

# More veterinary officers to enforce wildlife Act

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**PETALING JAYA:** More veterinary enforcement officers will be employed to ensure that the Animal Welfare Act is implemented smoothly after it comes into force, says Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Deputy Minister Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman.

He said the Act, which has stiffer penalties against animal abusers, "will be enforced very soon", declining to say exactly when.

But until then, the Government was preparing to ensure the Act would be implemented smoothly when the time came, he said.

"This includes looking into recruiting more Department of Veterinary Services enforcement officers and training them in the newly-passed law," Tajuddin said.

He added that the ministry would

also organise seminars to educate the public, especially pet owners, on the law and animal welfare.

"Public participation and cooperation are needed in protecting animal welfare.

"The burden should not rest solely on enforcement officers.

"As pet owners, they need to be aware of the new provisions in the law," Tajuddin said, adding that local councils would also be included in the programmes.

The Act, passed by Parliament last year, received Royal Assent in December.

Under it, those who abuse animals will face a fine of between RM20,000 and RM100,000, a maximum jail term of three years, or both.

This is a heavier penalty compared to that in the Animals Act 1953, which punishes animal abusers with a maximum fine of RM50,000, one year in jail, or both.

Some people urged the Government to enforce the Animal Welfare Act 2015 as soon as possible after several recent reports of cruelty against animals.

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Selangor patron Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye made the call after pictures of a dead dog, allegedly shot and killed by Rompin District Council workers, were circulated on social media.

The dog, called Rocky, was allegedly shot in front of its owner's house.

According to Section 30 (1) of the new Act, "no person shall kill by shooting with firearms any dog, cat or other animal unless authorised by the veterinary authority during an emergency or for the purposes of disease control".

Several animal welfare groups have claimed that the law has loopholes.

Malaysian Dogs Deserve Better founder Wani Muthiah pointed out that part of the Act prohibits killing animals unless the purpose is for human consumption.

"In other words, you can kill dogs and cats for food," she said.

Lawyer and SPCA senior volunteer Wong Ee Lynn said Section 30 (1) of the Act gives veterinary authorities excessively wide discretionary powers in the culling of strays, pets, farm animals and wildlife in urban and residential areas.

"Since the new Act provides for an Animal Welfare Board to be set up, individuals, including animal rights groups representatives, should be appointed to draft standard operating procedures and train officers on intervention and outreach procedures," she said.

In response, Tajuddin said the law must be read in context with the situation.