

Venice Pigeon War Could be Heading for a Solution

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Vendors likely to accept compensation, officials say



Venice's long 'pigeon war' could be heading for a solution, local officials say.

The city has for years been trying to rid its historic squares of sellers of pigeon feed, seeing the birds as a health and heritage hazard.

The battle now appears to be heading for an out-of-court settlement.

The last stand-off is taking place in Piazza San Marco, where many tourists see the flocking birds as part of the famed location's appeal.

The vendors have appealed to the courts which have upheld their rights to their traditional turf. The traders have also insisted that, if they be forced to move on, they should be handed concessions to sell toys and souvenirs in other parts of the lagoon city.

But officials are optimistic that a deal can be made. "We're prepared to pay what it takes to get the vendors out of the piazza," said Green Councillor Beppe Caccia, who is pressing for a solution by an April 30 deadline.

"Compensation will be calculated on the basis of how long the vendor, or vendor's family, has been there and how much their business is worth," he said.

"Offers will be full and fair, and I'm confident that the vendors will take them".

Caccia was speaking after a recent report by local health inspector Sergio Lafisca which highlighted the risks of contracting lung diseases and salmonella from the birds - a risk that is higher for children and the elderly.

"In Piazza San Marco you see people, especially kids. literally covered by pigeons. They also fly right over the piazza's tables, showering germs on the food," Lafisca said.

Vendors in St Mark's Square expressed renewed anguish on Monday. "It's absurd to take away our jobs like this. We have to live," said Sergio, one of the 20 or so Venetians who run the small stands selling bird seed and corn.

Like several other European cities, Venice has already banned people from feeding pigeons in all other parts of town, saying they are a public health menace and a nuisance, eroding monuments with their excrement.

The initiative has the backing of heritage experts who say pigeon droppings are eating away at historic facades and statues.

Some even claim the excrement, by eroding flagstones, has increased the risk of the 'acqua alta' that puts the square under water for much of the winter.

Local people also became more sympathetic to the cause after a report by the Nomisma research



group found that the presence of pigeons in Venice costs each resident some 275 euros a year to clean up the mess and damage.

(ANSA NEWS)

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