

Homepage

Latest News

Search

Languages

Contact Us

About Us

Friday, May 13, 2011 14:04 GMT

IPS Direct to Your Inbox!

your email

- Global Affairs
- Africa
- Asia-Pacific
 - Afghanistan
 - Iran
- Caribbean
 - Haiti
- Europe
 - Union in Diversity
- Latin America
- Mideast & Mediterranean
 - Iraq
 - Israel/Palestine
- North America
 - Obama: A New Era?
 - Neo-Cons
 - Bush's Legacy

- Development
 - MDGs
 - City Voices
 - Corruption
- Civil Society
- Globalisation
- Environment
 - Energy Crunch
 - Climate Change
 - Tierramérica
- Human Rights
- Health
 - HIV/AIDS
- Indigenous Peoples
- Economy & Trade
- Labour
- Population
 - Reproductive Rights
 - Migration&Refugees
- Arts & Entertainment
- Education
- ExPress Freedom
- Women in the News
- Columns
- Slideshows
- In Focus

- Readers' Opinions
- Email News

[What is RSS?](#)

LANGUAGES

- ENGLISH
- ESPAÑOL
- FRANÇAIS
- ARABIC
- ČESKY
- DEUTSCH
- ITALIANO
- JAPANESE
- MAGYAR
- NEDERLANDS
- POLSKI

Stray Dog Issue Hounds Animal Welfare in India

By Keya Acharya

BANGALORE, May 12, 2011 (IPS) - Moves to enact a new law on animal welfare in India have upset public health advocates, who fear it will interfere with efforts to control rabies-carrying stray dogs.

The draft animal welfare act, formulated by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), seeks to expand AWBI branches across the country, define cruelty to animals more stringently and impose higher fines for violations.

What public health advocates worry about is that in AWBI's desire to be kind to animals, its animal birth control and vaccination programme will be unable to keep up with the increasing number of strays on the roads, causing problems in health, safety and unnecessary expenditure of public money.

"The most dangerous aspects of the draft animal welfare act are its interference with the control of rabies caused by the incredible increase in the number of stray dogs," said environmental activist and solid waste expert Almitra Patel in a letter to Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, who has jurisdiction over AWBI.

Rabies is a fatal disease usually transmitted when the toxic saliva of infected animals, such as dogs, penetrates human skin, mainly through bites.

India contributes nearly 60 percent of all deaths from rabies worldwide. A 2003 report by the Bangalore-based Association for Prevention and Control of Rabies in India (APCRI), sponsored by the World Health Organisation (WHO), found 20,565 deaths from rabies in 2003, with over 96 percent transmitted by dogs, mostly strays.

Though the mortality figures from rabies have come down, the viral disease clearly remains a problem in India, which also has an estimated 17.4 million dog bite cases per year, causing the country to lose 38 million work-days.

The public health system spends nearly two billion rupees (45 million dollars) every year for human anti-rabies vaccines to treat bite cases.

Most of the deaths from rabies and bite cases are from poorer sections of Indian society, where garbage heaps and scavenging dogs abound.

There is no known census of the population of stray dogs in India, though the 2003 report by APCRI, a group of professional scientists and experts, estimates that there were 22 million stray dogs in India in 2000.

Socio-religious and cultural beliefs about benevolence to animals has made control of stray dogs an emotionally divisive issue in India.

The new law will annul the current Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960, and respond to calls in Parliament for stronger legislation to control the use of, and cruelty towards, animals.

"We are a balancing agency, trying to incorporate various interests," says Dr. Anjani Kumar, director of animal welfare at the Ministry of Environment.

An emotional and financial resurgence of animal-rights organisations, coupled with society's



Stray Dogs in Cochin, Kerala, India

Credit:SingChan/Creative Commons Licence

RELATED IPS ARTICLES

- ▶ DEVELOPMENT-INDIA: IT Hub Can Handle Gigabytes, Not Dog Bites - 2007
- ▶ CUBA: Dogs Suffer the Mean Streets - 2007
- ▶ ITALY: Thousands of Pets Abandoned During Summer Vacation - 2006

RELATED WEB SITES

- ▶ World Health Organisation on Rabies
- ▶ World Rabies Day
- ▶ World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)
- ▶ WSPA report on Stray Animal Control Practices (Europe)

IPS is not responsible for the content of external sites

RELATED TOPICS

- ▶ Asia-Pacific
- ▶ Environment
- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Health

ADVERTISEMENT

PORTUGUÊS
SUOMI
SVENSKA
SWAHILI
TÜRKÇE

willingness to feed strays, has muddied the issue of control of stray dogs, their connection to public health and the huge costs to the treasury.

