

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

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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 Cathy Grant. I am a certified dog trainer at Above and Beyond Dog Training. My qualifications are through NDTF. I conduct private consultations, board and train options for clients and rescue dogs from rescue groups around Brisbane. I also teach obedience classes from basic through to advanced classes. I own a pack of 12 dogs of my own all who interact daily with each other without any concerns. 10 of these dogs were rescue. 6 of these dogs were due to be put to sleep. I have been training dogs professionally for the last 8 years but having had dogs my whole life from German Shepherds to Border Collies.

My experience regarding the use of the tools that you wish to ban is that they are not just there for the dog it is about giving owners peace of mind. Most dog owners that I encounter, who use these tools, use them because they give them confidence in a lot more situations. These dogs and owners need help to get their dogs past some behaviour concerns.

If you go ahead with this ban it will destroy a lot more families. It will create a lot of resentment. A lot more dogs will be left in the back yard without exercise. There will be a lot more noise complaints over excessive barking due to boredom.

I have had owners who were so overwhelmed but wanted to give their dogs what they require and that is to be a strong part of the family doing what families do and spend quality time together.

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

POINT A

a) 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 it's 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

b) Lack of genuine community consultation means the impacts on the community have not been adequately assessed.

I know I was not consulted and neither were any of the dog trainers that I am associated with.

I also know that none of the many friends nor clients have ever been consulted.

I would like to ask who was consulted?

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 ban will my business and clients will be overwhelmed as to what they need to do. Some dogs and people DO require the help of a prong. These owners do not hurt their dog. Why would they? Why would they pay me as a trainer for a tool that would hurt their dog. That is just outrageous.

Not having the tool to offer clients is not an option. Owners need to know they are in control of their dog.

Owners who have no upper body strength need help.

Owners with disabilities need help.

I will lose business from this as people come to me for this option.

Lots of these dogs are NOT dangerous they just need guidance and help.

Competition Impacts

This ban will limit the training owners can receive. You are limiting us as trainers as to what we can sell on or advise owners to get for the safety of their dogs and others. There is already divide in the world of dog training in differences of opinions and how dogs are trained.

Training is about teaching and helping the dog understand. Training is about giving the owners the best tools to help their dog understand.

Giving tools to owners is not just handing the tool over and saying there you go. It is about training the owner how to use the tools. How to communicate.

Social and environmental impacts

By not allowing the prong collar or other methods of safety you will increase the risk of potential injury to other dogs and owners. You will increase the risk of depression in people who are no longer capable of walking their dogs and facing the risk of having to rehome or put their dog to sleep. These owners love walking and love having a dog for company. This will become a mental health issue as lots of my clients are already worried about this ban. I have been contacted by numerous clients asking for help and what were they going to do. How were they going to cope. Their dogs are their life in a lot of situations.

POINT C -

c) 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 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.

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.

I appreciate your time in reading this and hope you will consider our side as trainers and the impact it will have on dogs, clients and us as qualified trainers.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Grant

Above and Beyond Dog Training