

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

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Submitted by: Sophie Armstrong
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Sophie Armstrong

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 Sophie Armstrong. I have owned pet dogs since childhood and in the past two years have developed a significant interest in dog training and behaviour after acquiring a dog with a number of behavioural issues. This has led me to work under the guidance of professional dog trainers and invest significant resources into educating myself about both the theoretical and practical aspects of dog training.

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

- a) The government has not followed its own best practice guidelines in proposing these amendments. There has been a significant lack of communication and consultation with both industry stakeholders and the wider community, with no opportunity afforded to these groups and individuals to be consulted on the proposed amendments to the Act.
- b) Impacts to the community have not been adequately assessed in order to inform decision making
- c) Conclusions regarding the use of restraint based tools, in particular the prong collar, have been drawn based on unsubstantiated research and with no consultation of industry professionals and other stakeholders.

POINT A

- a) The government has not followed its own best practice guidelines in proposing these amendments. There has been a significant lack of communication and consultation with both industry stakeholders and the wider community, with no opportunity afforded to these groups and individuals 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)
- 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”

POINT B

- a) Impacts to the community have not been adequately assessed to inform decision making

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).

In my view, these include the following social and environmental impacts.

A number of members of the community, myself included, choose to use a prong collar, in conjunction with other training tools and methodologies (such as a flat collar, hardness, lead and rewards and positive reinforcement) because it has enabled the safe management of a dog which would otherwise pose the potential to be a public nuisance and a potential threat to wildlife or livestock. Prior to employing the use of a prong collar, under the guidance of a professional dog trainer, I was unable to safely walk my dog in public without risk of being pulled into traffic or have the dog attempt to chase and catch birds and other wildlife.

This led to my dog receiving insufficient exercise and fulfillment, which was a welfare concern. Without adequate exercise, my dog was at risk of becoming a nuisance to the local community, exhibiting behaviors such as excessive barking. I attempted to rectify the problematic behaviour through use of only positive reinforcement training and the use of no restraint based devices other than a harness and lead under the guidance of a trainer, however was unsuccessful. Through use of the prong collar I am now able to safely exercise my dog in public and provide appropriate mental and physical fulfillment for the animal.

I am one of hundreds of individuals who rely on the option to choose from a number of restraint based tools, including the prong collar, to safely manage my dog and ensure that it does not pose a risk or nuisance to the wider community.

POINT C

- a) Conclusions regarding the use of restraint based tools, in particular the prong collar, have been drawn based on unsubstantiated research and with no consultation of industry professionals and other 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 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. 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 comprehensive 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. Personally, I was at first apprehensive to use a tool on my dog that is, on first impressions, very visually confronting. However, after being shown how the collar works and then seeing the effect on my ability to communicate with my dog, I have no doubt in my

mind that it is the most appropriate tool for my situation. It may not be for everyone and there are many cases where the use of such a tool would not be required, however in those cases where it is, the benefit it can provide is immeasurable. I am now able to offer my dog a much greater quality of life and would say that overall I can provide a greater level of care through being able to walk and exercise my dog in a wider variety of places providing better mental and physical fulfillment. My dog is visibly happier when walking and I feel I do *less* potential damage through using a prong collar, than through using a flat collar or harness which my dog often pulls into during a state of high arousal causing a choking pressure.

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, 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,

Sophie Armstrong