional, bound by a professional oath, working according to a professional code of conduct and codes of Good Veterinary Practice, licensed and supervised by an authority (veterinary statutory body), the veterinarian has an important role to play in the prevention and control of stray dog problems. In different positions and at many levels - for example as clinician, state officer, policy advisor, research worker, teacher, etc. - veterinarians have the ability to contribute to prevention and control of stray dogs.
- The European veterinary profession, here represented by FVE, UEVP and FECAVA, cares for animals and people. Veterinarians continuously strive to promote the health and welfare of animals and public health.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre\\_aw\\_stray\\_dog.htm](http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=chapitre_aw_stray_dog.htm) as per 19 Feb 2015

- An integrated, comprehensive, long-term approach, aiming at managing existing populations and preventing new stray dogs appearing. The effectiveness<sup>2</sup> of such an integrated approach largely depends on a good coordination of all initiatives and measures taken. Good collaboration and communication between all actors.
- The integrated approach should be adjusted to the local situation and take into account cultural and social differences. A participatory approach of the community is indispensable.

### **1. Education on Responsible Ownership:**

Preventive measures to avoid new animals becoming homeless are crucial. Responsible Ownership, such as promoted through the *CARODog* project<sup>3</sup>, aims to maintain a good level of animal health and welfare, to control reproduction, to maximize physical and psychological benefits for humans and the animals and to minimize the potential risk that pets may pose to the public, other animals, or the environment.

Responsible Ownership must be encouraged by education, incentives and/or legislation. It should be covered in national and European legislation and implemented in combination with regulating the breeding and (internet -) trade of companion animals. Harmonization within the EU and close collaboration of the Member State Authorities would be very helpful in restricting stray animals in a country.

Education of the public - both children and adults - about responsible ownership is the cornerstone. Responsible ownership campaigns should become an integral part of primary education, establishing a long-term solution to the problem, where ideally no shelters are needed and all companion animals are looked after by a caring owner. Education should take account of cultural differences.

### **2. Mandatory permanent identification and mandatory registration**

Mandatory permanent identification and mandatory registration of all dogs in Europe is essential when it comes to control of the dog population. There is a need for a central database or to improve the exchange of information between existing databases. At the present time, the use of transponders offers the most advantages for a pan-European system and therefore microchipping should be the method of choice.

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<sup>2</sup> ICAM guidance document A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluating Dog Population Management Interventions 'Are we making a difference'

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.carodog.eu/>

### **3. Ensure health status of homeless animals**

Vaccination against for example rabies and other important diseases, as well as anti-parasitic treatment of all animals, for example against echinococcosis should be ensured; this is an integral part of the responsible ownership principles. Authorities should guarantee the health of the public and other domestic animals through the implementation of health plans for stray dogs appropriate to the disease situation in the area.

### **4. Ensure minimum quality standards for shelters**

All shelters should be at or above the minimum standards (see Shelter Quality<sup>4</sup>) and be registered and inspected on a regular basis by the competent authority. Staff and volunteers working with the animals should be sufficiently trained to fulfill their tasks properly and without risks for the animals or themselves. Shelters should have a contract with a veterinary practitioner for the provision of veterinary advice, and regular care to the animals in the shelter. Dogs and cats entering shelters should receive a health examination, they should have a transponder implanted, be sterilized, receive an anti-parasitic treatment and be vaccinated against pathogens which are of relevance in the region.

In cases where the health and welfare of the animal, other animals or people is severely compromised, euthanasia must be considered, for example in a case of severe zoonotic or other risks, or when it is impossible to assure the health and welfare of the animal and to provide it with a minimum quality of life (examples are rabies, inappropriate aggression, incurable diseases, long term retention in inappropriate facilities etc.). Euthanasia should be performed by a veterinarian and in line with internationally accepted guidelines such as the World Animal Protection's "*Methods for the euthanasia of dogs and cats: comparison and recommendations*"<sup>5</sup>

### **5. Adoption**

Adoption of dogs within a country should be facilitated and promoted. Care needs to be taken with cross border adoption. Seeing the potential for spread of zoonotic, other infectious and/or parasitic diseases and behaviour problems it should be avoided or surrounded by sufficient health guarantees and only be done under veterinary supervision with full compliance with the relevant EU law<sup>6</sup>. A risk analysis on the zoonotic, and animal health and behavioural implications should be made before any cross-border rehoming.

