

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022


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Danielle Atwell
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21st May 2022

Danielle Atwell



State Development and Regional Industries Committee

Dear Parliamentary Committee,

Submission on proposed amendments to the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed amendments.

My Name is Danielle Atwell, I have been a Dog Obedience Trainer for over 20 years in Cairns, Queensland.

I am strongly against the proposed amendments to the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (detailed below).

- 1) **The government has not followed its own best practice guide for the amendment of legislation. As a result, key stakeholders and the wider community have not been afforded the opportunity to be consulted on the proposed amendments to the Act.**
- 2) **Lack of community consultation means the impacts on the community have not been adequately assessed.**
- 3) **Conclusions drawn regarding restraint-based tools, specifically the prong collar, have been made based on unsubstantiated research and without consultation of key stakeholders.**

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Cairns Queensland**POINT 1**

- 1) The government has not followed its own best practice guide for the amendment of legislation. As a result, key stakeholders and the wider community have not been afforded the opportunity to be consulted on the proposed amendments to the Act.**

The Queensland Government Guide to Better Regulation May 2019 states that:

- The COAG Best Practice Principles For Regulation Making include:
 - a) Consulting effectively with affected stakeholders at all stages of the regulatory cycle
 - b) Ensuring that government action is effective and proportional to the issue being addressed
 - c) Considering a range of feasible policy options including self-regulatory, co-regulatory and nonregulatory approach
 - d) Adopting the option that generates the greatest net benefit for the community

Evidence that the government has not followed its own best practice guidelines:

I refer to the "REVIEW OF THE ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION ACT 2001 CONSULTATION OUTCOMES REPORT", prepared by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and published in October 2021.

I refer to page 37 of the report, section titled "Relevant E-Petitions". It is acknowledged that *"there were six animal welfare related e-petitions that were tabled in the Legislative Assembly during the consultation period. Issues raised in these e-petitions (listed below) are also being considered as part of the ACPA review process"*.

Of these six petitions, the relevant subject matter of three of these petitions was also included as part of the initial discussion paper; as such, stakeholders and the community were provided the opportunity to give feedback on these matters. I have included the 3 relevant petitions below:

- Make suitable shelter mandatory for all farmed animals (Petition no. 3499-21)
- Tethering of dogs must be prohibited (Petition no. 3501-21)
- Continue the use of all methods, including dogs, to control feral pigs (Petition no. 3515-21)

There remains three relevant e-petitions, for which there was no correlating subject matter in the initial discussion paper:

- Ban the use of shock collars on dogs (Petition no. 3526-21)
- Illegal to import - Prohibit the use of prong collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3530-21)

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- Prohibit the use of choke collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3531-21)

These three petitions were made to the Hon. Mark Furner, with closing dates in May 2021 and a response due date in June 2021. I wish to note that, since the closing of these petitions, there has been no opportunity provided to relevant stakeholders or the community to be surveyed on these matters. All three petitions listed above closed on 23rd May 2021. The closing date for feedback on the review of the *Animal Protection and Care Act (2001)*, as detailed in the Outcomes Report, was 21st May 2021.

With reference to the “*Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022 Explanatory Notes*”, page 33, section titled “*Consultation*”. The use of prong collars or any other restraint based tools is in fact missing from the key consultation outcomes of the discussion paper.

It is of concern to me that the following has been stated in the bill (I refer to page 18), given adequate community consultation has not been completed:

“New section 37A allows for the possession of additional types of collars or devices to be prescribed. The amendment is required because continuous developments in collars and devices for animals means that some existing and new collars and devices become unacceptable to the community”

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Cairns Queensland**POINT 2****2) Lack of genuine community consultation means the impacts on the community have not been adequately assessed.**

The “Queensland Government Guide to Better Regulation May 2019” states that “The depth of analysis and consultation undertaken for a proposal should be proportional to the complexity and significance of the problem and the size of the potential impacts”.

To quote from page 14 of the bill: “New section 37A prohibits the possession of a prong collar or another restraint device prescribed by regulation, unless the person has a reasonable excuse”

The proposed banning of restraint-based training tools presents a number of adverse impacts on the community, which have not been considered due to insufficient community consultation (as evidenced above). To quote from The Queensland Government Guide to Better Regulation May 2019, these include:

Business Impacts

This will impact the level and quality of the Dog trainer’s ability to assist Dog owners in behavior management. Clients seek assistance with their own dogs and newly acquired fostered Dogs which react on lead or even pull on a flat collar. The main purpose for clients seeking guidance from us is just being able to walk their dog so it gets the adequate exercise in a controlled manner. We use tools such as Slip Leads, Check Chains and Halti’s so that clients can walk their Dog safely.

