

Queensland submission March 2016

1) Options for the regulation of welfare standards for breeding companion dogs and cats.

Definition of a pet or companion animal; any animal kept by a human in their own household (house and/or garden) for companionship and pleasure.

Basic principles for animal welfare:

Nobody should cause a pet animal unnecessary pain, distress or suffering in any way, shape or form. Nobody should abandon a pet animal or leave unattended for any more than 12 hours at a time.

Owning a pet:

Any person who owns a pet shall be directly held responsible for its health and welfare.

Any person who owns or is fostering a pet shall provide suitable accommodation to protect said pet from the elements, suitable food and sufficient clean water.

Provide it with ample exercise to suit the breed or type.

Take all necessary precautions to prevent escape.

Dogs shall not be chained as a means of containment.

Obtain regular veterinary attention.

All pet animals are required to be registered with your local Council and wear the appropriate tags upon leaving their property.

Breeding a pet:

Every pet should be desexed prior to the onset of the first "season" unless there are sufficient health issues as for the operation be deemed undesirable by a qualified veterinarian whereupon the desexing should be carried out at the first opportunity.

All breeders must be registered with an appropriate controlling body.

Each registered breeder should be required to hold no more than 4 breeding dams and 2 breeding sires at any given time.

The breeding schedule is to be no more than 1 litter per year per each dam. The animal should not be bred after the age of 6 for a canine and after the age of 8 for a feline.

Upon reaching this age the animal is to be retired, desexed and if necessary rehomed. Under no circumstance is this animal to be euthanised unless prior health conditions as ascertained by the veterinarian deem it necessary for the relief of pain and suffering.

Any breeding is to have regard to the anatomical, physiological and behavioural characteristics which are likely to be passed down to offspring. No animal with an obvious genetic imperfection is to be bred and should be immediately desexed and if necessary rehomed.

Registered breeders shall be mandatorily inspected at least once a year totally at random with no prior warning and should conditions not meet the above standards then the registration will be immediately revoked.

No mass breeding of any pet animals will be permitted and any found will be immediately dismantled with no recompense and all animals rehomed.

Welfare agencies need to be given greater ability to stop animal hoarding. Be this through hobby breeders or collectors, effective policy is needed that can be used immediately by agencies to place bans on holding animals and limits to animal capacity

NARGA recognise the importance of the RSPCA, AWL and other groups but suggest that animal welfare investigations be handed over to the Police so there is greater accountability, investigative powers and offer ongoing ability to action and stop welfare violations.

2) The adequacy of regulation of the source of companion dogs and cats for sale

All breeders must be registered with an appropriate controlling body and licensed by a local authority.

Each registered and licensed breeder should be required to hold no more than 4 breeding dams and 2 breeding sires at any given time.

The breeding schedule is to be no more than 1 litter per year per each dam.

The animal should not be bred after the age of 6 for a canine and after the age of 8 for a feline.

Upon reaching this age the animal is to be retired, desexed and if necessary rehomed. Under no circumstance is this animal to be euthanised unless prior health conditions as ascertained by the veterinarian deem it necessary for the relief of pain and suffering.

Any breeding is to have regard to the anatomical, physiological and behavioural characteristics which are likely to be passed down to offspring. No animal with an obvious genetic imperfection is to be bred and should be immediately desexed and if necessary rehomed.

Registered breeders shall be mandatorily inspected at least twice a year by a qualified inspector, totally at random, with no prior warning and should conditions not meet the above standards then the registration shall be immediately revoked.

Registration fees should be such as to cover

No mass breeding of any pet animals will be permitted and any found will be immediately dismantled with no recompense and all animals rehomed.

Controlling bodies need to recognise mixed breed dogs and cats due to the popularity of the “designer” breeds.

The influence of the physical standards of dogs as decreed by the regulated Kennel Clubs needs to be investigated thoroughly due to the encouragement of changing shape, and physical attributes.

More than 500 genetic defects exist in today’s purebred dogs

(1). Inherited diseases such as hip dysplasia, brachycephalic airway syndrome, cardiomyopathies, endocrine dysfunctions, blood disorders, and hundreds more, affect the quality of life and longevity of these dogs. Over 400 breeds currently exist, but they are artificial constructs of human fancy, instead of the evolutionary outcome of natural selection

(2).The wide array of genetic diseases found in purebred dogs reflects their unnatural development, by kennel club associations and breeders who are largely responsible for this welfare predicament.

