

Agriculture and Fisheries and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Submission No: 13
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Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to express my gratitude for considering strong dog laws. I have some comments on the proposals and would also like to make a highly important suggestion.

Every dog attack is very personal to me. On the morning of [REDACTED] 2019, my seven-year-old daughter, Polina [REDACTED], and her mother, Maria [REDACTED], were peacefully walking along [REDACTED], when a dog attacked them on the footpath. As a result of that attack, Polina was seriously injured and probably would have died without the help of Scott [REDACTED], who came to their rescue and forced the dog away. After the attack, Polina underwent surgery and spent a week in the Queensland Children's Hospital. She got severe facial and head injuries, lost her right ear, and needed 2 additional surgery operations which were planned for later.

Only 4 years after in March of this year 2023 the first operation for her ear reconstruction was done, and she is still waiting for her second operation.

According to City Safety Officer [REDACTED] opinion immediately after the attack, it occurred due to the owner's irresponsible attitude towards maintaining the appropriate living conditions for the dog. The American Staffordshire Terrier, an extremely aggressive breed that is banned in several countries due to its temperament, easily escaped from the backyard, which was poorly fenced, to the street. It savagely attacked my innocent daughter who was coming home from her swimming lesson accompanied by her mother.

I would like to thank you for considering the proposal to introduce education for dog owners. I believe this initiative is of great importance to our community. To ensure maximum effectiveness, I would like to highlight some key aspects that should be included in this education program:

1. Preparing for Dog Ownership: **Before** acquiring a dog, prospective owners should undergo an education test. This would allow individuals to reconsider their choice of breed and select one that is most suitable for them and less likely to pose a danger to the community.
2. Understanding Dog Breeds: The education should provide information about the history and purpose of different dog breeds, with particular focus on strong and potentially dangerous breeds such as American Staffordshire Terriers, Rottweilers, and others. This knowledge would help owners make an informed decision and choose a breed they can effectively control.
3. Dog Behaviour and Safety: The education program should cover statistics on dog attacks and provide insights into dogs' behaviour in various situations. It is important to emphasise

that the most dangerous dog is the one without an owner. Owners should be educated on how to avoid risky situations, such as moving to a new house, having a poorly fenced yard, leaving the dog unattended, or not informing guests about the presence of a dog. In dangerous situations, owners should be prepared to take steps to minimise any potential harm.

4. Dog Upbringing: The education should also address proper dog upbringing and common errors that owners may make during this process. This includes guidance on socialisation, training techniques, and addressing behavioural issues in a responsible manner.

5. Responsible Ownership: A crucial aspect of the education program should focus on responsible dog ownership. Prospective owners should be encouraged to consider whether they have the necessary time, financial resources, and space to keep their dog safe and well-cared for. It is important to emphasise that owning a dog comes with responsibilities akin to those of driving a car, or handling firearms.

By incorporating these key elements into the education program, we can ensure that dog owners in our community are well-informed, responsible, and capable of providing a safe environment for their pets and the general public.

On the other hand, I believe that the current measures are insufficient in addressing the issue. While strict measures targeting irresponsible dog owners, such as fines and imprisonment, may help in holding them accountable, I am sceptical about their potential to dramatically reduce severe dog attacks. In my opinion, the number of serious attacks is largely influenced by the **presence of dangerous dogs within the community**. Even with the introduction of strict penalties, if the overall **number of dogs** remains the same over the long term, the frequency of attacks is unlikely to see a significant reduction.

To effectively address this issue, it is crucial to implement a **long-term policy** that encourages a shift from owning big, strong, and aggressive dogs to smaller, calmer breeds that are friendlier in nature. One way to achieve this is by introducing mandatory dog owners' liability insurance. Every dog owner should be required to have this insurance, with the premiums varying based on factors such as the breed, size, and weight of the dog. For instance, smaller and calmer breeds could have lower or even negligible insurance fees, while larger and more aggressive animals would have higher premiums. Insurance companies could determine the prices based on the risk associated with different breeds and sizes, like how they assess insurance rates for cars.

This approach has already been successfully implemented in certain countries, such as Germany. The insurance would cover losses for victims of dog attacks and provide compensation for any material damages caused by the animals. However, the primary goal of this insurance is to prompt dog owners to carefully consider their decision before acquiring a pet. The upfront **cost** of obtaining insurance would make them think twice about owning a dog, especially an **aggressive breed** with a higher-priced insurance policy. It would

encourage potential owners to evaluate what breed and size of dog best suits their lifestyle and needs.

Currently, there is a concerning trend where big, heavy dogs of aggressive breeds are often offered for free in dog shelters, while small, calm dogs can be quite expensive to adopt. This often leads people to choose the cheaper option without adequately considering the potential risks associated with owning an aggressive breed. By implementing mandatory insurance, the cost of owning potentially dangerous dogs would be **equalised**, making them at least **as expensive as other dogs** and ideally even more costly. Owning a dog inherently involves certain risks, and having dog insurance in place would ensure that owners are financially prepared to handle any unforeseen incidents that may occur.

It is indeed interesting to note that while the Pit Bull breed is deemed dangerous and prohibited in QLD, the American Staffordshire Terrier (Am Staff), which is the closest relative to Pit Bulls, is not only permitted but also one of the most popular breeds in QLD. This raises the question of whether there is a valid reason to claim that Am Staffs are inherently less dangerous than Pit Bulls, given their close genetic relationship. The varying regulations and perceptions surrounding these breeds highlight the subjective nature of breed-specific classifications and emphasise the importance of evaluating individual dogs based on their behaviour rather than generalising solely based on breed. An American Staffordshire Terrier attacked my daughter and I know how terrible its attack can be.

To summarise, I firmly believe that implementing **insurance** coverage for dog owners is essential. This approach would prompt individuals to carefully consider the reasons behind the high insurance costs associated with big aggressive dogs and ultimately **encourage responsible decision-making**. Furthermore, it would help **shift** the preference towards smaller and friendlier breeds in the interest of promoting safer and more harmonious interactions between dogs and their communities.

Best regards

Aleksandr [REDACTED]