



**Investigative report on The Small Animals Quarantine in Luqa,
by The Office of The Commissioner for Animal Welfare
4th April, 2022**

Background

Following a formal complaint made by Mr Claude Mifsud Wismayar, initially by phone on the 10th March, 2022, and later by email on 15th March, 2022, about alleged sub-standard conditions at the Small Animals Quarantine in Luqa, The Office of The Commissioner for Animal Welfare launched an investigation into the matter.

SAQ falls under the jurisdiction and management of the Veterinary Regulations Directorate (VRD) and the investigation, which was legally based on CAP 439 art 44A(2)(f), centred around the conditions of the SAQ area and not the veterinary certifications and requirements for animals to be able to enter the country and/or bypass quarantine.

Following several requests for information from VRD, a physical inspection of the SAQ area was conducted by The Office of The Commissioner for Animal Welfare on 21st March, 2022.

Inspection Summary

Upon inspection, the conditions of SAQ were not found to be up to the desired minimum standards that one would expect to find in an official government quarantine facility, which should be a showcase of an animal keeping facility.

The cats were being kept in a very old structure built out of a combination of limestone, metal sheet roofing, and a façade made up entirely of metal wire for ventilation. Apart from being visually unpleasing and disheartening to the owners who were obliged to leave their much-loved pets there, the structure did not provide adequate shelter from the elements, nor did it provide protection from construction and other noise sources in the area.

It is to be noted that on the day of the inspection, significant actions had already been taken by VRD to remedy the situation. In fact, on the day of the inspection a new structure in the form of a mobile hut was being set up. This is made from insulated material and is white in colour to deter heat and has a door and a window for ventilation. At the time of the inspection, it was about to be installed with air-conditioning units. This new structure was also affixed with a metal fenced anteroom, for additional security. Although not ideal, and the space allocated to each cat is actually smaller than the space in the old structure, this new temporary structure is overall much better and deemed adequate until SAQ is completely demolished and replaced as part of a wider SAQ upgrading process.

Following the physical inspection on the 21st March, 2022, it was formally requested from VRD to keep the Office of The Commissioner informed about the finalisation of the

mobile hut project and about the date when the cats were to be moved from the old structure to the new mobile hut.

Whilst The Commissioner was informed by third parties that the cats were moved to the new structure on the 21st March, 2022, this information was not forthcoming from VRD, until the 28th March, 2022.

Commissioner's Conclusion

Whilst it took 11 days for the new SAQ area for cats to be temporarily upgraded to satisfactory levels, whenever living animals are involved, time is of the essence, and delays only contribute further to animal suffering. During the 11 days in question, Malta was hit by inclement weather which worsened the situation and heightened its urgency.

Whilst it is understood that VRD did its best to turn the situation around as soon as possible, a serious lack of feedback and laboured slow communication both towards the public and towards The Office of The Commissioner for Animal Welfare, could not go unnoticed.

Although the issue had already gone public through various media outlets and via social media, to date no public statement to address public perception was ever issued.

Despite action being taken to remedy the actual situation, the lack of public response leads to a further deterioration of the public's perception about the situation of Animal Welfare in the country.

In addition, the ongoing slow or lack of response by the Veterinary Regulations to answer to official and written requests for information by The Office of The Commissioner for Animal Welfare, highlights the general disregard to the legal authority bestowed onto The Office of the Commissioner by the Animal Welfare Act CAP 439 art 44A(2)(f) to review and investigate the functions and workings of the Directorate of Veterinary Services.

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| Attachment 1 | - Full Inspection Report |
| Attachment 2 | - Email Correspondence from 10 th March, 2022 to 28 th March, 2022 |
| Attachments 3 & 4 | - Audio Visual files received from Mr Claude Mifsud Wismayer's as part of the initial complaint. |



Alison Bezzina (MA. Lond)
Commissioner for Animal Welfare





Ms Alison Bezzina
Commissioner for Animal Welfare

21st March 2022

Inspection at Small Animal Quarantine Luqa

A surprise inspection was carried out today by Reuben Montebello and Ian Vella from the Office of the Commissioner for Animal Welfare. Present for this inspection were Dr Paul Portelli (Director VRD), Dr Karen Gatt, Mr Aldo Bonello, and Ms Silvana Borg, all from VRD.

This inspection was carried out on direct instructions from Commissioner AW in relation to the investigation being carried out on the conditions that the animal being kept at the small animal quarantine in Luqa.

It has been confirmed that all cats currently being kept in quarantine are still being housed in the existing structure that has been in use for the past years. The structure is built with a combination of limestone, metal sheet roofing, and has a façade made up of metal wire for ventilation. It also has an external metal fence ante-room, for additional security to prevent escapees from the unit.





The unit had additional metal sheeting affixed to the façade plus other wooden sheets, mainly to prevent rain and wind to the inside. All these additional temporary materials affixed to the structure continued to make it aesthetically worse than it originally was. It needs to be highlighted that this is a very important factor to be taken in consideration when people have to leave their pet behind in such makeshift structures.



The cats inside were noted to be placed in quite large and spacious enclosures, all of them including bedding and cat litter.



We also noted the newly installed container which will eventually be used to replace this existing structure. The new structure is made up entirely of insulated material, white in colour which reflects heat. It has one door and one window. This new structure was also affixed with a metal fenced ante-room, and this for additional security measures to prevent escapees. The new structure comes with an AC unit as well, which still needs to be installed later today or tomorrow by the contractor. We advised the officers that cats can be transferred inside even without an AC unit in this time of the year. In fact, we were informed that the cats will be transferred in the new unit in these days.







The new structure will be air-conditioned (still to be installed) and will contain 14 individual large enclosures for cats. There are presently 8 large cages placed within, and we were informed that they are waiting for additional 6 cages to be delivered from the supplier.

Conclusion

During the time of our inspection, it has been noted that there were no signs of water leakages inside the structure where cats are currently being kept. Due to the realities of the existing structure, since it has one open side for ventilation purposes and the existing metal roofing is even not insulated, the cats may be exposed to unfavourable weather related conditions. This is an issue which needs to be addressed, even because of the excessive noise inside the room caused by the heavy rain on the metal roof structure.

It was also noted that adjacent to the existing quarantine structure for cats, there are ongoing construction works for the building of the new offices. It was also noted that excavation works are now finished and it seems that the workers were finalising the foundation works prior to the actual building phase. These ongoing works inevitably entail some sort of noise pollution, which may cause additional stress for the animals being kept there. Although it has to be noted that all cats were noted to be very calm and relaxed during our visit.

Once the cats are transferred to the new structure, this will definitely provide additional protection from noise and inclement weather conditions. The new modern design, when compared to the existing structure, will also calm the complaints from the public on the unacceptable conditions that one expects to find in an approved quarantine.

Reuben Montebello
Principal Veterinary Support Officer

Ian Vella
Inspector