Better lives for dogs

Managing the dog population in Dubai

بلدية دبي
DUBAI MUNICIPALITY

In this case study, we outline the steps taken by the Emirate of Dubai since 2004 to initiate a comprehensive humane dog population management programme, in place of dog culling. We show how their comprehensive approach has benefits for both dogs and the communities around them.

Global context

Here at World Animal Protection, we have been advising and supporting governments on humane dog population management for more than 30 years. By working with governments we are building a world where people respect and value dogs and act compassionately towards them to create a harmonious existence.

Where problems do exist, such as rabies transmission and dog attacks, we advocate comprehensive multi-faceted humane dog population management programmes with a One Health focus[1]. These address the root causes of problems associated with free-roaming dogs while also improving their welfare.

We follow the International Companion Animal Management Coalition's dog population management methodology[2]. This involves the implementation of the following components: education and training, primary dog healthcare, reproduction control, identification and registration, legislation, holding facilities and rehoming centres and limiting access to food resources like garbage.

Background

In recent years, Dubai has emerged as a global city, known for hosting big sporting events and attracting more than ten million tourists every year. It is the second largest Emirate in the United Arab Emirates and has a population of more than two million people.

Designing a humane dog management programme

The first step in achieving a successful and sustainable humane dog management programme is identifying the problems caused by dogs and the types of dogs causing any issues. It is also important to identify the stakeholders - the communities, organisations and government departments affected by an unmanaged situation and those likely to be affected by programme implementation. The factors that precipitate these issues need to be assessed and understood.[3]

Dubai had a large, visible unowned and owned free-roaming dog population. It included packs of feral dogs living in the desert surrounding Dubai which were breeding with free-roaming, owned farm dogs. This resulted in a growing population of unwanted, unowned dogs on the streets. Furthermore, a large number of dogs were being abandoned by ex-patriates leaving Dubai to return to their home countries.

At that time, dogs that found themselves in conflict with the local community were either shot or placed in a privately run shelter. The Municipality realised that shooting dogs was not helping to reduce the population, nor were complaints from the public falling.

Staff also acknowledged that shooting dogs was inhumane and could have a negative impact on Dubai's reputation as a modern, international tourist destination. Further dog-related problems were also emerging, including the sale of puppies through pet shops, many of which carried diseases.

Dubai residents, especially children, were often frightened by large packs of free-roaming dogs. Incidences of dog bites were frequent, as were complaints about dogs. Most of these were about the fear of dogs transmitting disease, dog faeces in the streets, barking and aggressive behaviour. In addition, free-roaming dogs were often the victims of cruel treatment and regularly involved in road traffic accidents.

Meanwhile, Dubai Municipality's awareness of the importance of animal welfare was increasing through the successful implementation of another World Animal Protection initiative – the Trap-Neuter-Release programme for cats. Having seen first-hand how a humane programme could reduce its stray cat population, the Municipality asked for our help to introduce a humane dog management programme.

Starting a programme

Successful implementation depends on identifying root causes of problems associated with free roaming dogs and consulting with identified stakeholders[4].

In 2004, World Animal Protection staff attended a meeting with Dubai Municipality officials and outlined plans for a humane dog management programme. Following the meeting we held a series of workshops in dog management for staff from the Veterinary Services Section of Dubai Municipality's Public Health Services Department (DMVSS).

We also ran practical training for municipality staff - including vets and dog handlers - in topics vital to the development of a comprehensive programme such as neutering surgery and humane dog-catching techniques. Additionally, a building used for housing livestock was converted into dog kennels and designed to be used as a public holding facility for free-roaming dogs.

It was decided that Trap-Neuter-Release would not form part of Dubai's humane dog management programme as the community and government were not willing to have any dogs roaming the streets.

While pilot projects in small areas usually form part of World Animal Protection's humane dog management programmes, it was agreed that it wouldn't be necessary in this case as Dubai covers a small geographical area within the United Arab Emirates.

