

## **Don't spike their Alpo**

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Greece's alleged plan to poison 15,000 stray dogs in advance of the Athens Olympic Games next month is indefensible on both a moral and practical level.

The motivation for the planned canine slaughter is said to be Greece's fear that if visitors saw packs of stray dogs wandering around Athens, they would not view the country as it would prefer to be seen: as modern and civilized.

It would seem to us, however, that any chance Greece had of selling tourists on this image of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan city is being undone by the cruelty it has planned, the poisoning of thousands of its homeless canines. Surely, there is a more humane way to clean up the streets for tourists than felling hapless strays with spiked Alpo.

Building more animal shelters would be an obvious starting point. Athens has only two shelters, which are already at capacity. By comparison, the metro Los Angeles area - which has a population roughly three times greater than that of Athens - has at least 30.

Of course, constructing more shelters would cost Greek authorities time and money, and judging by the speed at which they built the Olympic venues, and the extent of the cost overruns, this might have stretched them to the breaking point.

If Greece is not willing or able to expend the necessary resources to create new shelters where the strays could be housed at least temporarily (politely out of tourists' sight lines), then it should simply let the dogs be and live with the consequences. They are surely better than the international PR fallout from a dog slaughter.

Of course, Greek authorities will not even own up to an official dog poisoning plan. (Indeed, what modern and civilized government would?) But animal welfare groups say mass poisonings have already started. According to one activist, "There has been a big increase in poisonings recently and we expect it to rise sharply as the Games get closer."

The actions are consistent with Greece's poor track record for the humane treatment of animals. Poisoning is routinely (if not particularly effectively) used as a method for controlling stray dog populations. But at the same time, it is illegal to have pets euthanized, so there is always a steady stream of unwanted dogs to take the dead strays' place. There also remains a cultural resistance to spaying and neutering animals, which aggravates the situation.

So, in many ways, Greece is the author of its own stray dog problem. Greek authorities must commit to a more humane and, dare we say, modern, approach to dealing with household pets.

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