

Inquiry into the Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill 2022

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My name is Mitch Watson.

I own and operate a dog training business called "The Paw Professor". This is my full-time profession and has been since 2013.

The service I provide is focused on dog training across a broad range within the industry including, however not limited to the following:

- domestic dogs for families
- working dogs (security dogs/detection dogs)
- assistance dogs and therapy dogs
- animal rescue organisations

Generally, I train/educate approximately 20 dogs and their families per week conducting private sessions/consultations. I have trained in excess of 9000 dogs during this time.

Prior to working as a dog trainer my previous occupations that relate to this submission were a Police Dog Handler (Qld) and an RSPCA inspector (WA & Qld).

Both as stakeholder in the industry and an animal loving owner, I oppose the proposed amendments relating to dogs in the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001.

As a dog trainer, I also heavily utilise the following items to teach a dog or increase a behaviour.

1. Treats.
2. Toys.
3. Praise.

In terms of decreasing a behaviour, there are two options.

- adding an aversive after an unwanted behaviour - this is commonly referred to as Positive Punishment.
- removing something from the dog immediately after an unwanted behaviour - this is commonly referred to as Negative Punishment.

As a dog trainer I use many different aversives as it relates to dog training to reduce a behaviour. We are all subject to aversives in life, as are dogs. In fact, dogs use aversives on each other regularly.

Whilst not one of my regular tools, a pinch collar is one that I use as an aversive, with discretion. I acknowledge that the pinch collar may appear barbaric. Prior to my experience in the industry and as a person who objects to animal cruelty, I too would have thought this was a medieval tool. I can appreciate that a person who

has limited knowledge of the psychology regarding dog training could have this point of view.

Other aversives include, check chains (not choke chains), e-collars (not SHOCK collars), flat collars, vocal control, water pistol (squirt bottle), throwing an item on the ground to name a few.

Both head halters and no pull harnesses are an aversive I generally do not use. If they are used and decrease a dog's behaviour of pulling, they too are an aversive. I do not use these for several reasons, one of which causes injuries to the dog's nose and bleeding on the muzzle, and/or chafing under the armpits.

In terms of the first option (Positive Punishment), an example would be squirting water from a bottle towards a dog after unwanted behaviour of jumping. Dog A could in fact like water being squirted out of a bottle and therefore this would reinforce the behaviour of jumping. However, Dog B may be petrified of water being squirted and have significant emotional trauma. Irrespective of either case, the dog owner squirting the water may be neutral and have a belief system that the water is an 'appropriate' aversive. This is like a range of aversives - One dog may be very sensitive to the correct use of a check chain whereby limited application is required. However, another dog may not feel concerned by having a check chain applied and continue the unwanted behaviour.

A pinch collar also fits into this category. With the correct fitting and appropriate use, very subtle correction with the use of your fingers is all that is required. In fact, this type of aversive is far less of a concern than the continual use of an inappropriate aversive or flat collar choking a dog day in and day out on a walk. This is evident, by merely observing everyday dog owners being pulled down the street by their pet.

In terms of the second option of decreasing an unwanted behaviour - Negative Punishment. I also utilise this method, however it is my experience that this will work on very few dogs and with a sterile environment. Furthermore, this can create significant emotional trauma by locking a dog away in the crate or laundry after an unwanted behaviour occurs. The dog is howling and clearly displaying high levels of stress. Dogs don't communicate with each other using this option. I have never seen a dog remove something from another dog to communicate to its fellow species in order to reduce an unwanted behaviour. (ie; a puppy jumping on an adult dog).

Proportionate positive punishment/negative reinforcement is very evident in the canine's world. It sends a clear and uncomplicated message to the receiver. It's evident in the natural phenomenon of the canine in their natural environment. The female dog admonishes her pups with a quick grab around the neck adding pressure until the pups comply. The older dogs also assert their pack leadership and placement/pecking order in the pack with a shot sharp aversive in a growl, nip or bite. A pinch collar mimics this effect and that's how the dogs learn. This hierarchy is maintained for the pack to survive.

The appropriate use of Positive Punishment and Negative Reinforcement has wonderful applications for dogs and our community. With greater control and

obedience, the following outcomes are achieved, the first two being the most important in my view.

- Greater involvement with dogs being taken for walks or regular outings. As a direct result of a dog's poor behaviour in the community, it creates embarrassment and anxiety for the owner - This directly results in the dog being left at home with very few outings. Further problems of destructive behaviour and unwanted barking results. This leaves owners in a downward spiral having their dog contained beyond what it should be and possibly then having to use a bark collar. No dog should be subject to a life of confinement without regular freedom to run outside their small yard.
- Reduced Euthanasia rates for dogs that begin to demonstrate dangerous acts towards other dogs and members of the community.
- Reduced incidents at the dog park

Conclusion

In my 20 years in the industry of both training dogs (Domestic/Police/Security) or enforcing legislation whilst with the RSPCA, I have never witnessed any dog physically injured from the use of a check chain, pinch collar or E-collar. I don't dispute that some people have injured dogs as a direct result of the inappropriate use of these tools. It would be fair to say that those people were not of sound mind and could injure the dog irrespective of any of the tools under discussion.

Furthermore, I am yet to see a dog trained correctly with these tools that doesn't display a happy attitude to have the device fitted to their neck. In fact, they are over the moon as they know they are about to do something or go for a walk etc like any ordinary pet owner would have their dog display. Why would a dog demonstrate this behaviour if the collar had given them such a cruel experience? On the contrary, I regularly see rescue dogs in my profession demonstrating a complete fear of 'males' or when you raise your hand, grab a mop etc. They are visibly distraught with the fear that they may be hit again.

Sadly, also in those 20 years I have seen many circumstances leading to terrible animal cruelty. I have seen animals, caged up, tied to poles whereby they were nearly choking to death, and severe starvation whereby they could barely walk. The people that committed these horrific acts on these defenceless animals did this without the use any of the above-mentioned tools. Only greater minds than mine can understand why they would do such things. All too often, these people were only given warnings from the relevant authorities.

In my professional capacity nearly on a weekly basis, I speak to someone who thinks it is ok to have a dog confined to a small apartment for up to 8-10 hours having to go to the toilet on a balcony whilst the owner is busy working. Unfortunately, dogs don't have the choice that we humans have to leave their environment. It is complete luck and chance with who they have as an owner. In my experience this is a far more pressing matter for the Qld government to consider rather than remove useful tools that are widely used throughout the world to assist professional trainers/handlers and

responsible dog owners so they can provide the best quality of life for their beloved companion.

Pinch collars and E-collars are necessary in training many dogs. It is my opinion that the use of such items should be regulated. This includes the regulation of the quality of the tool (particularly when it comes to E-collars) and the professional guidance that is required to use such items.

I would be more than happy to make myself available for the committee to further discuss any of the above-mentioned points with me.

For your Consideration.