

Penang defends decision to cull strays

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GEORGE TOWN: The state government has denied that it is on a "killing frenzy" in approving a mass dog culling exercise to curb the rabies outbreak.

State Health Committee chairman Dr Afif Bahardin said the administration has engaged with experts who say that culling is the proper method to stop the spread of the disease.

In defending the state's decision, Afif said he had consulted both government and private veterinarians on the matter,

adding that he could not solely rely on the views of one NGO.

"It is not that we want to go on a 'killing frenzy' to contain the disease, our main interest is public health," he said in a press conference yesterday with Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and Penang Veterinary Services Department (VSD) director Dr Siti Salmiyah Tahir.

The order to cull began on Sept 15 after rabies was detected in the state following infections in Perlis and Kedah, three years after Malaysia was declared rabies free.

The decision did not go down well with animal welfare activists and netizens who

balked at the order to destroy all strays.

Afif said the methods used now to put down stray dogs are more humane compared with the past.

"In the past, it was shoot on sight, now we are using tranquillisers, we euthanise the dog, in less than one minute the dog will sleep," he said, adding Malaysia had eradicated rabies before.

On the supply of vaccines, Siti Salmiyah said 300 doses will be delivered to the VSD office in Bukit Tengah on the mainland on Sept 23.

She said dog owners can take their pets there to have them vaccinated.