



Speech by

JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—Ind) (5.28 p.m.): I rise to address that section of this legislation which concerns dogs. I agree with many of the words spoken by the member for Warrego and the member for Darling Downs. I am disappointed, however, that the member for Warrego has been bitten by farm dogs. I do not think anybody gets more exposed to farm dogs than large-animal vets.

Mr Hobbs: Town dogs.

Dr KINGSTON: Town dogs? They must be badly trained. For a consideration I will give the member for Warrego lessons in how to avoid dog bites.

I also wish to offer some friendly advice to the member for Kawana with his cowardly labrador. A friend of mine in England had an English bull terrier, a very ferocious looking dog. He took him for his first walk in Hyde Park, let him off the leash and the dog trotted off to mix with other dogs, as he should. He took one look at another dog, turned tail and headed for his owner. However, he forgot to stop and he broke his owner's kneecap. His owner spent the next six months in plaster. I hope that the member for Kawana does not suffer a like fate.

I find the problem that this bill is addressing a vexing one. As a veterinarian, I have treated dogs seriously injured by so-called savage dogs. I have also destroyed many dogs that could not be controlled by their owners. I felt sorry for the dogs and angry with the owners. As a horse breeder who guaranteed his product for many years, I experienced the same problem: good horses spoilt by unskilful owners. The problem common in both of those circumstances is the inability of the owners to adequately train and adequately control the animal. On many occasions I have humanely destroyed dogs and retrained horses whilst realising that the fault lay not with the animal but with the unskilled owner. Whilst working as a vet entering farms, all of which appeared to have at least five dogs, and treating injured pig dogs every Sunday afternoon—usually suturing long, deep rips from tusks without an anaesthetic—I have never been bitten by a farm or a hunting dog. The only dog that has ever bitten me was a half-dead cocker spaniel. Strangely enough, it was fully dead by that night.

I have mentioned this to emphasise that experienced handlers are rarely injured by dogs of any breed. In fact, I would much prefer to treat hunting dogs and cattle dogs than lap-dogs. I have more faith in a hunting dog than I have in lap-dogs and confidence that I will retain all of my fingers. Certain breeds such as the pit bull have received very negative publicity because of injuries inflicted on innocent people. This has already resulted in some councils placing a total ban on such breeds, and rightly so in urban areas. In researching the incidence of injuries from dogs, I have found that the breed that has caused the highest number is the Rottweiler. Rottweilers are a favourite guard dog. The statistics do not explain the circumstances under which the Rottweilers racked up their good score—whether it was in the course of duty or otherwise. But I have to recount what I think is a set of delightful circumstances wherein a potential thief fell into a policeman's arms weeping with relief as he had spent the previous six hours sitting on top of a two-inch pipe fence post whilst a Rottweiler sat below him.

One of my dogs is a bull terrier-blue heeler cross, and he is not a pretty dog at all. With a great deal of imagination, we named him Blue. Blue is a trained guard dog. He will bite if he is told to—if I tell him to—but otherwise he will not. I wish to give an example of the value of such a dog. A good friend of mine, a mechanic, came to pick up my truck for servicing. When he could not find me, he knew the keys would be in the truck, so he thought, 'Well, I will just take it.' He placed one hand on the truck and he felt something take him by the boot, and there was Blue lying on the ground with a firm grip on this man's boot and it was a Mexican stand-off. When he took his hand off the truck, Blue eased his teeth

and he was able to walk slowly to the front gate with the dog still hanging on to his boot. When he touched the front gate and opened it, Blue let him go. But his 20-metre walk took 20 minutes.

Whilst I may appear to be treating this subject lightly, I am not. I am seriously concerned that a breed should be banned across-the-board because it is a breed. I am much more in favour of legislation that limits the ownership of potentially harmful dogs to qualified people. Obviously, such legislation must consider the location of the dog and the owner. I strongly support the thrust of this legislation that innocent people must be protected from attack from uncontrolled dogs. I am surprised to hear members express concerns about the accurate identification of the breed and that that will be a problem. Alan Wilton of the University of New South Wales has now perfected a DNA test, and a mitochondrial test, that is capable of identifying dog breeds. He is currently identifying purebred dingoes from hybrid dingoes very accurately. The cost of the test is going to be somewhere in the vicinity of \$50 per dog.

I am concerned that the legislation may be widened to include other breeds. I and other farmers in my area—and I am sure in the minister's area—are currently plagued by feral pigs, which are harboured, not intentionally, by national parks and forestry. They are breeding faster than we can eradicate them. Pigs are causing major damage to sugar cane and major losses to canefarmers. I am sure that the minister would be cognisant of that fact. Pigs that are eating sugar cane are like children eating chocolates: it is extremely difficult to get them to eat anything else. The current laws controlling the distribution of 1080 for use to eradicate pigs limits the farmer to using 1080 on grain. Cane-eating pigs regard grain as unpalatable muesli. They do not want to touch it. Personally, I and many other farmers would like to see that restriction eased. Farmers have a need to resort to pig dogs to control feral pigs. Such dogs are often not very attractive and are trained, as has been previously said, to kill pigs. I have already said that I have spent many Sunday afternoons sewing up pig dogs and I have always found that those dogs were particularly easy to handle. I just told the owner to put them on the surgery table and I sutured them. There was never a whimper from them.

To conclude, I agree that people must be protected. I do not agree with a sweeping ban on certain breeds. I think that certain breeds should be limited so that they can be owned only by people who are capable of handling them and who have exhibited that capability. I think that the inclusion of further breeds should be done only after a case-by-case study and that every case should be considered separately. I am strongly in favour of owners being encouraged to undertake training, that is, training for the owners and training for the dogs. Again, I emphasise that in most cases it is the owners who are at fault rather than the dogs.
