



Prime Minister of Aruba
Minister of General Affairs

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Government of Aruba

To: Massimo Pradella – OIPA Chairman
Valentina Bagnato – OIPA Head International Relations Office
Organisation Internationale pour la Protection des Animaux
international@oipa.org

Aruba, July 26th, 2021 MA2: 8756

Dear Valentina and Massimo,

Thank you for your letter dd. July 15th, 2021, and for reaching out to the government of Aruba with your concerns.

My cabinet is the first cabinet in over 40 years that has truly started to address the stray dog population problem in Aruba. In March 2019 I requested Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Mrs. Irene Croes to develop a National Dog Population Management Plan (National DPM Plan) that carries the approval of all stakeholders and partners.

This is an overview of the plan that was developed:

National Plan: Dog Population Management

Objectives:

1. promote responsible ownership;
2. improve health and welfare of owned and stray dog population;
3. reduce density of stray dogs;
4. prevent illegal trade and trafficking.

Direct approach

Set up "Dog Act Shelter/Centro di Control di Cacho" & Central Database
Set up "Dog Control Unit"
Revise "Hondenverordening"
- Registration & ID mandatory
- Designate Leash-Free areas

Training Dog Control Unit staff
Training VD staff (euthanasia)
Design regulations for breeders, etc

Short term approach

Assessment
Strengthen border control
"Centro di Control di Cacho" (?):
- Evaluate effectiveness
"Dog Act Shelter"

Censo 2020 Dog & Cat
Training border control
Lectures at schools
Budget (upcoming 5 years)

Mid-/Long term approach

Design a "Dieren(welzijns)wet"
Modernize ongoing registration
- app
Set up Animal Control Dept.
- Animal Control Officers
Evaluate culture: new dog census
- "kill cage" still a
necessity?
Evaluate need for mandatory
spaying and neutering,
dog taxes or other means



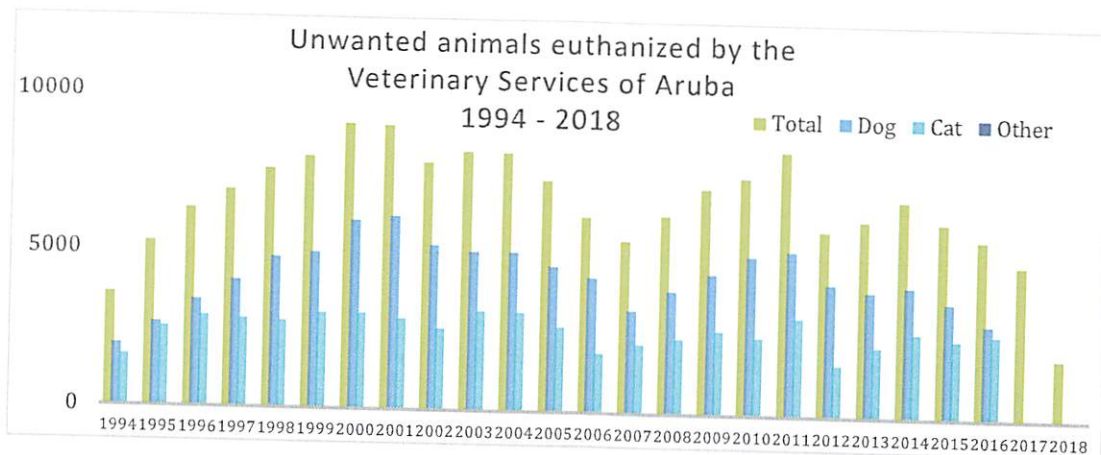
The National DPM Plan is based on the following documents:

- the OIE's Stray Dog Population Control document,
- the ICAM's Humane Dog Population Management documents (including the 2019 update), and
- the report from the local Plataforma Ley di Cacho (Platform Law for Dogs), which advised the former government in 2014 of the necessary steps to be taken to address the issues. This considered the fact that the old Dog Act would be revised whereby

dog owners are obliged to keep their dogs in their garden. The new Dog Act is in effect starting January 2015.

