

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

Submission No: 56
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Submitter Comments:

23-May-2022

SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION ACT 2001

Dear Parliamentary Committee,

I hereby wish to make a submission on the proposed amendments to the Animal Care And Protection Act 2001, per subject above.

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a qualified dog trainer (Cert III National Dog Trainers Federation, 2021) and I have been operating in the industry for ~2 years, I own and operate Paws of DownUnder in south west Sydney. I recently purchased a property in QLD (Fraser Coast area) and my long term goal is to provide dog training services to pet dog owners in both states NSW and QLD.

This submission is to state that I am not supportive of the proposed amendments to the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001. There are three (3) major concerns that result in me opposing your suggested changes, as follows:

1. It appears to me the Queensland Parliament has not followed its own best practice guide for the amendment of legislation. As a result, a number of key stakeholders and the wider community in general have not been effectively 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 Queensland Parliament has not followed its own best practice guidelines is below:

- 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. Kindly 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:

- a. Make suitable shelter mandatory for all farmed animals (Petition no. 3499-21)
 - b. Tethering of dogs must be prohibited (Petition no. 3501-21)
 - c. Continue the use of all methods, including dogs, to control feral pigs (Petition no. 3515-21)
- For the remainder three e-petitions, there was no correlating subject matter in the initial discussion paper:
 - a. Ban the use of shock collars on dogs (Petition no. 3526-21)
 - b. Illegal to import - Prohibit the use of prong collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3530-21)
 - c. Prohibit the use of choke collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3531-21)
 - These last three petitions were made to the Hon. Mark Furner, with closing dates in May 2021 and a response due date in June 2021. Kindly 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 (back to the original point of lack of evidence to sustain “effective consultation”). 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 great 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”
2. The lack of genuine and timely community consultation results in inability for the parliament to understand the true impacts on the community, as such impact analysis has not been adequately performed

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:

For example, to me, this means certain restraint tools which I often use (such as slip leads and flat collars) may be at risk here; further the wording is non-specific, for example works such as “or other restraint device” and does not clearly articulate what a reasonable excuse could be.

Again, this is of great concern to me due to the information being so generic and non-specific

3. Conclusions drawn regarding restraint-based tools, specifically the prong collar and “other restraint device”, alarmingly 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 an alarming lack of understanding of behavioural science and the means in which training tools are most commonly used as a means of Negative Reinforcement (guiding the dog towards the correct behaviour), not Punishment. Further, often these tools are used in combination with Positive Reinforcement once the dog performs the correct behaviour, so eliminating the guiding process may adversely impact on the clarity and quality of dog training when these tools are used.

Adequate consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to those listed below, would result in a more comprehensive and proportionate understanding of the use of training tools in behaviour modification training and the betterment of animal welfare.

- 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

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.

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 opportunity 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 three points above, I would request that amendments to the use and/or availability and/or legality of restraint 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 effectively** on the proposed changes throughout all stages of the regulatory cycle.

Yours sincerely,

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