

# 'Island sanctuary for stray dogs not **feasible** proposal'

► Experts warn of potential risks to animal welfare, public safety and could impact Langkawi's image as luxury tourist destination

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**PETALING JAYA:** The recent proposal by a lawmaker to designate an island in Langkawi for housing stray dogs has sparked concerns among experts who warn of potential risks to both animal welfare and public safety as well as ecological consequences.

Universiti Teknologi Mara tourism economics lecturer Prof Dr Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah cautioned that while the idea is commendable from an animal welfare perspective, concerns over feasibility, ecological impact and tourism branding present significant challenges.

"The proposal intersects animal welfare, luxury tourism, and sustainable development.

"The idea of an island shelter for stray dogs is commendable but its feasibility is not in Langkawi's favour."

Hafiz said Langkawi, marketed as a luxury, nature-based destination competing with places like Bali, Phuket and the Maldives, could weaken its branding and send mixed signals to tourists if an island for stray dogs is introduced.

"Japan's 'Cat Island' (Tashirojima) successfully turned its stray cat population into an attraction. However, Langkawi's positioning as a high-end destination may not align well with such an initiative," he added.

Recently, Langkawi MP Datuk Mohd Suhaimi Abdullah proposed designating one of the 99 islands in his constituency as a sanctuary for stray dogs.

His suggestion follows an incident in Kampung Dede, Sungai Menghulu on March 1 where a four-year-old boy suffered severe injuries after being attacked by a pack of dogs on the island.

Suhaimi suggested turning the island into a tourist attraction for housing stray dogs, equipping the island with veterinary facilities to provide medical attention and create an attraction for animal lovers visiting Langkawi.

Meanwhile, Universiti Putra Malaysia Faculty of Veterinary Medicine senior veterinary officer Dr Nor-Alimah Rahman raised concerns about the rapid reproduction of stray dogs.

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Hafiz said Langkawi is marketed as a luxury, nature-based destination, competing with places like Bali, Phuket and the Maldives. – **COURTESY PIC**

number of dogs could spiral out of control, leading to food shortages and environmental pressure," she warned.

In an environment with limited resources, dogs may become aggressive toward each other, leading to fights, injuries, and stress, she said.

Nor-Alimah also pointed out the dangers of disease outbreaks, stressing that without proper vaccination and healthcare, lethal canine diseases such as parvovirus, distemper, and rabies could spread swiftly.

"The presence of parasites like ticks, fleas, and intestinal worms could further compromise the health of both dogs and the island's ecosystem.

"The island's ecosystem may not support the nutritional needs of a large number of dogs. Without a reliable food source, they could suffer from malnutrition, hunger, and competition for limited resources," she added.

Another major challenge is accessibility to veterinary care. Remote locations lack medical infrastructure, making it difficult to provide timely treatment for injuries, illnesses, and vaccinations.

Nor-Alimah also emphasised budget constraints, stating that sustaining a fully operational veterinary station, food supply, and emergency response team, would require significant long-term funding.

Persatuan Haiwan Terbiar Malaysia president Kalaivanan Ravichandran supported the MP's proposal, but stressed that it must be implemented ethically and sustainably.

"Without proper safeguards, the island could become a dumping ground rather than a sanctuary," he cautioned.

He outlined several key measures for the project to succeed including security measures to prevent illegal dog dumping, and cruelty with strict enforcement under the Animal Welfare



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Act 2015.

Additionally, guaranteed accessibility for feeders, rescuers, and NGOs should be established through transport services and emergency response protocols.

"Another critical factor is the presence of permanent on-site veterinary support, including caretakers and a veterinary station for sterilisation, vaccinations, and emergency treatment.

"Sustainable feeding and health management must also be ensured, backed by funding mechanisms and proper nutrition systems."

He said TNVR (Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release) programmes are also essential to prevent uncontrolled breeding and control disease spread.

Environmental impact assessments should be conducted to prevent disruptions to Langkawi's ecosystem, ensuring the initiative does not negatively affect the natural habitat, Kalaivanan added.

"A clear legal framework is necessary to ensure responsible long-term management and prevent abandonment."