

## Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

**Submission No:** 604  
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**Submitter Comments:**

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## **Steve Courtney**

Nationally Accredited Dog Trainer

Nationally Accredited Dog Behaviour Specialist

Nationally Accredited Law Enforcement Dog Trainer

ANKC Registered Breeder

President PDTA

## **State Development and Regional Industries Committee**

Dear Parliamentary Committee, this is my 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 Steve Courtney, I am, as stated above a dog trainer, behaviour specialist, law enforcement dog trainer, registered breeder and President of the Professional Dog Trainers of Australia Organisation.

I have owned and trained my own dogs and other people's dogs for most of my adult life in some capacity. This now spans more than three decades.

These include, but not limited to: -

- Training my own dogs for simple to complex tasks and demonstrating these dogs to perspective clients, such as Police, Defence Force, Corrections Services, Security, young children and the disabled and general pet owners.
- Training clients dogs from the above groups to fill working roles, competition roles and well mannered pets.
- Rehabilitating dogs that have developed serious behaviour problems
- Training dogs for Assistance and Service roles
- I have presented in over 300 seminars, workshops and training schools.
- I have worked with an estimated one hundred of thousand dogs plus.
- Developed and train K9 Angels, a dogs for child and elderly therapy program.
- Training dogs and handlers for scent detection including AQIS and Customs
- Training and developing a group of dogs and handlers, mostly from dogs that started with behaviour problems, to form Team K9 Pro. This team has more podium wins across more dogs sports than any other group in the southern hemisphere.

**The most common task I am faced with is rehabilitating dogs that I am told no one else can.**

We work with dogs that have spent years with other trainers, vets, vet behaviourists etc that have triple medicated dogs with no improvement, and within hours many times, I am handling a dog that no one else can get near.

I have been the last chance for tens of thousands of dogs.

## **I am strongly against the proposed amendments to the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001**

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:

1. Business Impacts, for example, how this will impact the level and quality of service your business is able to offer
2. Competition Impacts how this will impact the wider dog training market by limiting options available to consumers via targeting of select training methodologies Social and environmental impacts
3. Another example of how this will impact public safety in terms of safe management of dogs in the community.
4. How this will impact members of the community who are unable 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.

Page 25 of the bill, 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.”*

The most common use of the prong collar is to facilitate Negative Reinforcement, so the above statement is false.

I would ask, who is it that considers prong collars inappropriate?

What experience with behaviour modification and training with prong collars do these people have?

Also from the Bill: *“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.

Also, I request 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
- 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 have irrefutable evidence on this.**

I have a letter from the designer and manufacturer of the prong collar stating this is untrue.

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.**

Where is the evidence of such outcomes?

Where are the studies and citations to prove this?

Also, 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, nail clippers) has the potential to cause injury.

It is also factual to state that **correct use of the prong collar does not cause injury to the dog.**

Given the fact that I have handled, trained, and rehabilitated thousands of dogs using a prong collar and never caused any physical injury, correct use of the tool is safe, effective and in some cases necessary.

I have taught handlers how to use this collar who: -

- Are small in size / weight and have a large dog that cannot be handled safely in the community without a prong collar.
- Are disabled and require their Assistance / Service dog to accompany them in public places and cannot confidently control their dog without a prong collar due to dexterity disabilities.
- Handle Police, Military, Correctional Service and AFP Service dogs.
- Have pet dogs that without the collar, would not be able to be calm and focussed in the community and therefore would be surrendered, put to sleep or left in backyards.

**I have not found** these people to have caused problems or abuse their dogs with the collar.

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.

On the 24<sup>h</sup> May 2022, Mayor of Townsville, Mark Molachino via 7 News, has appealed to public and the Shadow Minister to crack down on dog owners as there have been 500 reported dog attacks this last year.

Please consider a few points here.

1. This is not a Townsville problem; dogs are out of control in **every town**.
2. How might the ban of the prong collar and other restraint devices effect these statistics?
3. Does anyone feel that less control will equal less attacks?

My understanding is that an individual can currently be convicted of animal cruelty for the misuse of any training tool or simply being cruel to any animal.

I feel that the three additions to the bill, which are:

1. Ban the use of shock collars on dogs (Petition no. 3526-21)
2. Illegal to import - Prohibit the use of prong collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3530-21)
3. Prohibit the use of choke collars in Queensland (Petition no. 3531-21)

that were not added by the closing date of 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2021 to give key stakeholders and the wider community the opportunity to provide feedback, be scrapped from the ACPA 2022.

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 and experienced stakeholders are consulted on the proposed changes.



Yours sincerely Steve Courtney

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