

Concept Note on Need for Certification Standard for Sustainable Pet Trade

Pets are animals that are kept for a person's company, protection or entertainment instead of using them as a working, livestock or laboratory animal etc. Animals such as dogs and cats are the common kinds of pets observed in most of the households. In addition, other domestic and wild animals are kept as pets such as rabbits, hamsters, rodents, guinea pigs, parrots, passerines, fowls, reptiles (turtles, lizards and snakes), fish, snails, frogs and arthropods (e.g. tarantulas, hermit crabs etc) among other.

Use of animals and their cross-border trade for zoos, aquaria, safaris, etc is on steady rise in India with economic growth - needing certification and consumer awareness. The pet population in India has grown from 7 million in 2006 to 10 million in 2014; on an average 6,00,000 pets are adopted every year. The pet-care sector in India - already pegged at over Rs 81 billion is expected to grow at over 35% every year.

A pet serves as a companion animal to us humans and owning a pet has been turning to a growing culture all over the world. As a result, the pet trade has become a big business throughout the world, including in India. Although keeping a pet has got its positive aspects, there are many negative effects that cannot be left unseen and ignored. Some of these negative aspects that need to be discussed and worked upon for sustainable pet trade are as follows:

- 1) Breeding trouble:** Despite the animal shelters being overflowed with healthy animals needing homes, the breeders continue to bring litter after litter of animals to fulfill their need of making money. Breeders regularly mate closely related animals in an attempt to pass down certain characteristics, which has led to genetic defects in virtually every breed. It is said that there are now more hereditary canine diseases than there are dog breeds. For example, deliberately breeding animals for distorted physical features, such as a flattened face, causing discomfort to animals and shorter life spans.
- 2) Standard of living in animal shelters:** The pet animals are raised in cramped, crude and filthy conditions in some animal shelters. In extensive breeding facilities, animals are kept constantly confined and deprived of adequate veterinary care and socialization. For example, in puppy mills, female dogs are repeatedly impregnated, which puts an enormous strain on their bodies. Both mothers and their puppies are often malnourished and do not receive proper, if any, veterinary care.
- 3) Pet shops:** Pet shops selling animals invariably keep animals in pathetic conditions. Also, many people impulsively buy animals from pet stores knowing little about their needs. Many animals which are purchased get abandoned or die from neglect or improper care

due to lack of proper guidance and lack of pet rearing manuals. Small animals such as birds, rabbits, mice, and other rodents are often mistakenly thought of as “starter pets”, but they have specialized needs and suffer terribly at the hands of uninformed buyers. Exotic animals such as chinchillas, tarantulas, birds, reptiles, and other species are often stolen from their homes in the wild and trafficked around the world. Pet shops are also notorious for selling sick animals, failing to provide them with proper veterinary care, keeping them in unsanitary conditions, and using inhumane methods to dispose of them.

- 4) **Illicit Wildlife trade:** Globally, illegal trade of wildlife is estimated to be worth \$19 billion per year and is rising at an alarming rate. The legal trade stands at much higher \$300 billion per year. Such massive global exploitation of wild animals and plants is bringing many of the species to the brink of extinction. Illegal wildlife trade threatens livelihoods of rural communities and damages natural ecosystems as well. Increasing profits and low deterrence of wildlife trafficking has caused evolution of highly organized criminal syndicates. Frequently, same syndicates engaged in drugs, arms-trade and human-trafficking are seeing wildlife trade as greener avenues. Illegal wildlife trade is also fueling corruption and weakening economies of developing countries which are rich in natural resources. Wildlife conservation is often masked by unorganized pet trade of domestic animals as well. Ill-monitored international and national trade of pet animals such as parrots, finches, snakes, butterflies, spiders, turtles etc cause complications and regulation problems in controlling trade in threatened species by authorities.

In view of the unorganised nature of pet trade, its integral links with illegal wildlife trade, concerns of invasiveness and its impacts on natural ecosystems, cruel means of rearing pets, and health concerns, developing standards in pet trade is need of the hour. A well-designed certification standard for sustainable pet trade will address these concerns. Most importantly, it will promote conservation of wildlife, ease regulation of international trade in wildlife and their safety and enhance societal and industrial benefits.

NCCF seeks comments and feedback on this concept from various stakeholders and public at large to align this growing industry in the right directions.

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