



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL [No. 2]

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (4.40 p.m.): This afternoon it gives me great pleasure to speak to the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) and in particular about the provisions in relation to restricted dogs. These amendments provide for the creation of a state framework for minimum standards for the regulation of breeds of dogs that are currently banned or prohibited by the Commonwealth Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulation. The role of this legislation is to provide a state framework consistent with what the Commonwealth government has already introduced.

The four breeds of dog in question are the dogo Argentino, fila Brasileiro, the Japanese tosa and the American pit bull terrier, or generally the pit bull terrier, or any crossbreeds of these dogs. The primary purpose of this bill is to provide for the regulation of those breeds of dog prohibited from importation into the country by the Commonwealth government. There has been a lot of debate about whether breed-specific laws are the appropriate way to pursue this. It has already been highlighted that we are merely following the lead of the Commonwealth government in banning these four dog breeds.

The issue is about breed-specific bans versus bans on dogs with a certain nature. It is important to identify that, although individual dogs within those four breeds could be playful and not have a nasty bone in their body, these four dogs are bred mainly for their attacking ability, aggression and biting power. Yes, other breeds of dog do attack people, but it is important to highlight that the breeders of these four dogs seek specific genetic traits of aggression and biting power. That is why they have been singled out.

This bill does not address the nature of other dog breeds, because other dog breeds are not specifically bred for their aggression. Prior to my wife giving birth a number of years ago, we had two dogs—a Rhodesian ridgeback cross by the name of Reika and an Australian silky terrier by the name of Jasper. Prior to the birth of our daughter, we were concerned about the way the Rhodesian ridgeback in particular would respond to our daughter. We had a number of concerns in that regard. We spoke to and sought advice from veterinarians. We also spoke to and sought advice from dog specialists.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the chamber. Members are distracting the member for Redlands, who is making a brilliant speech.

Mr ENGLISH: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We sought the advice of a number of experts in relation to dog behaviour so as to try to provide our daughter with as safe an environment as possible. I am a fan of dogs and I am quite happy for my daughter to grow up around dogs and to experience the pleasure that they can provide. However, believe it or not, after the birth of our daughter, our concerns for the Rhodesian ridgeback were found to be baseless as it behaved impeccably towards my daughter. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the Australian silky terrier by the very aggressive name of Jasper.

Mr Purcell: Vicious Jasper!

Mr ENGLISH: Yes, vicious Jasper. Although not aggressive, unfortunately, as is the way with some terriers, the dog was terribly overenthusiastic. Nothing we could do, including surgical intervention on his testicles, could modify his enthusiasm. So despite a number of training courses and surgery—much to his discomfort—we could not modify his enthusiasm towards my daughter and, as a result—

Dr Kingston: Give him a dose of female hormones.

Mr ENGLISH: That is not something that we explored, but I would hate for my male Australian silky terrier to start growing breasts. To cut a long story short, we ended up giving Jasper away to protect the safety of our daughter. I understand a lot of the concerns that members of the public and parents have in relation to the potential for harm and damage by dogs to children and even adults. However, my point is to highlight the difference between dogs bred specifically for their violence and aggression and other dogs that might exhibit those traits. I am comfortable with the reasons why these four breeds in particular have been targeted. That is not to say that other breeds of dogs will not attack from time to time. However, they are not genetically encouraged to be aggressive.

The Commonwealth and other states, including South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, have recognised the increased risk to public health and safety posed by these four breeds of dogs. Despite my nervousness about the conduct of Jasper towards my daughter, I suspect a frenzied attack by an Australian silky terrier bears very little resemblance to a frenzied attack by an American pit bull terrier or a dogo Argentino. Those dogs can kill an adult. We are talking about horrific injuries that, in some cases, require urgent surgical intervention to save people's lives as opposed to a small puncture wound on a big toe. These dogs are potential killers and, as such, they have been treated somewhat differently under this law from other breeds of dogs.

Once a breed of dog has been classified as restricted, the key elements that will fall into place are as follows: the bill will place controls and conditions upon the keeping of those restricted dogs; it will prohibit the breeding, sale or exchange of restricted dogs and require the desexing of any restricted dogs currently in Queensland; and it will also enable the destruction of a restricted dog in specified circumstances. I will leave it for other members to discuss that in detail.

This bill also provides for local governments to be responsible for the administration and implementation of this regime. The bill requires that each local government that permits the keeping of restricted dogs in its area to create and maintain a register of restricted dogs. The register has to be open for public inspection and include the following details: the address where the dog is kept and a detailed physical description of the restricted dog.

I can understand some members of the public having concerns about their privacy. There is the potential for a fear campaign and revenge if a house is identified as containing one of these four breeds of dog. To maintain the privacy of certain members of the community, the bill provides that persons who are protected from the disclosure of their name and address under the Valuation of Land Act 1944 for the purpose of local government records are similarly protected under the restricted dog register provisions.

A protected person is someone whose personal safety or property would be placed at risk if their name and postal address were included on such public records. So if a person does have concerns about the safety of themselves or their property, including the dog in question, they can apply to be listed as a protected person and thereby seek suppression of their particular details from the register. I believe that this is a very wise move by the minister. Obviously some members of the community are going to have concerns about retribution or will fear attacks on their property, given the level of misinformation out there in the community about what this bill means. Without further ado I congratulate the minister and the department on the wide-ranging consultation and putting this bill together. I certainly commend the bill to the House.