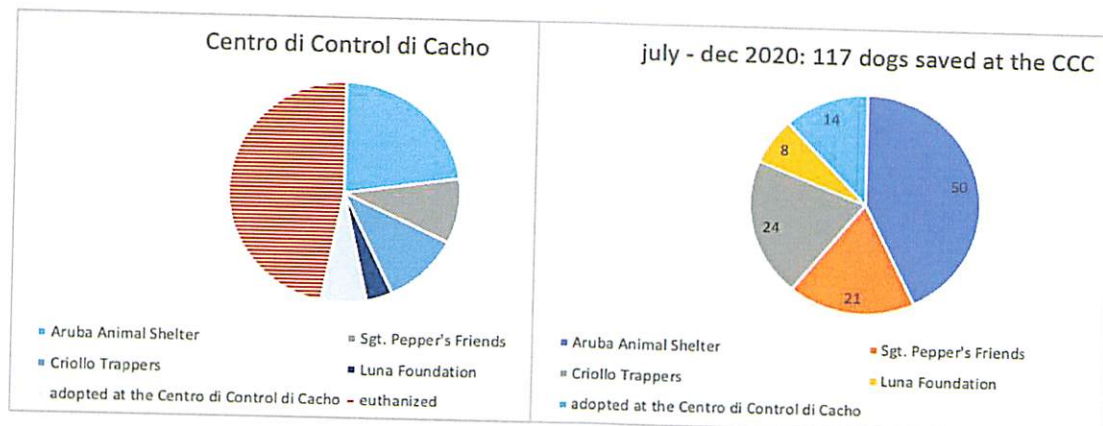
The first step of this National DPM Plan was to eliminate the so-called “kill cage”, a facility that had been in existence for over 40 years. Here, people who wanted to get rid of their unwanted pets could leave them to be euthanized. It is important to realize that the problem with these animals starts with a human factor: these dogs did not enter the facility by themselves, but these were unwanted pets, dropped off by owners, for the purpose of being euthanized by the government. This facility has been transformed into a Dog Control Center to act as a temporary shelter under the Dog Act. This place was inaugurated as the Centro di Control di Cacho (CCC, Dog Control Center) on the 1st of July 2020. The Mahatma Gandhi quote “the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated” I have used during my speech at this inauguration.

The chart below shows the number of animals being euthanized before the Dog Control Center was introduced:



In the old structure no more than 2% of the dogs and cats deposited at the facility were lucky and saved by the shelter next doors. Since March 2018 when all foundations protested the kill cage, more and more animals are being dumped around the island instead of being brought to the facility. Based on that experience in March 2019 we recognized the urgency and requested Dr. Irene Croes to address this situation in a strategic way.

The below chart shows the results of the first half year of the Dog Control Center being active, showing that 47% of all dogs being brought to this transformed facility were euthanized while 53% were saved.



Compared to the 98% euthanasia rate, this is a huge improvement. However, very few dogs were brought to the CCC, only 221 dogs, so we need to address the quantity of pets being abandoned and dumped elsewhere.

The second visible step was to introduce a Dog Control Unit which happened mid-April this year. In May the personnel started receiving training on humane dog catching methods.

I can assure you that a common concern is the way dogs are treated, and this is addressed in the National DPM Plan. Our desire is for Aruba to be a positive example of ethical tourism, a perfect place where humans and animals can coexist with a positive synergy between them. We know, a country that treats animals with respect and compassion is a country that many people would be happy to visit and promote.

We are following the recommendations of internationally renowned organizations in this National DPM Plan like stated earlier.

According to the OIE the following control measures could be implemented in accordance with the national context and local circumstances, and these control measures are quite similar to those by ICAM:

1. Education and legislation for responsible ownership,
2. Registration and identification of dogs (licensing),
3. Reproductive control,
4. Removal and handling,
5. Capture and return, rehoming or release,
6. Environmental controls (controlling access to resources),
7. Control of dog movement — international (export/import),
8. Control of dog movements — within country (e.g., leash laws, roaming restrictions),
9. Regulation of commercial dog dealers,
10. Reduction in dog bite incidence, and
11. Euthanasia

Considering the overpopulation of dogs and cats, and our current legislation, no permanent TNR (Trap-Neuter-Release) program for dogs can be implemented, as the Dog Act requires owners to ensure that their dogs are not roaming around and are kept in their yard or on a leash when not in their garden.

As we all know, without enforcement, legislation is ineffective. Local organizations claim the right for sterilized dogs to roam the streets, however, this would pose a problem for the dogs themselves, for the community and the environment. Hundreds of dogs are killed in traffic on a yearly basis. There are numerous reports of unowned dogs disturbing and/or excavating turtle nests on the beach, and as turtles are almost extinct and known to be protected, some nests in Aruba are under serious threat. Enforcement is therefore necessary.

TNR programs for cats are applauded by the government. This measure is also mentioned in the ICAM's Humane Cat Population Management Guidance as a very useful tool, which is also included in this National Plan. Mass sterilization and community engagement as outlined by ICAM is being worked on, but unfortunately the Aruban government does not have the capacity to completely fund this program. Where possible, all foundations addressing the issue, local and international, are being supported. These projects are organized on a yearly basis and my cabinet supported those in 2018 and 2019. Due to the

COVID19 implications, the program could not be executed in 2020, but we are aiming for two such projects this year; the government covers some expenses when organized.

