

North Point pet cafe appeals in row over serving coffee next to veterinary clinic

Helen Wu

A pet cafe in North Point took its case to the Municipal Services Appeal Board yesterday after the government refused to issue a licence to serve coffee.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department argued that the food counter of Pets Central Cafe, where coffee was prepared, was not completely segregated from the adjoining veterinary clinic.

The link between the two places thus contravened the law, which prohibits dogs on food premises, the department said in yesterday's board hearing.

But Peter de Krassel, chairman of Pets Central Asia which runs the cafe, said it was not serving any human food apart from coffee, which required only boiling some water.

He said the law was too outdated to reflect the changing trend of keeping pets in the city.

"The veterinary community around the world welcomes the idea of a pet cafe as it allows the pets and their parents to socialise," he said. "It is common in many world-class cities and why should the law of Hong Kong prohibit it?"

Mr de Krassel said a 2-metre parti-



Martha Leung and Mugen show support for the cafe. Photo: Edward Wong

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Peter de Krassel, Pets Central Asia

tion was installed to separate the food preparation area from the clinic.

Government counsel Mark Chan Hoi-cheung said the partition did not completely seal off the area where food was handled from the space where pets were allowed.

In a letter issued to the cafe in May last year, the department said the layout did not comply with the legisla-



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tion as the gap between the ceiling and the partition could allow the transmission of infectious diseases, fleas and parasites, and cause a bad smell and nuisance.

Mr de Krassel said it was unfair for the department to reject the cafe's application when it had chosen to abide by the law.

"There are many human cafes around – especially in Sai Kung – where pets are allowed," he said.

"But when we want to do it legally, the law is so confusing and is enforced by people who do not have knowledge about animals."

He said their case should have been handled by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, which has veterinary expertise.

Pets Cafe Central has been applying for a licence since November 2006. A prosecution case against the cafe for operating illegally was dismissed by a magistrate last year because of insufficient evidence.

The board, chaired by Chan Chihung SC, will notify the cafe of its verdict in two to three weeks.

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