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The Star

Let's get animal welfare education moving along

I AM fully supportive of the Government's proposal to introduce a subject on animal welfare in schools by next year.

This proposal, which was made by the Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries, Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek, will go a long way towards inculcating awareness among the young to show care for animals.

I hope that the Education Ministry will be receptive to the proposed introduction of the subject in schools. Both ministries are currently discussing the matter as reported.

When we start to create awareness on animal welfare among children, they will grow up respecting animals and will be more conscious of their responsibilities towards animals, especially when they have pets.

Through education, we can create a positive and caring attitude towards animals, with a sense of compassion and respect for the value of life.

Animal welfare education promotes knowledge, understanding and responsibility as well as the



right attitudes and values towards animals. It can bring significant change in the way animals are treated.

The introduction of the animal welfare subject in schools is in line with the Animal Welfare Act 2015, which was gazetted in December last year.

The landmark legislation seeks to better promote animal protec-

tion and prevent abuse.

I am very hopeful that the Act can be enforced as early next year. There are so many public complaints, media reports and social media postings about animals being physically abused or pets abandoned by the owners without food and water.

We have to put a stop to all forms of ill treatment against ani-

mals. Animals have a right to live free from pain and suffering, and especially death from a vicious killing.

Under the Act, a minimum fine of RM20,000 and a maximum penalty of RM100,000 fine and three-year jail sentence will be imposed on those convicted of abusing animals.

The Act also requires all individuals and businesses which carry out activities involving animals to obtain a licence.

Under the licencing requirements, owners have to ensure animals are free from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

The Animal Welfare Board should also be formed soon to raise public awareness. Besides providing public education, the Board will also monitor the work of associations or bodies that handle animals.

Meanwhile, local authorities must also be educated on animal welfare.

Those in charge of catching stray animals must not commit acts of cruelty against these sentient creatures.

Local authorities are, in most cases, unkind to strays. It seems that the standard operating procedures for the catching of strays have not been complied with by many local authorities.

Our local authorities should come out with an effective and humane stray management plan with the support of animal welfare NGOs on humane ways to catch, transport and manage the strays.

Teaching animal welfare education in schools is the long-term preventive strategy that would bring about a more lasting impact in attitude change for Malaysians to be more responsible towards animals in general.

The Education Ministry, in preparing the module for animal welfare subject, should consult animal welfare NGOs who can provide excellent insights into effective animal welfare education, including responsible pet ownership.

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