Competition Impacts

The Dog Training Market will be limited to not being able to use tools that teach the dog right from wrong. If we don’t have these tools, our communications take longer to be understood. We live in world where we as humans are time poor and prefer to set clear boundaries as quickly as possible to enable the Dog to understand how best to behave. If Dog obedience classes require long term commitment from owners, there will be less owners wanting to teach their Dog Obedience or even just to walk safely on lead and therefore more unruly bad behaved dogs that will be surrendered to rescue groups. This then leads to more rescue groups not having the capacity to take on or re-home surrendered dogs, which in turn leads to them being euthanized. The solely Positive Dog Trainers will be inundated with badly behaved dogs which they cannot control and either refuse to train or get bitten.

Social and environmental impacts

Some Dogs quickly learn that if they react their problem goes away, so then learns to react before there is a real issue just in case it becomes a problem. Removing the Dogs ability to make poor choices enable us as Dog Trainers to teach the Dog that it doesn’t need to react, and it is quicker to communicate this to the Dog with effective tools/equipment such as Slip Leads, Check Chains, Prong Collars etc. Without these tools, owners cannot hold back their dogs from jumping on children or elderly people walking past them which may cause the pedestrian to fall and get injured. I have used these tools to stop Dogs from re-directing their pent-up emotion onto the owner and/or other dogs. I have used these tools to stop dogs from pulling their own owners off their feet and drag them down the road. I have used these tools to teach dogs that they don’t need to react or bite and that if it is obedient, it will be safe and can enjoy its walks. If not being exercised, the Dog becomes a nuisance by destroying their yard and furniture in it, escaping, barking for long periods and becoming overall ill mannered and unenjoyable for the owner which in turn ends up being surrendered or taken away by the animal control officers.

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Cairns Queensland**POINT 3****3) Conclusions drawn regarding restraint-based tools, specifically the prong collar, have been made based on unsubstantiated research and without meaningful consultation of key stakeholders.**

I refer to page 25 of the bill, which states:

“Imposing restrictions on the use of prong collars and other devices is justified as they are considered to be inappropriate as a training aid because they cause pain and fear in dogs which is used as a punishment. Research has shown that using aversive training methods including the use of prong collars can cause pain and distress and can compromise the dog’s welfare”

I would request a more comprehensive review of tools be considered prior to drawing such conclusions, as the above statement demonstrates a lack of understanding of behavioral science and the means in which training tools are most commonly used as a means of Negative Reinforcement (guiding the dog towards the correct behavior), not Punishment. Adequate consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- Members of the Queensland Government currently utilizing these training tools, including Police and Military units
- Certified Animal Training Professionals, working to improve standards of pet ownership and care, community safety and education around responsible pet training and ownership
- Animal Welfare Organisations
- Members of the public who own pets or have pet dogs living in their community

Would generate a more comprehensive understanding of the use of training tools in behavioral modification and the betterment of animal welfare.

I refer to page 3 of the bill, which states:

Prohibiting inhumane practices

The Bill amends the ACPA and introduces new offences which will prohibit the inhumane practice of:

- *possessing or using a prong collar, which is designed to bruise or pierce an animal’s skin, or another prescribed restraint on an animal*

The above statement is factually incorrect – the tool is not **designed** to bruise or pierce an animal’s skin. I refer further to page 25 of the bill, which states:

If used incorrectly, prong collars can also cause physical injuries, such as bruising, scratching, and punctures to the skin of the dog. Over time, this can lead to scar tissue developing on the dog. In extreme but rare cases, prong collars have been associated with spinal cord injuries and other severe injuries.

This refers specifically to the **incorrect** use of the prong collar. It is reasonable to state that incorrect use of **any** tool (for example a leash, flat collar or harness) has the potential to cause injury. It is also reasonable to state that **correct** use of the prong collar does not

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cause injury to the dog. I personally use prong collars on my own dogs just to walk in my neighborhood. My dogs are excited to go for a walk and are happy for me to put on their collars to do so. None of them shy away or show any adverse reaction to me presenting them with their prong collars and none pull away while I put them on. If this tool caused them a negative experience, they would show body language that they are not comfortable in me putting them on. One of my dogs is over 30kgs and the other over 40kgs, if I did not use these tools, they could easily pull me over in excitement.

Additionally, it is of great concern to me that, as per the wording of the bill above, the use of potentially **any and all** restraint based tools is considered to be inhumane. I am especially concerned by this wording given key stakeholders and members of the community have not been given room to provide feedback on this.

My understanding is that an individual can currently be convicted of animal cruelty for the misuse of any training tool. I would request that current and historical data on such convictions be cited and included in the consideration of amendments to regulation.

Based on the above, I would request that amendments to the use / availability / legality of tools not be considered as part of the proposed amendments to the Act, until such time as best practice process is followed, and the community is consulted on the proposed changes.

Yours sincerely,

Danielle Atwell