




Speech By  
**Laura Gerber**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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### **ANIMAL CARE AND PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (4.52 pm): The Animal Care and Protection Amendment Bill received a whopping 1,495 submissions to the committee, with a significant proportion raising concerns with the banning of pig poison and prong collars. That is where I will focus the majority of my contribution today. Before I get to the substance of prong collars, I do want to put it on the record that I strongly condemn animal cruelty and that anyone found guilty of animal cruelty should have the book thrown at them.

Over the past few months the media has been saturated with reports that Queensland is currently facing one of the largest biosecurity threats in modern history. We have the looming threats of foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease. An outbreak of these would have detrimental and wide-reaching effects to our great state. Protecting our biosecurity is not just important to those in the regions or farmers or producers; it can impact every item on every plate right across the state. In August we had 13 fewer biosecurity officers in Queensland than we did when the government came to power. An additional five positions were left vacant.

It is incredibly important that all options be on the table as we fight to protect our agricultural industries and the livelihoods of rural and regional communities. Instead, this bill proposes a ban on the use of a poison which means that products such as CSSP pig poison will be banned. I confess that when this bill first came on the *Notice Paper* and I read the submissions that this was an issue I did have to do some research to formulate my position on it and exactly what the word 'poison' might mean not only for the pigs but also for our wildlife. I was shocked to learn that banning pig poison will mean that feral pigs will be able to spread devastating diseases even more rapidly if an outbreak does occur. One expert in feral animal management across Queensland, Darren Marshall, told the ABC earlier this year—

... it will be 'virtually impossible' to stop the spread of disease if control methods are limited. It would be absolutely detrimental if these toxins are taken away, because other control methods just do not kill enough feral pigs ...

Feral pigs are a real threat to our wildlife and to our agriculture industry. They spread invasive plants, degrade soil and water and prey on natural species. They damage crops and livestock and they carry diseases. This threat is widespread. In the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries's correspondence to the committee, it estimated that there are 24 million feral pigs across Australia. That is 24 million opportunities for feral pigs to cause irreparable damage. It defies logic that, at a time when Queensland is facing such a large biosecurity challenge, those opposite want to ban one of the most common ways landholders manage pests and feral animals. Quite frankly, I think it shows a bit of ignorance on the part of the Labor government to the very real effects that this will have on primary producers and the ability for farmers right across the state to put food on their kids' plates. This is frightening. I am very grateful that our shadow minister for agriculture is in fact a primary producer and informs our policy positions. I think that is why the LNP is able to stand up for our farmers and our primary producers in the way we are.

In its submission to the committee AgForce, a peak organisation representing Queensland's \$7.8 billion cane, cattle, grain and sheep wool producers, raised a concerning point: no public consultation has occurred regarding this proposed amendment to the act. It went on to note that during the May 2021 discussion paper phase AgForce was advised that a particular toxin used for feral pigs was of concern to the government yet AgForce could not or would not be advised which particular toxin it was; nor was AgForce provided with any explanation of why the toxin was of concern. This blatant circumvention of transparency and public consultation is fitting of a tired, third-term Labor government that has, quite frankly, lost touch with everyday Queenslanders. It was on 12 May 2022 that AgForce finally became aware of what the concerning toxin was.

**Mr McDonald** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Member for Lockyer, if you are going to interject, return to your seat, please.

**Mrs GERBER:** That was only because of a media release issued by the minister. To make matters worse, we found out that the research the government is relying on to ban the pig poison in New South Wales is research from 2011. While other states, including New South Wales, have banned pig poison, the government is neglecting to acknowledge that those states do not have the massive livestock industry that we have in Queensland. Instead of this blanket ban, the government should be working with Queensland industry to investigate and properly understand the threat from feral pigs when it comes to spreading exotic diseases and our capacity to control feral pigs with or without pig poison. Only then, after a thorough, comprehensive review has taken place, should the government redress this issue.

As this clause stands, I cannot in all good conscience support it. For me, that is not the only concerning part of this bill. This bill also proposes to prohibit the use of prong collars because, according to the explanatory notes, they are designed to pierce an animal's skin. This is fundamentally incorrect.

I took it upon myself to obtain some firsthand experience with a prong collar to formulate my position on them. When you first look at this device it is deceptive and you would think that it looks like it could hurt. When you investigate how it is worn—

**Ms Pease:** Would you wear one?

**Mrs GERBER:** I put one on my skin and investigated how it is worn. I found that it is a levered device that applies communication to both sides of the neck. It has a larynx plate on the neck so the dog cannot choke. I fitted one to my skin to see what it feels like. It does not penetrate and pierce the skin. It is not a choking device.

A number of submitters also noted the use of prong collars on dogs used by people with a disability. These people made submissions that it is vital to ensure that direct communication is maintained with the dog and them. This includes people who are vision-impaired.

Recently, I had a very informative conversation with a police officer from the Dog Squad. Police officers in the Dog Squad regularly use prong collars not just to train their dogs but to keep a clear line of communication between them and their dog in a crowded, heightened stress situation. The officer told me that because it provides a clear communication method with the dog, it allows the dog to perceive the handler's impulses without the dog being jerked by the chain and without a detrimental impact on the dog. Let us remember that these handlers love their dogs. They would never do anything that would harm them. What they are concerned about with the outright banning of prong collars is it will take away a method of communication with their animals. It makes it better for the handler to communicate with their dog and for the dog to do their job. These are working dogs. They have a role to play in the community which they need to do.

Of the nearly 1,500 submissions, an overwhelming number of dog trainers and pet owners supported the use of prong collars by trained people. Let's get real: these people love their animals; they are not out to be cruel to animals. Australia's top dog trainer, Steve Courtney, has said that the banning of prong collars would result in more dogs being put down and an increase in humans being killed in vicious attacks. Mr Courtney went on to say—

Not one expert trainer experienced in the use of prong collars was consulted in proposing this ban.

Another dog trainer, Catherine Grant, stated that she had had a client come to her after their beloved dog was going to be put down. The use of a prong collar in training that dog to be a safe and better dog saved that dog from being put down. As it stands, this element of the legislation needs to go back to government to be reviewed.

I cannot support the element of the legislation that bans pig poisoning because I stand up for our farmers, agriculture industry and primary producers.