

Tammy's adopter faces legal action from volunteer

Audrey Tan

A British woman who adopted Tammy the mongrel and then had it put down for being "aggressive" is facing legal action from the animal welfare volunteer who handed the puppy to her.

Assistant project manager Ada Ong, 35, wants \$1,000 in damages and \$200 in legal costs from Briton Alison McElwee for breach of contract.

She said she is pursuing the matter to raise public awareness of animal welfare. If Ms McElwee complies, the \$1,200 will go to a charity of Ms Ong's choice.

A letter of demand from her lawyers from Allen and Gledhill says that putting down the seven-month-old dog on Oct 7 was "clearly in breach" of Ms McElwee's obligations under an agreement signed between her and Ms Ong on June 1.

Ms Ong also wants a written acknowledgement from Ms McElwee that "it was inappropriate and in breach of (her) obligations under the pet adoption agreement to put Tammy down".

Ms McElwee has up to Friday to respond, after which legal proceedings will commence. Ms Ong's legal team is led by Mr Edwin Tong, an MP for Moulmein-Kallang GRC.

She was advised by Law Minister K. Shanmugam to take legal action after she showed him the contract and records of SMSes between her and Ms McElwee. The minister also helped her to get a lawyer to represent her.

Ms McElwee and her lawyer did not answer queries. She has previously said she put down the

dog after it bit her four-year-old daughter and others.

The incident sparked fury online and shed light on adoption agreements being used by pet rescuers and animal welfare groups.

Action for Singapore Dogs said it has used them for 12 years.

While terms vary, these contracts include clauses to protect animals' welfare, such as requiring adopters to provide food, water and veterinary care.

Lawyers said parties are legally bound by them and "there is no need for a lawyer's involvement for such a contract to be legally valid".

Such agreements may soon become more comprehensive as animal lovers hope to make them "bulletproof".

A reinforced, five-page contract was circulated on Facebook last Friday by animal welfare volunteers. It included additional clauses preventing adopters from removing dogs' vocal cords or carrying out euthanasia "without prior consent of the (rescuer)".

While lawyers agree a detailed contract can "enhance the welfare and protection of the animal", it does not ensure a problem-free adoption.

"I fear the contract may result in fewer dogs being adopted because prospective adopters may not welcome the (rescuer) still having residual rights," said Singapore Management University law associate professor Eugene Tan.

Mr Chandra Mohan, partner at law firm Tan Rajah and Cheah, said: "Ultimately, there has to be compassion and public awareness in caring for animals to truly safeguard the welfare of the dog."