We hope that the foundation Stimami Sterilisami (translates to “Love me, sterilize me”) can soon resume their sterilization funding activities; they were forced to discontinue this program as the crisis seriously impacted their funding.

Monitoring the presence of stray dogs with the introduction of ear tags for already sterilized street dogs is not included in our National DPM Plan. A tolerance policy for neutered strays is being worked on. If approved, these dogs should be tolerated throughout the community and responsibility should be taken for these dogs. Instead of the ear tags they will have a



large tag on their collars, like the ones used in Cuba, to prevent them from being picked up again by the Dog Control Unit. However, community engagement is necessary, as stray animals are not well tolerated and sometimes even shot at, especially near livestock farms. We do not want people taking the law into their own hands, so education and awareness are very important to achieve this goal. A canine municipal registry for both owned and stray dogs is the next step in our National DPM Plan.

Raising community awareness and responsible pet ownership, creating a campaign to prevent animal abandonment and encouraging vaccination and sterilization activities are important and applauded. Removing dogs alone will not have a significant impact on the dog population density. Euthanasia of dogs, used alone, is not an effective control measure either. Therefore, our primary objective is to promote responsible animal ownership in Aruba, as we lack responsible pet owners. Since the approval of this National DPM Plan in the council of ministers, education and awareness on the subject started, as part of a continuous effort.

We are working on microchipping regulation for owned dogs so the owners can be easily traced in case of abandonment. We are awaiting a better recuperation of our economy to make this mandatory.

Implementing national law and local regulations on animal rights and animal protection to punish those who commit mistreatment and animal abuse is one of the missions of our National DPM Plan, because these laws exist. The government stands for integrity and transparency. Transparency of funds and activities carried out by non-governmental organizations dealing with animal issues is therefore of great importance at this point.

Establishing a close cooperation with our local animal rescue and animal rights associations, international organizations as yours and volunteers who can provide knowledge and share expertise is also a goal in this National DPM Plan. Everyone must know and respect their place within the structure and be vigilant but must not interfere.

In your letter you claim that stray dogs (old, adult, puppy, pregnant, owned, sterilized, etc.) are being brutally handled by governmental staff of the Dog Control Unit, following the instructions of cleaning up the streets of Aruba and are then transferred to the Center for Dog Control to be euthanized.

First, we are not aware of such practice and would like to receive this evidence to which you are referring to. Second, there is no instruction of cleaning up the streets of Aruba. Third, we do find homes for some of the dogs being brought in by the Dog Control Unit and these figures will be presented in due time. The staff of our Dog Control Unit has been trained and instructed to handle the dogs as humanely as possible and will continue to receive training and instruction in this. The humane treatment of animals is a priority in our National DPM plan. With thorough records of all dogs euthanized at the Dog Control Center; we would be able to compare your data with what we have documented.

In your letter you also claim that dogs are being euthanized for no specific reasons and that the way the killing is carried out is simply terrible. Euthanasia of dogs in Aruba is performed according to the official veterinarian's recommendation using the most humane possible method. According to the table of summary analysis of methods for euthanasia of dogs, as published by the World Organization for Animal Health, mechanical, electrical, and gaseous methods are included, but in Aruba euthanasia at the Dog Control Center is only performed by injection of pentobarbital by trained personnel of the Veterinary Services of Aruba.

I urge you to send us the evidence you are referring to and we are eager to receive this evidence, so we can verify and confirm the validity of its content. Naturally we will share our findings with you. I can assure you that the government of Aruba is following the International Companion Animal Management Coalition's recommendations to ensure that our veterinary professionals are well equipped to take an effective leadership role in a DPM program to ensure the welfare of all dogs in a community. You can also be assured that our official veterinarian is doing her utmost best to achieve this in collaboration with local and international organizations.

We look forward to working with your organization to develop a short-term solution for the approximately 40.000 roaming and unneutered dogs and cats at minimal cost to government of Aruba, and we would welcome your ideas and suggestions.

Dr. Irene Croes is of course available for a zoom meeting with you after receiving the evidence you mentioned.

Sincerely,



Mrs. E.C. Wever-Croes, LL.M
Prime Minister of Aruba

Copies to:

MinTVS, mr. D. Oduber

MinJVI, mr. A. Bikker, LL.M.

CVO, Mrs. I. Croes