Crucially, the municipality set about engaging with the Dubai community to generate support for the programme. This was achieved through advertisements in various media, press articles and campaign literature.

Who takes responsibility for the programme?
Dubai Municipality Public Health Services Department and the DMVSS are responsible for the implementation of the programme. The DMVSS is also responsible for funding the programme.

Implementing the components
It took Dubai Municipality around five years to fully implement all components of a humane dog management programme. It began in 2004 with staff training, the building of a public holding facility and public engagement.

Education and training

Education is a key part of any humane dog management programme. Problems associated with free-roaming dogs can be traced back to human behaviour. Education can influence human behaviour in a positive way and change people's attitudes towards dogs, and how dogs are treated[5].

Education
Education has been one of the most important components of Dubai's programme. Public awareness campaigns, usually on single issues that dog owners can address, have been the main focus. For example, the DMVSS launched a campaign to encourage dog owners to pick up their dogs' faeces. This campaign uses the media, posters and billboards across Dubai to help change attitudes and win public support. The media is also used to keep the public informed on the progress of the programme.

Brochures and other printed educational materials are used to promote the programme. These are distributed at both the public veterinary clinic and private veterinary clinics as well as in pet shops. DMVSS staff also attend the annual Dubai Pet Show to engage in person with the thousands of dog owners who attend to show off their pets.

World Animal Protection educational resources are used in local Arabic primary schools by the DMVSS to teach children about general animal welfare. As part of the initiative, children also visit the public veterinary clinic on school trips. The DMVSS is developing the education programme further by using another World Animal Protection resource – 'Five tips to prevent dog bites' – which shows children how to read dogs' body language to avoid being bitten.

Training
Everyone involved in humane dog management programmes must be trained to ensure the safety of staff and dogs[6].

At the start of the programme, World Animal Protection assisted the DMVSS with staff training in:

- Spay and neuter techniques

- Developing criteria for the humane euthanasia of dogs

- Humane catching and handling techniques

- Dog behaviour.

The DMVSS now organises training for staff, veterinary students from the United Arab Emirates University, and pest control companies who deal with stray dogs, in these topics. The training is conducted either by DMVSS staff or external consultants.

It also facilitates the participation of veterinary students from the United Arab Emirates University in practical training sessions on various topics at their public clinic.

Primary dog healthcare

Primary dog healthcare includes: reproduction control, vaccinations and parasite control.

Reproduction control may be used to help lower the number of dogs in an area or to lower the probability of various diseases. In some cases it can help control aggression and/or the desire to roam too.

Vaccinations are essential for the welfare of the dog, and will benefit public health by controlling zoonotic disease transmission[7].

Reproduction control
Neutering is strongly promoted as part of Dubai's effort to control its dog population. Surgical sterilisation is performed by private veterinary clinics. The DMVSS is planning to work with these clinics to provide free neutering days for owned dogs in Dubai.

Legally, all dog breeders must be registered with the Municipality. This helps to control the number of unwanted dogs that are bred.

Vaccination and parasite control
By law, all dogs in Dubai must be vaccinated against Rabies, parvovirus, distemper, and canine hepatitis. Reminders for annual vaccinations are sent to dog owners via the DMVSS or private veterinary clinics.

Unowned free-roaming dogs that are eligible for rehoming are vaccinated in the holding facility.

"The foremost success of the programme is creating awareness in the community regarding responsible dog ownership."

Hashim Mohammed Al Awadhi, Head of Veterinary Services Section, Dubai Municipality

Identification and registration

Identification and registration of dogs are essential parts of a dog management programme. They allow lost dogs to be reunited with owners, help enforce anti-cruelty legislation and can help in surveying the dog population[8].

Dubai has a mandatory identification and registration scheme. All dogs must be microchipped and registered on a local database. Private veterinary surgeons must make sure that all dogs they treat are registered. Such a mandatory scheme provides a good opportunity for educating dog owners about vaccination and neutering.