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<sup>4</sup> Shelter Quality, Welfare Assessment protocol for shelter animals, S. Barnard, C. Pedernera, A. Velarde, P. Dalla Villa

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/Methods%20for%20the%20euthanasia%20of%20dogs%20and%20cats-%20English.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/liveanimals/pets/comm\\_intra\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/liveanimals/pets/comm_intra_en.htm)

## 6. Trap, neuter, vaccinate and release

In the initial stages of a dog population management program or where shelter capacity for stray animals is limited, the employment of temporary control measures that prevent population growth can be considered. Trap-neuter-vaccinate-release is a program that has been used successfully in certain regions, but might not work for other areas. It should always be considered in relation to the local situation and measured for effectiveness<sup>7</sup>.

The animals should be caught in a humane way by trained and caring professionals. Veterinary surgeons should examine, vaccinate and neuter the animals with minimal stress and by using proper anaesthesia and analgesia protocols. The animals should only be released when sufficiently recovered from the procedure. Care must be taken not to create a welfare problem during the program.

### CALL UPON:

#### ➤ Veterinary Organisations in Europe

- to engage and to be actively involved in solving the stray dog problem
- to play an active role in disease surveillance because private practitioners might be the first to see a dog suffering from a notifiable disease such as rabies.
- to enhance communication with other parties involved
- to participate in education and awareness campaigns and to promote responsible pet ownership
- to be alert for animal cruelty and possible cases of neglect to raise their voice against dog population management measures and other initiatives that would endanger animal health and welfare

#### ➤ Politicians, legislators and administrators

- to provide sufficient means and resources necessary for promoting responsible ownership and to ensure sustainable dog population management for example by funding neutering programs.
- to put relevant legislation in place, such as mandatory identification and registration of all dogs
- to set up effective control and enforcement measures in particular against illegal dog trade and cruelty
- to avoid unsustainable ad hoc measures, especially those which go against the welfare of animals (use of inhuman traps, shooting, poisoning)
- to ensure minimum standards and regular inspections of shelters
- to collaborate on a regional basis and to share best practices

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to H. Bacon assessment protocol TNR

- at EU level to come forward with a Community Animal Welfare Law, which includes companion animal issues

➤ **Dog owners and breeders**

- to obtain and keep their animals as a responsible owner
- to have their dogs identified and registered
- to prevent uncontrolled breeding of dogs

➤ **Educators and researchers**

- to promote responsible pet ownership
- to make people, beginning with children, aware of risks associated with stray dogs and teach them how to avoid these risks<sup>9</sup>
- to provide further science based recommendations for dog population management

➤ **Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)**

- to partner with veterinary services and veterinarians in contributing to public awareness and understanding of the reasons for the growth of and the need to control dog populations as well as in educating the public in responsible dog ownership
- to contribute to obtaining resources to contribute in a practical way to the design and successful implementation of dog control programmes
- to supply local knowledge on dog populations and features of ownership, as well as expertise in handling and kennelling dogs and the implementation of sterilisation programmes.

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<sup>9</sup> For example The Blue Dog Project: <http://www.thebluedog.org/en>

### **Further reading**

- FECAVA: [Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations](#)
- FVE: [Federation of Veterinarians of Europe](#)
- [Humane dog population management guidance 2007. International Companion Animal Management Coalition.](#)
- [School education](#)
- [CALLISTO Strategy report II Cycle](#)
- [Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters](#) – The Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV)
- [Shelter Quality: Welfare Assessment Protocol for Shelter Dogs](#)
- [Pesavento PA<sup>1</sup> et al \(2014\) Common and emerging infectious diseases in the animal shelter. Vet Pathol. 2014 Mar; 51 \(2\):478-91. doi: 10.1177/0300985813511129. Epub 2013 Nov 21.](#)
- [Cleaveland S et al \(2014\) The changing landscape of rabies epidemiology and control.](#)
- [Onderstepoort J Vet Res. 2014 Apr 23;81 \(2\):E1-8. doi: 10.4102/ojvr.v81i2.731.](#)
- [Rupprecht CE et al, Control and prevention of rabies in animals: paradigm shifts. Dev Biol \(Basel\). 2006; 125:103-11.](#)
- [Council of Europe –European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals](#)
- [OIE guidelines on stray dog population control](#)
- [European Commission – conclusions first European conference on companion animals](#)