In 2001, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was amended to include Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules, which outline a programme of sterilising female strays and vaccinating each dog on the road, to be conducted by local municipal authorities.



In the 741-square-kilometre town limits of Bangalore, capital of the south-western Indian state of Karnataka, the joint director of animal welfare, Dr. Pervez Piran, oversees the operation of 20 centres for sterilisation and vaccination of stray dogs, outsourced to eight animal welfare organisations.

Each dog costs municipal coffers 600 rupees (15 dollars), with 50 million rupees (11.5 million dollars) spent on the ABC programme in the city last year alone.

But in spite of over 31 million dollars being spent on ABC in the last eleven years in Bangalore, and Piran's work in sterilisations, he says it will take another three years to 'stabilise' Bangalore's stray dog population, currently estimated unofficially at around 300,000.

"I am caught between the devil and the deep blue sea," says Piran wryly. "The city, its population and its garbage are increasing rapidly, allowing stray populations living off garbage to increase exponentially.

"I have been struggling for years with solid waste management," says Patel. "Every municipality needs to enforce non-feeding of strays by citizens."

Stray Dog Free Bangalore (SDFB), a group of working professionals, including veterinarians, who have banded together to remove strays from the streets because of their public health and safety implications, has now petitioned the Supreme Court to remove strays from public places in India.

"It is ironic that the new act does not take responsibility for or custody of stray dogs," says Diana Bharucha, founder of SDFB. "Countries like the USA or UK, European and even Asian nations like Singapore and Malaysia have animal and rabies control systems, and treat their animals with as much compassion as we in India."

A study by the World Society for the Protection of Animals covering 31 European and Eurasian countries in 2006 found that more than half of the countries caught strays as a method of control, with 35 percent euthanising the sick or those not 're-homed' after the holding period of 60 days.

Ten percent, or three countries, did not permit killing of healthy strays, but needed the authorities to hold and take care of such dogs.

After more than a decade, the ABC programme has been unable to stem or control stray dog populations in India, with charges of corruption, malfeasance and incompetence leveled at municipalities and outsourced animal rights organisations.

Dr. MK Sudarshan, dean of the Bangalore-based Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) and principal researcher on the 2003 APCRI-WHO Rabies Survey, welcomes the proposed Animal Welfare Act and the powers it gives to the Animal Welfare Board.

"Let the Animal Welfare Board take over the responsibility of the ABC and ensure the safety and health of the public," says Sudarshan. "We can now hold the Board responsible if they don't do a good job."

The draft Act is due to be discussed for enactment in Parliament later this year. (END)

[Send your comments to the editor](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

[grab this widget](#) | [start a petition](#) | by [Care2](#)



IPS Pictures in www.flickr.com



MOST POPULAR

- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT:** Investment, Not Charity for LDCs
- ▶ **MIDEAST:** Egyptian Activists Gear Up For Third Intifadah
- ▶ **NEPAL:** Women Race to the Top: Mt. Everest
- ▶ **DEVELOPMENT:** Time For New Approaches says Civil Society
- ▶ **Iran's Two Executives Play a Lose-Lose Game**
- ▶ **INDIA:** Smuggling Everything From Cough Syrup to Sex
- ▶ **MIDEAST:** The Indigenous Become Squatters
- ▶ **CUBA:** Changes in Property, Travel Rules Announced
- ▶ **Indigenous Craftswomen Take on Mexican Fashion World**
- ▶ **AFRICA:** Investment Growth Benefiting Only Some Poor States

- News Feeds RSS/XML
- Make IPS News your homepage!
- Free Email Newsletters
- IPS Mobile
- Text Only

SIGN UP

[READ IN IPSNEWS.NET >>](#)

ECONOMY, TRADE & FINANCE



▶ **DEVELOPMENT:**
Market Forces Rise Above
Declarations

[More >>](#)

**REALITY CHECK - Missing the Millennium
Development Goals?**



▶ Humanity Hitting the
Resource Ceiling

[More >>](#)

ENVIRONMENT



▶ **PERU:** Native Birds
under Threat from Illegal
Logging

[More >>](#)

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Subscription](#) | [News in RSS](#) | [Email News](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Text Only](#)
Copyright © 2011 IPS-Inter Press Service. All rights reserved.