Reference; Can Vet J. 2007 September; 48(9): 953–965.

Pets traditionally bred by “friends” and backyard breeders are the ones expected to end up at the pound either by means of being dumped, not retrieved or surrendered, these tend to be of a mixed breeding heritage and as such needs to be banned.

3) The feasibility of a mandatory cooling off period between registering intent to purchase a companion dog or cat and taking possession of the animal.

A mandatory cooling off period should become an important requirement of new legislation. Positive examples of where rescuers offer trial adoption periods should be assessed for to develop a uniform process for wide adoption.

Trial adoption periods of 14 days need to be introduced to ensure the animal is totally suitable for the purchaser and their circumstances.

Personality, behaviour and energy levels need to be taken into account as they are most common reasons for surrendering to rescue organisations and the pounds. All breeds have specific genetic traits which specify their mental and physical stimulation levels, temperament, their suitability for the living circumstances of the potential owners, their level of intelligence and the ability to be left unsupervised for long periods of time.

Impulse purchasers rarely consider the requirements of the animal therefore a contract of intent to purchase shall be signed and purchase price paid but ownership not granted until the trial period has expired.

4) The adequacy of the regulation of non-retail trade in companion dogs and cats.

Current laws in Queensland are totally inadequate at present. With around 450,000 dogs being sold in Australia annually and fewer than 100,000 of those originating from registered breeders and a smaller amount still from pet shops it leaves a massive amount being acquired through back yard or hobby breeders. In order to halt the obvious overpopulation this figure must be reduced and the most effective way is by bringing in licensed and registered breeding only.

The figures for cats being sold is currently not known as there are few regulations covering cats. What is known is that there is a possibility of a cat and her kittens producing an incredible 20,000 offspring within a 7-year period. Again licensed and registered breeding only must be introduced.

Reference: People for the ethical treatment of animal's website. ABC Insight programme

5) How the registration, microchipping and desexing of companion animal may address these goals.

Registration

Free lifetime registration for microchipped and desexed cats and dogs should be introduced with the initial payment of only the price of the tags ie; \$5.00.

The registration fee should become a considerable amount (upwards of \$100.00) for entire animals and to be renewed yearly. As puppies and kittens are required to be registered upon purchase a small percentage of the registration fee should be charged up to the age of 6 months for dogs and 4 months for cats when the animal is deemed to be sufficiently mature enough to be desexed.

Cats should not be required to wear tags due to safety concerns with collars.

Rescue groups and shelters should not be liable to pay registration fees for the interim between acquisition of the animal and the desexing of same.

The procedures for registering animals over and above the maximum allowance should be simplified for foster carers and the maximum amount of animals at any one time should be set by the standard of facilities and not the square footage of the property.

The Councils should encourage participation in puppy schools to assist with socialisation and behavioural problems. This may be done via the abolition of the registration fee until the animal becomes 6 months old or ready to be desexed.

Microchipping

Although this is a compulsory requirement of all sales of companion animals it is not being policed so it has become a normality to totally disregard this law. Upon asking local Councils they refer you to the DPI and then when you ask DPI they refer you back to the Councils. Obviously there is a lack of either communication or legislation.

Required to be performed by a veterinarian or a fully trained professional

There must be a government run microchipping database established that is connected to driving licenses/over 18 cards to ease the problems of changing the contact details of owners. The database must also have the ability to search Interstate microchip registers due to a migrating public or holidaying owners.

The microchip database should have details of every owner the pet has over its entire lifetime including the breeder's details. (Whole of life microchipping) Should have easy access for Vets, animal welfare organisation, owners and search agencies in order to be able to tag the register with a lost pet.

Mandatory scanning for microchips should be introduced into all pounds, shelters, or any other receiving centres for lost animals and every opportunity to contact owners should be taken, including consulting the electoral roll and neighbours. Council workers or tender holders picking up deceased animals should be also required to scan and will need to receive adequate training in order for this to be performed correctly.

Desexing

Desexing will become more popular due to the lifetime free registration and the high cost of both the registration of an entire animal and becoming licensed as a breeder so it is not considered essential to become mandatory

The large animal welfare organisations and Councils should be encouraged to provide large scale, low cost desexing to low income earners.