Microchipping costs 50 AED (approximately £10) and registration costs 10 AED (approximately £2)

Legislation

Humane dog management programmes need to be supported by both national and local legislation. National legislation should ensure that minimum standards are maintained in its application while local legislation can allow for variables in the local situation[9].

Before introducing the humane dog management programme, Dubai had no legislation relevant to dogs. As part of the programme, many new local laws as well as national legislation were introduced (see table).

National legislation is implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Water of the UAE, and local legislation is implemented by the Dubai Municipality. Programmes are in place to create awareness amongst dog owners of these laws.

In addition, the DMVSS has the authority to seize any dog that has been neglected or cruelly treated by its owner.

Most recently, legislation has been introduced to license pest control companies that deal with stray dogs and cats to ensure that all handling of dogs is done appropriately and humanely.

Local legislation	National legislation
Local Order No. (11) for the year 2003 concerning Public Health and Community Safety in the Emirate of Dubai and Administrative Order No. (30) for the year 2007 for implementing Local Order No. (11) of 2003.	Federal law No. (16) for the year 2007Respecting animal welfare
Control of stray and abandoned dogs	Administrative Decree No. (348) for the year 2008 concerning the health requirements for importing pet animals to UAE
Dangerous dogs	
Prohibited areas for dogs	
Dog fighting	
Dog waste removal	
Mandatory dog identification, registration and vaccination	
Import, export and sale of animals including pets	
Pet shop licensing	
Pest control licensing	
Dog breeding establishment licensing	

Holding facilities and rehoming centres

In some communities around the world, free-roaming dogs are well tolerated. However, temporary holding and rehoming facilities may be needed to manage aggressive or problematic unowned dogs, or owned dogs that have strayed from their home. Communities should be encouraged to adopt unwanted dogs from these facilities[10].

There are two holding facilities and rehoming centres for dogs in Dubai. One is run by a voluntary organisation called K9 Friends, which is licensed and regularly inspected by Dubai Municipality. The purpose of its shelter is to rescue and rehome stray and abandoned dogs.

The second is a holding facility run by the Dubai Municipality where rehoming also takes place. Owned dogs that have strayed are held for three working days for owners to collect them before new homes are sought. Owners are fined 500 AED ($141) if their dog strays from home. Any unowned free-roaming dogs are assessed as to whether they are suitable candidates for rehoming. Feral dogs are humanely euthanised.

The DMVS has two dog-catching teams that work five days a week to deal with any dog-related complaints or stray dogs. They are on-call 24 hours a day, seven days a week for serious emergencies, such as dogs involved in traffic accidents or that have bitten people. They also have the power to seize any dog from its owner that has been neglected or cruelly treated.

In addition, there are voluntary groups in Dubai that run fostering networks, where unwanted dogs and unclaimed strays are fostered in people's homes until permanent homes are found.

Controlling access to resources

Dogs may roam in areas where access to resources, such as food waste, is available. For example they may congregate around refuse and garbage dumps. This could precipitate disease transmission and cause concern for the public where streets are not cleaned and people frequent[11].

Dubai Municipality Waste Management Department makes daily collections from street skips. Food outlets and slaughterhouses are regulated by the food control department and are stringent about making sure food cannot be accessed by free-roaming dogs.

Euthanasia

For dogs with incurable illnesses, injuries and behavioural problems and no prospect of recovery then euthanasia may be a necessary part of a dog management programme. It is important for everyone involved in a programme to agree and understand the circumstances under which euthanasia should be used[12].

In Dubai, the criteria for euthanasia includes dogs that are sick with no prospect of recovery, feral dogs with no prospect of adapting to life in human company, or those that are aggressive. Euthanasia is carried out using pentabarbitone injection by qualified and trained staff.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation play an important role in the programme process. They allow a programme's effectiveness to be assessed, issues to be identified and adjustments to be made accordingly. Monitoring and evaluation also allow information regarding successes and failures to be published and shared[13].

The dog management programme is monitored using daily programme records. The DMVSS now keeps a record of: dog related complaints and the nature of those complaints, euthanasia records, and how many dogs are rehomed or reclaimed by their owners.

