

Strategy for Control of Stray Dog Populations in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2010

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1. Legal basis and background

- 1.1 The 1999 version of the Bulgarian Law on Veterinary Activities;
- 1.2 the new (2005) Law on Veterinary Activities;
- 1.3 the Law on the Protection of Animals (against cruelty) entered into force on 31.01.2008.

2. Policies applied

- 2.1 Up to the end of 2005, catching stray dogs, offering the ones caught for adoption and possible euthanasia of those not adopted successfully;
- 2.2 Since the beginning of 2006, the overall policy has been changed by avoiding euthanasia and by a joint programme with the 'Four Paws' foundation to catch and neuter stray dogs, offer them for adoption and to release those not adopted at the places where they were caught (the CCR approach);
- 2.3 The Animal Protection Act of 31.01.2008 has enacted (among other things) a new obligation on municipal mayors making them responsible for ensuring and running appropriate facilities and making them operational as dog shelters where stray dogs should be accommodated and further nurtured, as necessary.

3. Training programmes in animal welfare and protection

4. Major factors of occurrence and later evolution of the stray dog problem

- The rapid increase of town populations;

- the drastic rise in the number of home pets kept under inappropriate conditions and their unknown and uncontrolled reproduction (in villages, on parking places, on construction sites, etc.) due to the fact that most of the owners do not ensure neutering or restrict by other means the pregnancy of their female pets, thus facing the option of releasing the undesired offspring;
- the specifics of town environments making it easier to find food and asylum;
- the absence of adequate controls on domestic dogs;
- throwing out 'domestic dogs' and enabling them to migrate from rural villa zones into the towns, in order to get food;
- abandoning animals due to lack of capacities to care for them.

5. Measures undertaken to control stray dog populations

5.1 Municipal programmes for controlling stray dog populations in accordance with the Animal Protection Act, including:

- ✓ constructing and operating animal shelters at the municipality level;
- ✓ neutering and freeing dogs of parasites;
- ✓ well communicated offers of dogs for adoption;
- ✓ releasing the non-adopted dogs where they were caught, keeping alive the task delegated to municipalities and relevant animal welfare (AW) NGOs to ensure relevant immuno-prophylactic activities.

5.2 Co-operation and interactions between municipalities and relevant AW NGOs.

6. Outcomes

6.1 The measures aiming to decrease the numbers of stray dogs, as provided for in the Animal Protection Act, are well applied in the big towns of Bulgaria (Sofia, Burgas, Ruse, Dobrich, Varna, Vidin and Shumen), where substantial drops in stray dog populations have been observed. These towns might also be highlighted as examples of very good and close co-operation between municipal bodies and relevant AW NGOs.

6.2 Between 60 and 70% of the municipalities in the country have their approved programmes for controlling stray dog populations;

6.3 Since the start of 2010, the National Electronic Database for registered dogs has been operational and ensures all the necessary means to establish and keep the national register of domestic dogs, and thus to improve substantially all the necessary controls on both domestic and stray dog populations.

6.4 Statistical data on stray dogs:

- ✓ up to 2006: 98,350 stray dogs;
- ✓ at the beginning of 2008: 69,560 stray dogs;

- ✓ at the end of 2009: 43,700 stray dogs;
- ✓ at the end of 2009 (by municipal shelters only): 9,892 neutered and released stray dogs and 487 successfully adopted.

7. Conclusions

Final objective of the programme:

Ensuring and constructing all the shelters needed, accommodating and neutering the dogs therein, adoptions of dogs, but without releasing any where they were caught.

The National Veterinary Service performs the overall supervision of implementation of all programmes for controlling stray dog populations that are to be implemented in the municipalities concerned.