Trapping and then desexing wild/feral cats and releasing them, commonly named TNR should become common practise and be encouraged by the large welfare organisations and community veterinarians. This will reduce the amount of kittens/cats entering pounds and rescue facilities. Further investigation needs to be carried out to obtain the financial benefits of TNR.

6) Other relevant recommendations

- 1) The health benefits of owning a companion animal are well documented and as such should be considered a cost saving on the State health system. The elderly and disabled need to have access to affordable or discounted home pet care or suitable kennelling whilst in hospital or receiving medical treatments. Community assistance with transport for veterinary treatments and daily exercise for dogs is also an area that needs to be investigated and if necessary a voluntary organisation funded by State Government be founded.
- 2) Investment home owners need to be encouraged to rent out homes to families/people with pets. A “pet bond” clause should be legislated to satisfy the owner’s and insurance company’s reluctance to lease.
- 3) Animal control services that are tendered out by local Councils must be on the proviso that the successful tender is paid a fee on the successful rehoming of an animal and no fee for any killing or euthanising an animal that hasn’t been sanctioned by an independent veterinarian.
- 4) All pounds should be required to implement a no kill policy where no healthy and full adoptable dogs or cats can be put to sleep.
- 5) All pounds (tendered or Council run) must advertise the pets they have in confinement by multiple means; website, social media, newspaper or newsletter. A concerted effort must be made to photograph and correctly describe the animals.
- 6) All pounds, shelters and rescue groups must work together to obtain the very best outcome for each and every animal. Cooperation and conversation between all organisations must be mandated in order to successfully bring the adoption/rehoming rate up to acceptable levels.
- 7) The sale of all animals at markets, fairs or roadside stalls must be banned immediately. The facilities provided are not consistent with minimum animal welfare standards.
- 8) The introduction of animal care courses in primary schools should be fast tracked and should include a field trip to a relevant pound, shelter or rescue group for first hand knowledge.
- 9) Development of a database of repeat animal abuse/abandonment cases.
- 10) The appointment of a State Animal Welfare Ombudsman.

11) Local Government to encourage the development of educative programmes;

To promote awareness and knowledge amongst organisations and individuals with regards to the keeping, breeding, training, trading and boarding of pet animals.

To discourage the practise of gifting persons' animals either underage or not, having pet animals as a prize, award or bonus, unplanned breeding, cruelty and irresponsible acquisitions.

To encourage regular vaccinations, worming and other treatments required on a regular basis, best practises of care and welfare.

12) Every pound must provide suitable housing, cover, food, fresh water, comfort, bedding, exercise, veterinary care, human interaction and stimulation (toys etc) for any animals being held. The minimum holding time shall be increased to 7 days for unregistered and unmicrochipped pets and 14 days for identified pets. Should the holding time expire said animals shall be passed onto rescue groups/shelters/refuges for any necessary vetwork, microchipping and rehoming after a quarantine period of at least 10 days. If not suitable then it must be euthanised by a veterinarian immediately. It is preferable that each Council pound have their own rehoming service operated out of separate but nearby premises.

13) Each Council should be required to have a pound fee repayment schedule for those who cannot afford the sum all at once.

14) Mandatory record keeping of all pound figures with annual reports published for the general public.

15) Acts of animal cruelty or neglect need to have minimum penalties legislated and surety that the perpetrators cannot reoffend by banning those individuals from ever owning another animal.

16) Every animal's life has value, and each cat or dog is a unique, irreplaceable individual with needs and feelings. The fact that most are healthy and affectionate when they are killed makes their deaths all the more unnecessary and poignant. Such is the seemingly never-ending tragedy and heartrending reality of the companion animal overpopulation crisis.

Most owners deeply love their companion animals as valued members of their families and would never dream of giving them up for any reason. Unfortunately, there are still many people who are not prepared to provide

lifetime homes for the animals they purchase or adopt. Many animals who wind up in shelters are surrendered by their guardians, who, for whatever reason, are either unable or unwilling to care for them anymore. People's readiness to dispose of animals as though they are old possessions they no longer want reflects a lack of empathy for living beings whose lives literally depend on their guardian's decisions. It also points to a larger systemic problem in the way animals are defined legally and that is, as property, a commodity to be bought and sold for profit or simply "thrown away". As long as animals are considered objects under the law that can be discarded at the "owner's" whim, many people will think of them as such, and living creatures will continue to pay the cost with their very lives.

Submitted on behalf of National Animal Rescue Groups of Australia

(Narga) Inc