

Pet law approved; starts in six months

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SANTA CRUZ — Starting in November, a new law will require almost all dogs and cats in the county's unincorporated areas to be sterilized before they are old enough to reproduce.

The controversial pet breeding law was approved Tuesday by a split Board of Supervisors, with Aptos Supervisor Walt Symons and Watsonville Supervisor Ray Belgard opposed.

Symons criticized the law for giving "excessive police powers" to a non-profit group, and charged that the \$100 to \$500 fines for violating it are "unconscionable."

He asked the board to delay its decision.

"Maybe we ought to see ... how or whether it's working (elsewhere)," Symons said.

The board has already discussed

the law extensively, said board Chairman Gary Patton, and is set to review its effectiveness a year after it takes effect.

Originally, the law was set to take effect July 1. Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beautz urged the board to pass the law now but to give opponents six months to come up with another way to deal with surplus pets.

"That's plenty of time for people who think there's a better way," Beautz said. If no better way is found, she said, the ordinance will be set to go Nov. 1.

The head of the county's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was pleased that the law was approved, but disappointed it won't take effect for six months.

"That's six more months of pain and suffering," for the county's dogs and cats, said Jody Paterniti,

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head of the group which runs the county's animal shelter and has pushed for the law.

Paterniti said she wants to work with groups that have opposed the law to solve the surplus pet problem. However, she drew the line at helping them raise money, saying the SPCA already has to raise more than \$300,000 yearly for its own educational work.

Six months is very little time, said Lynn Schmitt of the Animal Issues Alliance, a group of dog and cat breeders, veterinarians and

farmers that formed to oppose the law.

"But we'll do our best," Schmitt said.

Feeding stray cats will also be illegal under the new law unless the feeder registers with the SPCA and meets a number of regulations.

Paterniti noted, however, that the SPCA will not go out looking for these feral cat colonies, but will respond only when it gets complaints.

Last year, the SPCA killed nearly 4,500 dogs and cats. The over-

whelming majority were cats, and most of those cats were considered unadoptable by the SPCA. Most were kittens under 8 weeks old, Paterniti said.

The number of adoptable animals killed by the shelter last year was 218 dogs and 369 cats. Another 500 were killed at the request of their owners.

The law does not affect pet owners living in the county's four cities. At least some of the cities, however, are expected to follow the county's lead and adopt pet-breeding laws of their own.