

# Letters

Send your letters to Letters Editor, New Straits Times, 31, Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur or email [letters@nst.com.my](mailto:letters@nst.com.my) (Tel: 03-20569411). A letter must have the writer's name, signature, home address, phone and MyKad numbers. It should ideally not be more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to edit a letter for clarity and length.

**RABIES CONTROL**

## Vaccination is better than culling

**T**HE rabies outbreak in Penang, Perlis and Kedah has caused anguish, heartbreak and fear to animal-loving Malaysians, especially pet owners, animal rescuers and animal shelters. Malaysia has been rabies-free since 1999, and this outbreak caught the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) and animal carers unprepared, having a low stock of rabies vaccines for animals and culminating in a frantic desire to cull stray dogs in Penang.

While the DVS has done an admirable job in containing rabies in these states by enforcing mass dog vaccinations and culling of affected stray dogs, it is important to note that all mammals are potential vector carriers.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Selangor understands the significance of such actions, and urges the DVS to exercise the most humane and sustainable method to eliminate this disease.

In stray communities where the disease is unlikely to spread, SPCA urges vaccination instead of indiscriminate culling. Indiscriminate culling promotes dog movement, as other strays will move in to fill the vacuum since we cannot catch all of the animals. Granted, affected areas may necessitate

culling; but mass vaccinations will create herd immunity that will become a wall of immunity and, over a given time, rabies will be eliminated.

Experts like the World Health Organisation and United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention espouse that control of the disease through mass vaccinations, targeting at least 70 per cent of the dog population, will break the cycle of virus transmission from canines to humans. Effective and humane stray animal control, education and public awareness are recommended.

Penang is 350km from Kuala Lumpur and it is unlikely that affected strays will make their way to the capital. While SPCA Selangor is not in the affected area, we are anxiously awaiting the DVS protocols and guidelines for animal shelters. Based on on-going evolution of this outbreak in the northern states, SPCA Selangor will modify our response to ensure human and animal welfare.

SPCA Selangor urges the people of the state not to panic, and instead take preventive, proactive and precautionary measures. We will be vaccinating our animals in residence and our staff who come in contact with animals.

We advise animal rescuers to be vaccinated against rabies as well.



Experts espouse that mass vaccinations, targeting at least 70 per cent of the dog population, will break the cycle of virus transmission from canines to humans.

SPCA hopes to procure additional doses of rabies vaccines from our suppliers and provide them at a reasonable cost to the public.

As the situation is fluid, we will continue to monitor this outbreak, and will ensure that the welfare of our staff and our resident animals will not be compromised. At the same time, we will continue to help the stray population by continuing

our spay/neuter clinic (Klinik Kembari), and educating and guiding people on dog bite prevention.

SPCA Selangor hopes that rescuers and pet owners in the affected states will not worsen the situation by bringing strays or their pets to other states, as the movement of animals can spread the disease quickly to other states. Instead, it would be advisable to con-

fine, monitor and vaccinate the strays that the rescuers are caring for to protect them.

Pet owners are also advised to keep their pets in their compounds and prevent them from coming in contact with other pets or strays.

**CHRISTINE CHIN**, chairman, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals