



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Websites:
(in English, BM, Chinese,
& Tamil)
www.consumer.org.my

Letter to the Editor

15 March 2023

Livestock are inevitable victims of human doing

Recurring floods that hit Malaysia have been made much worse by climate change which is linked to logging and over-development. Flooding disasters have also taken a heavy toll on people and their livestock.

When natural calamities strike, farm animals are helpless and are always among the many victims. Yet measures to evacuate or protect livestock are not yet in place. Government relief and rehabilitation are focused almost exclusively on people.

According to livestock breeders in Terengganu, last December flood cost them RM3.47 million. This is despite the fact that animals can swim or try to escape if they are not tethered or caged. Livestock most commonly either drowned or died of exposure in the cold floodwaters.

The Terengganu Veterinary Services Department (JPV) reported a total of 43,789 cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, quail, and deer as flood casualties, with chickens accounting for the most casualties. Those are just the reported losses from one state among many that suffered from recent floodings.

Animals are the main source of livelihood for poor farmers, and yet there is no disaster management for livestock. There is no preparedness, mitigation, or rehabilitation focused on cattle, buffaloes, goats, or chickens.

Flooding cause animals to drown, suffer from trauma, shock, broken limbs, blood loss, dehydration and many consequentially perish. In light of the extent of losses and the importance of livestock for millions of people, the Veterinary Authority ought to take leadership in disaster risk reduction and management for animals. This would seem the proper role of the National Veterinary Services Malaysia which manages animals and animal welfare throughout the country. Indeed, government veterinarians can help to prevent suffering and early death by treating those afflicted and, as needed, euthanizing those beyond help.

Any workable disaster plan must therefore outline the roles and responsibilities of private veterinarians, livestock owners and keepers, breeders, and other animal owners. To help prepare veterinarians for emergency care of livestock in such disasters as the recurring flooding in Malaysia, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has published the WOAH Guidelines on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction in Relation to Animal Health and Welfare for member nations. Communities value their animals and look to veterinarians for help in such times of disaster. Vets are essential at the front lines of disaster relief and in the months of recovery that follow.

There are many ways to improve disaster response with regard to livestock. Veterinarians could play a role by becoming planners and advisors in risk reduction in their own communities and by helping livestock owners to prepare their own disaster plans. Vets could also lobby the local authority to include animals in their disaster preparedness.

A Veterinary Emergency Response Unit (VERU), with highly trained groups of veterinary students, can be deployed in times of disaster to provide veterinary care to injured or sick animals. As of 2012, VERU units have been created in collaboration with veterinary schools in eight countries: Colombia, India, Myanmar, Kenya, Nicaragua, Mexico, Thailand and Costa Rica. Malaysia could collaborate with these countries to develop Veterinary Emergency response units.

Malaysian policymakers have not yet created a plan for rescuing and aiding livestock and working animals during or after disasters, despite the importance of these animals to many Malaysian people. It is time for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary service department to survey necessary resources, determine the roles and responsibilities of those involved (veterinarians, livestock owners and breeders, veterinary students), and establish and enforce policies regarding the protection and care of livestock and working animals both during and after the disasters.

A plan is not simply about rescuing the animals at the time of the disaster, it must include long-term provisions. Without rescue intervention, livestock may perish from lack of food, water, and disease in the aftermath. It also helps to reduce financial losses to the livestock breeders if WOAHA Guidelines on Disaster Management and Risk Reduction in Relation to Animal Health and Welfare is adopted.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers Association of Penang (CAP)