

No donkeys to be slaughtered says Minister Boyce

Serious claims of donkey slaughtering and the removal of live stock from the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) has surfaced on the world-wide-web; all to be proven unfounded by a top veterinarian from the United Kingdom (UK).

The allegations were so far-reaching, that they alerted Donkey Sanctuary, a UK based charity working worldwide to improve conditions for donkeys and mules.

Finding this alarming, Dr. Andrew Trawford, Director of Veterinary Services there, wanted to enquire if there were any truth to these assertions and if they could offer some alternatives to help the animals.

Invited by the Ministry to investigate first hand, the noted veterinarian arrived in the TCI last week, traveling to Grand Turk (Friday), South Caicos (Saturday) and Salt Cay (Sunday), and given full access to all facilities. “From discussions with local people on the Islands and government officials who assisted me,” said Dr. Trawford, “I found no evidence that animals would go from Salt Cay for slaughter or that there was any boat waiting to take them away.”

“This has been very gratifying because, we know that when animals are transported they can suffer major welfare problems,” he noted, adding that “it is our ideal to assist countries all over the world where animals are moved, particularly donkeys, and where welfare issues might be of concern.”

Founded in 1969, the Sanctuary provides countries the ability to train persons in animal husbandry (health and welfare) and sustainable practices. Moreover, they will work along with government, to implement certain procedures when animals are to be transported abroad.

Historically, there is a need to maintain the genetic pool of the indigenous donkeys, which number 186, whilst also safeguarding the environment of the Islands and the health and welfare off the human population.

On Government Speaks in May, Minister of Health and Human Services, Hon. Dr. Lillian Boyce, noted that the Turks and Caicos Islands Government (TCIG) had given approval for a policy and a proposal for the removal of some animals on Islands mentioned.

These animals she said, were proposed to be transported Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and used as farm animals there. Each year, government budgets US\$245,000 for animal feed, this, notwithstanding manpower and auxiliary costs, is not sustainable. Additionally, Minister Boyce noted that these actions are taking place because people are not adequately caring for their pets, particularly, the native ‘pot-cake’ dogs.

The Animals Management Unit, established within the Environmental Health Department, came about in response to numerous public appeals for the department to tend to many problems presented by the over-population of roaming large animals - chiefly horses, donkeys and cows. These animals, along with the wild-dog problem in Providenciales, have been known to cause road accidents and damage to property.

As of late, the web has cropped up a plethora of serious allegations that donkeys are to be slaughtered and all animals are to be removed off Salt Cay, in particular, for development there. Holding a press call at her Palmco conference room, Dr. Boyce joined by the Ministry's Permanent Secretary, Denise Saunders, Dr. Trawford and Kenrick Neely, Deputy Director at the Environmental Health Department, sought to set the record straight.

"The Turks and Caicos is a humane society, with civilized people," she said, "one where its people would never slaughter our animals for development or anything else." With many viscous rumors lodged to the Donkey Sanctuary, this was not only a concern to their donors, but to our country.

"People are very irresponsible," said the Health Minister, "especially in the last few months throughout the world, damaging the good name of the Turks and Caicos Islands and its people." Moreover: "it is time for people to put a stop their vicious rumors and start being responsible." Persons who are doing this, added Dr. Boyce are not committed or dedicated to the development of the Turks and Caicos, the country in which they live. If this continues, she noted, it will destroy not only our reputation, but also our tourism sector, the lifeblood of TCI.

"We are doing our very best here to take care of our animals, and we work hard every day to take care of our people and our country, but if they are going to damage the character and reputation of our country, then we wont be able to take care of anyone," said the Hon. Health Minister. In respect of these false claims, she would like someone(s) to stand up and apologize to the Turks and Caicos for the creation of the controversy that has brought negative publicity to our country.

To that end, the public is hereby advised that should they be aware of any such problems to contact the Ministry of Health and Human Services or the Environmental Health Department first, before going to the web with accusations.

"This will be very helpful to us," said Ms. Saunders, as "we will probably be able to clear up a lot of this before it reach international and such damaging proportions."