Regular monitoring and evaluation also helps the Municipality remain vigilant for new problems that may arise. As a result, staff have already identified the potential for people to illegally breed and sell puppies via social media channels.

World Animal Protection continues to work closely with Dubai Municipality to evaluate the programme, assess the programme and make recommendations for improvements.

The benefits to dogs and people

Dubai's humane dog management programme has brought significant positive change for both dogs and the community as a whole. There are now far fewer complaints from residents about dogs and the dog population is now smaller, healthier, better controlled and handled with compassion.

"The dog population management programme implemented by Dubai Municipality Veterinary Services Section, as recommended by World Animal Protection, has resulted in greatly reducing human-animal conflict and this conflict has been proved worldwide to be a motivating and visible animal welfare problem.

The Dubai community has benefitted as the programme has resulted in zero transmission of zoonotic diseases, elimination of bite injuries and phobia of dogs due to unpredictable and aggressive behaviour. Dogs have benefitted as the programme has eliminated many welfare problems, such as disease, road traffic accidents, mistreatment and malnutrition. Inhumane control methods, such as poisoning and cruel handling are now totally out of the implemented system."

Mohammed Yousif Al Hammadi, Head of Veterinary Therapeutic Unit, Dubai Municipality

"The humane dog population management programme has greatly enhanced animal welfare in the Emirate. There is good awareness within the community about stray dogs and they notify the authority when they spot a stray animal for prompt action"

Adil Tayeb Al Badri, Head of Animal Welfare Sub Unit, Veterinary Services

"Before the introduction of the programme in partnership with World Animal Protection, I was angry with myself for shooting so many dogs. I did not know any other way then and now I feel much better about myself. I love my job now because I know I am helping dogs."

Khalid Mohammed Abdelhalim Khalifa, Principal Veterinary Supervisor, Stray Animal Control Team, Dubai Municipality

Conclusions

The introduction of a humane dog management programme has vastly reduced conflict between people and dogs in the community. Educating the public in responsible dog ownership and the benefits of reproduction control means fewer dogs are roaming freely and breeding with feral dogs from the desert. Therefore, fewer dogs are seen on the streets.

The key factors of Dubai's successful programme are:

- emphasising public engagement and education

- engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including private vets, the Waste Management Department, NGOs, dog owners, the local community, and pest control companies

