

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

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Submitted by: [REDACTED]
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PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION ACT 2001

22/05/2022

[REDACTED]
Personal Details Submitted on Form

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 [REDACTED], I participate in training courses provided by Mackay K9 Training that focus on behaviour and obedience for a better lifestyle with my two dogs. I have been an ongoing client since February 2020.

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

The community has not adequately been assessed due to the lack of community consultation regarding the proposed changes.

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 several 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 impacts to Business', Competitions, Social and Environmental Impacts.

Personal experiences allow me to comment on the Social and Environmental Impacts these new changes would make to the community. The proposed amendments would take us backwards regarding public safety and the safe management of dogs in public spaces.

Dogs can be unpredictable the same as any animal, aggression can arise during relatively benign interactions. We as a community are constantly reminded to implement supervision around children or other animals. Public spaces are full of interactions that cannot be regulated and can increase the chances of unpredictable behaviours due to past experiences the same as an individual who has PTSD.

The correct use of a restraint device can create a link between dog and handler and make a situation more manageable allowing the handler to correctly address the situation before a negative interaction arises (example: I have had dogs off leash attempt to interact with mine on a training walk, by applying small pressure of a restraint device I have positioned my dog in their sit command and stepped between the aggressor and my dog. Avoiding any contact and conflict whilst the dog's owner has re-established control of their animal. All parties walking away without serious injury). Without the confidence in the restraint device, I would be worrying about two dogs instead of one which would then impact my ability to make a sound judgement resulting in an increased potential of more damage for all parties involved (this may include children).

We as a community are encouraged to exercise our companions outside of their enclosed yards, this in turn creates exposure to risks that are out of our control. One negative interaction can change the course of not only our lives but also our companions. Without access to these restraint devices members of the community may not be able to provide adequate mental and physical fulfilment for their dog without said safe equipment, which is a welfare concern.

Conclusions drawn regarding restraint based tools, specifically the prong collar, have been made based on unsubstantiated research and without meaningful consultation of key stakeholders.

Decisions made on restraint-based tools, specifically the prong collar, have been made with unsubstantiated research and without consultation with frequent users.

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 request a more wide-ranging review of tools be considered prior to making such decisions, as the above statement demonstrates a lack of understanding of behavioural science and the means in which training tools are most used as a means of Negative Reinforcement (guiding the dog towards the correct behaviour), not Punishment. Adequate consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- Members of the Queensland Government currently utilising 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 thorough understanding of the use of training tools in behavioural 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 cause injury to the dog. If this statement was true, my two dogs would not get excited when I pull them out. The same as a dog gets excited with the rattle of the car keys, leash, food in their bowl, my two dogs get excited with the sound of their prong collars being placed on their necks. At first yes, I was apprehensive to use the tool when it was first introduced to me at Mackay K9 Training, it does look like a medieval device, but we are told not to judge a book by its cover. I researched the tool and tested the correct application on myself and felt no bruising or piercing as the above statement mentions.

Due to negative interactions (multiple interactions with dogs off-leash attacking ours) in public spaces our two dogs did become dog reactive. We sort out the help from our local training organisation and implemented an 8-week training course which came with prong collars, 24/7 assistance, training videos and lessons on how to properly fit a prong collar. I do believe without the help of the prong collars I would not be able to walk our two dogs together in public spaces. In multiple occasions since the completion of the 8-week training course and on-going group training sessions I have been in public spaces where individuals could not control their dogs on flat collars (they have either slipped their collar or the lead has pulled out of the owner's hand), and the dog has tried to attack our two. In all instances I have been able to avoid conflict by applying pressure to the restraint-device fixing my two in a sit command and intervening by keeping the aggressor away from my two allowing time for the owner to take control of their dog.

Additionally, it is of great concern to myself 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, removing these tools would put the handler and dogs at a disadvantage. My personal experiences have shown me that the restraint-devices used, such as a prong collar, when used correctly have a positive impact on public safety, safe management of dogs and strengthen interactions between companion and owner.

I request that the amendments to the use / availability / legality of the tools not be considered as part of the proposed amendments to the Act, until the individuals involved in this decision consult the community and study the use of the restraint-devices more thoroughly. I even suggest they take a class and follow the progress of dogs that have these items implement in their training programs.

Yours Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.