

The benefits of mandatory castration/sterilization for dogs

With this letter and a focus on public expenditures, we want to draw attention to the necessity of mandatory sterilization for dogs.

In Croatia's official Lysacan dog register, there are over 350,000 registered dogs. These are dogs that, in accordance with the law, have been chipped and vaccinated.

The reproductive potential of dogs is very high, thus the number of unattended dogs can multiply tenfold in just a few years.

Many unattended animals mate with domesticated dogs that are not under the full control of their owners (so-called "self-walkers," spending part of their day enclosed in the yard or tied to a chain, and part of their day free to roam without supervision). Dog owners often resolve these unplanned litters by leaving unwanted puppies in the street.

Every year, associations and shelters take care of over 10,000 orphan dogs, but those are only a fraction of the unattended animals currently living in Croatia.

If you were to calculate the cost of legal regulation measures -- chipping, anti-rabies vaccines and treatment of vermin -- you'd come to a total of 300 HRK per dog (not including the capture of the dog, food, accommodation, repeated vaccination and treatment against parasites). For 10,000 orphan dogs, that equates to an annual cost of 3,000,000 HRK.

Local governments pay an average cost of 1,600 HRK for a sheltered dog, which covers 60 days of compulsory care after capture, and amounts to 16,000,000 HRK for 10,000 dogs.

The figure 10,000 does not represent the total number of unattended dogs, but only the number of dogs that are cared for. There are more unattended dogs outside of the care system that continue to be a fiscal burden for local governments and the country as a whole.

If you consider that there are 1,000 unprotected dogs outside of the 10,000 in the care system, within a year that unattended population could balloon to 9,750. Simply put, the reproductive potential of only 1,000 unattended dogs could lead to nearly 10,000 unattended dogs in a single year -- equivalent to the 10,000 dogs already within the care system, which have already cost 16,000,000 HRK.

How did we get to 9,750 dogs?

Consider the 1,000 unattended dogs outside of the care system. If the gender ratio of that group is 1:1, it contains 500 females. If 500 female dogs each give birth to a single litter in a year, and there are 5 puppies per litter on average, then you have 2,500 new unattended dogs. In addition to the 1,000 from the first generation, the total is now 3,500 unattended dogs.

If the gender ratio in the second generation (2,500 dogs) is also 1:1, then there will be 1,250 new female dogs that achieve their sexual maturity within a year. Again, if each of those females only has a single litter with 5 puppies on average, they will birth 6,250 new dogs. In addition to the 1,000 unattended dogs from the first generation and 2,500 unattended dogs from the second, the total number of unattended dogs becomes 9,750.

Add those 9,750 dogs to the number of newly abandoned dogs and litters that are tossed out of homes every day. Then multiply that sum by 1,600 HRK, and you can determine how much local governments pay to care for all of these animals.

Now consider the cost of sterilizing those 1,000 unattended dogs from the first generation, compared to the exponentially rising costs of care that result from neglecting sterilization.

The annual cost of legal regulation measures (chip, rabies vaccine, booklets, treatment against parasites) for 1,000 dogs and their descendants (9,750 dogs in total) comes out to 2,925,000 HRK. The annual cost of 60 day compulsory care for those animals comes out to 15,600,000 HRK. All together, local governments pay 19,525,000 HRK to shelters in a single year for a group of 1,000 unattended dogs and their descendants.

What if the original 1,000 had been sterilized?

Animal associations can typically expect to pay 450 HRK for a single sterilization. Along with the 300 HRK cost of chipping, vaccination, issuing booklets and treatment of vermin, the total cost of regulatory measures combined with sterilization for the original 1,000 dogs comes out to 750,000 HRK. Because sterilization prevents further reproduction, there will be no descendants from these 1,000 dogs, and the figure of 750,000 HRK represents the total cost borne by local governments for these 1,000 dogs.

Sterilizing those 1,000 dogs could save local governments 18,775,000 HRK in a single year.

However, since there are 10,000 dogs in the care system every year, all potential savings should be multiplied by 10. Also, because the number of dogs within the care system will gradually decrease, those savings will increase more every year.

From a different perspective, if you consider there are 350,000 registered dogs and a gender ratio of 1:1 in that group, it contains 175,000 females. Even if only 10% of those females had an unwanted litter in their life, with only 5 puppies per litter, care for those unwanted puppies would amount to 140,000,000 HRK.

A law that mandates sterilization for all dogs, except working dogs and those with breeding permits, is the only humane way to control the dog population, and it creates significant long-term savings for the budgets of local governments and the entire state.

To avoid widespread abandonment while implementing the compulsory sterilization law, it's necessary for local governments to help support the costs of sterilization. While that could be a budgetary burden in the short-term, in the long-term it could save hundreds of millions.

We hope that the amendments to the Protection of Animals Law begin introducing measures that require sterilization for dogs, as this is the only effective solution to the growing number of abandoned dogs in Croatia.

Best regards,

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