- effective training for everyone involved in the programme

- clear leadership from the DMVS

- introducing new legislation and making dog owners aware of what's required

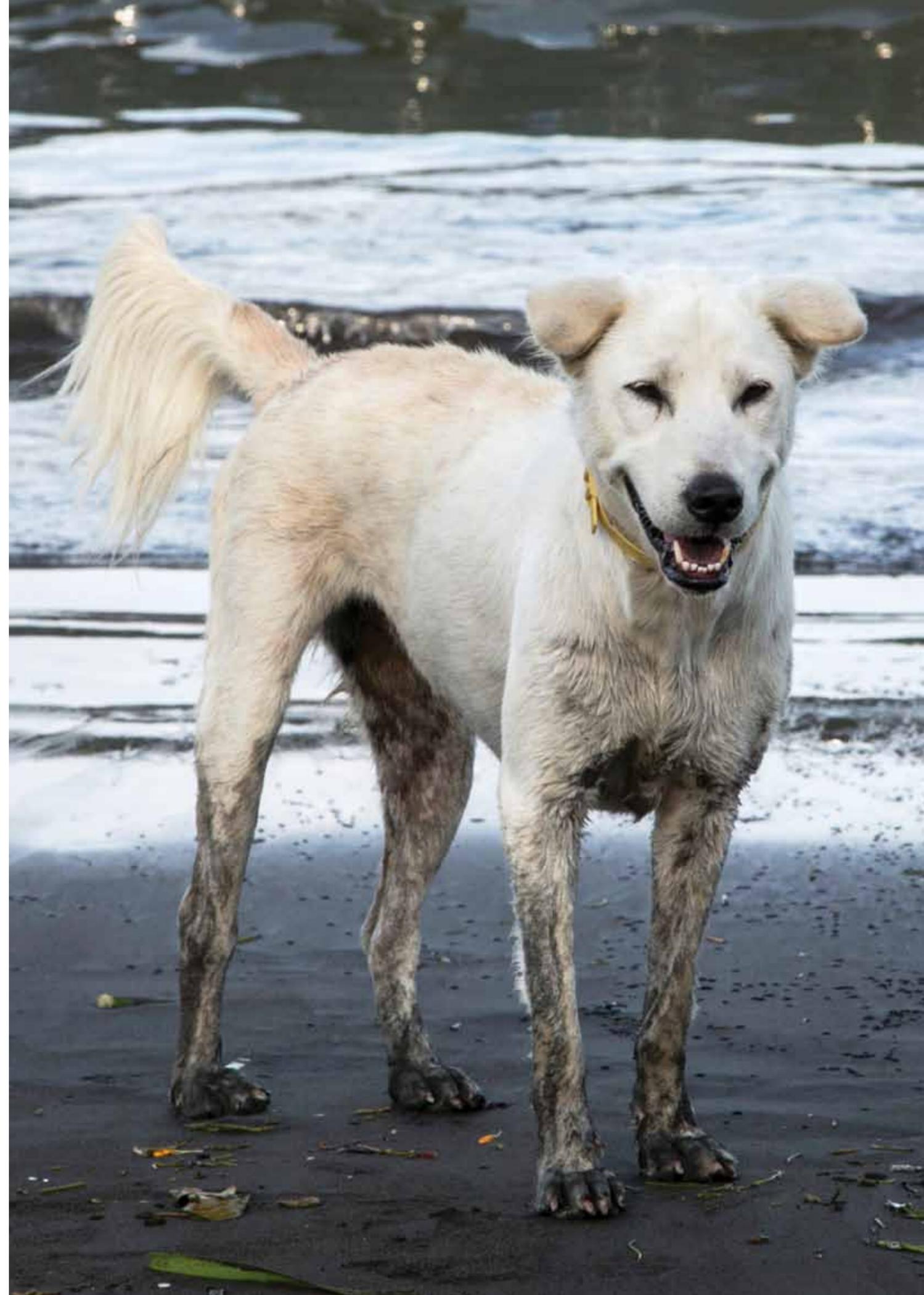- helping people in the community understand their role in the programme.

Dubai's example demonstrates how much can be achieved when governments and World Animal Protection work in partnership to implement a comprehensive humane dog management programme. We want to move other countries in the Middle East to work with us to help create a world where dogs and people coexist in harmony.

"There were many sick dogs and thin dogs before, and now they all look very strong and healthy. I think people are looking after them much better now. I used to see people trying to run over the dogs in their cars, but now if one is hit the driver stops and calls the municipality. It is very different now."

**Khalid Mohammed Abdelhalim Khalifa,
Principal Veterinary Supervisor, Stray
Animal Control Team, Dubai Municipality**

"It is my pleasure to recommend these measures to other governments for successful dog management. It is advised that whatever population management strategy is adopted in any country or region it should be humane and should ultimately lead to an overall improvement in the welfare of animals."

**Hashim Mohammed Al Awadhi, Head of
Veterinary Services Section, Dubai Municipality**

Notes

1 Free-roaming dogs can cause concerns not only for animals, but also for people and the environment. To address these issues successfully, collaboration between animal health, human health and environmental sectors is imperative. This collaboration is known as the One Health concept.

2 International Companion Animal Management Coalition (2008). Humane dog population management guidance. http://www.icam-coalition.org/downloads/humane_dog_population_management_guidance .pdf (accessed 09/07/2015)

3 World Animal Protection (2015). Humane Dog Management. http://www.worldanimalprotection.org/dog-population-management-training-guides (accessed 11/09/2015)

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

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