

# SC Directive Reshapes Urban Animal Policy

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## SC Directive Reshapes Urban Animal Policy : Stray-Free Delhi-NCR in Focus

### Context

The **Supreme Court of India** has issued a directive for the **immediate and permanent removal** of all **free-ranging dogs** from **Delhi, Noida, Gurugram, and Ghaziabad**. The decision comes in response to the rising number of **rabies cases** and **dog-bite incidents**, with the primary focus on ensuring the safety of **children** and **vulnerable citizens**.

### Introduction

In a landmark move, the apex court has instructed authorities to capture and relocate all stray dogs in designated Delhi-NCR localities to shelters, ending the previous practice under **Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules** of releasing sterilised dogs back into the community. This step is aimed at **stray-free urban zones**, **enhanced public safety**, and **protection of the constitutional right to safe mobility** under **Article 21**.

### Supreme Court Directives on Stray Dogs

- **Complete Removal** - All stray dogs in Delhi, Noida, Gurugram, and Ghaziabad must be captured, ensuring **no animals remain roaming in public spaces**.
- **No Release Policy** - Captured dogs will stay in shelters permanently, ending the cycle of repeated attacks and potential rabies transmission.
- **Shelter Expansion** - Authorities must build facilities with a **capacity for 5,000 dogs within eight weeks**, prioritising high-risk areas.
- **Rapid Response Helpline** - A **24×7 helpline** is to be established, ensuring reported dog-bite incidents are addressed **within four hours**.

- **Strict Compliance** – Any obstruction to the removal process will attract **contempt of court**.
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## Rationale Behind the Order

- **Public Safety Priority** – Rabies causes approximately **5,700 deaths annually** in India, with **over 95%** of cases linked to dog bites.
  - **Protection of Vulnerable Groups** – Children under 14 and elderly citizens over 60 face higher risk due to limited defence capacity.
  - **Policy Limitations** – The ABC model does not prevent aggressive or rabies-infected dogs from harming people.
  - **Right to Safe Mobility** – Stray dog attacks infringe on the constitutional right to life and liberty under **Article 21**.
  - **Permanent Structural Reform** – Focus on lasting removal rather than periodic containment drives.
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## Arguments in Favour

- **Life-Saving Measure** – Prevents avoidable rabies deaths, fulfilling the State's duty of care.
  - **Safer Public Spaces** – Enables citizens to move freely without fear of attacks.
  - **Accountability Measures** – Use of CCTV and documentation ensures transparency.
  - **Closure of Policy Gaps** – Eliminates the ABC return-to-locality loophole.
  - **Improved Urban Governance** – Integrates safety, sanitation, and public health priorities.
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## Arguments Against

- **Potential Legal Conflict** - May contradict provisions under the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act**.
  - **Shelter Overcrowding Risk** - Insufficient infrastructure could harm animal welfare.
  - **Animal Rights Concerns** - May be seen as infringing on intrinsic rights of animals.
  - **Ecological Impact** - Sudden removal could disrupt rodent control and waste management.
  - **Risk of Abuse** - Without strict oversight, potential for covert culling or cruelty.
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## Way Forward

- **Humane Shelter Infrastructure** - Adequate space, nutrition, and medical care to maintain animal dignity.
  - **Mass Vaccination Drives** - Prevent rabies alongside removal efforts.
  - **Controlled Adoption Policies** - Responsible placement with strict vetting.
  - **Policy Alignment** - Amend ABC Rules to reflect Supreme Court directives.
  - **Public Awareness Campaigns** - Promote community understanding of rabies prevention.
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## Conclusion

The Supreme Court's order represents a **decisive shift in urban governance** towards prevention, prioritising **public safety** while maintaining a framework for **humane animal care**. Effective execution will depend on **legal clarity**, **adequate infrastructure**, and **public cooperation** to achieve a lasting balance between **human health protection** and **ethical animal management**.