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Renewed Call for Responsible Dog Ownership as Attacks Threaten Livestock

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is renewing its call for responsible dog ownership across the Territory following continued reports of livestock being chased, injured and killed by roaming dogs.

Veterinary Officer Dr Nadya George said the attacks are a serious and recurring problem that causes significant emotional and financial hardship for farmers.

“Year after year, we see sheep, goats and other livestock chased, bitten, severely injured or killed by roaming dogs,” Dr George said. “Some are owned dogs that have escaped or are allowed to roam, while in other cases, ownership is not immediately known.”

Dr. George added, “Affected animals may suffer severe bite wounds, fractures, shock and infections. Even when a dog does not bite, livestock may be injured while attempting to escape, become separated from their young or experience significant stress. Young, pregnant and other vulnerable animals are particularly at risk.”

Dr George explained that a single attack can erase years of investment as the loss of a breeding animal affects not only the farmer’s current herd but also future offspring, production and income.

The *Dogs (Prevention of Injury to Persons, Livestock and Poultry) Act, 2001* requires dogs to be registered and kept under proper control. Owners are urged to:

- Keep dogs securely confined on their premises.
- Use a leash and maintain effective control when away from home.
- Ensure registration is current and identification tags are attached.
- Regularly inspect fences, gates, kennels, collars and restraints.
- Take immediate action if a dog repeatedly escapes or roams.

“A dog that keeps escaping or roams through a community should not be dismissed as harmless,” Dr George cautioned. “An uncontrolled dog can cause extensive injury and loss within a very short period.”

She added that registration helps the department identify roaming dogs and their owners, particularly after an attack.

The Veterinary Officer warned that preventable livestock losses undermine efforts to increase local food production and strengthen food security. Repeated attacks may also discourage established farmers from continuing to invest and deter new farmers from entering the sector.

“Farmers should not have to continually bear the financial consequences of preventable attacks by uncontrolled dogs,” Dr George said.

Dog owners are therefore urged to register their animals, keep them securely confined, and comply with the laws established to protect people, livestock, and poultry.

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About:

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is mandated to promote and regulate the agricultural and fisheries sectors to ensure that food produced and harvested within the Territory is safe, nutritious, and sustainably produced, while protecting the natural environment, enhancing economic growth, and improving the social well-being of Virgin Islanders.