

A Submission regarding the Stop Puppy Farming – proposed Legislation.

By

Mr Graham Pearce

DogsWest member of over 30 years.

Member number – [REDACTED]

I have competed in Obedience, Agility and Conformation showing in that time and was an ANKC (DogsWest) breeder from 1987 until 2008. I have been an executive member on many dog Club committees and my family and I have been involved in education programs for the public, through demonstrations to school groups and for community organisations.

During recent meetings at the DogsWest headquarters attended by DogsWest members, Lisa Baker MLA and representatives of various government departments, Ms Baker said that DogsWest members were the “good guys” and the “gold standard” in the industry (a term that does not sit well with me). DogsWest members, in my opinion are not involved in an industry. As DogsWest members we are bound by rules, regulations and a Code of Ethics that have far reaching implications for the members should they seek to operate outside those parameters. The proposed legislation the “Stop Puppy Farming” seeks to further control the members activities and in some cases to halt them altogether.

There are several points that I feel need addressing in the proposed legislation and I would like to offer my views for consideration before the legislation is set before parliament.

Mandatory dog de-sexing for non-breeding dogs

I think this is a nonsensical notion. As a DogsWest member who competes in conformation showing, my dog must to be entire. These conformation dogs are the future of pure bred dogs. If all dogs that are not owned by registered breeders are desexed then eventually it will mean the demise of all pure-bred dogs. It is from the dogs that are being shown in conformation that breeders can select to produce their litters from health tested and DNA profiled animals, therefore giving the public the best chance of owning a dog fit for purpose.

Just because I own an entire dog does not mean I am going to be breeding and selling puppies, but if this section of the proposed legislation is enacted then I and many other DogsWest members will have to cease their pastime.

The argument that desexing is beneficial to all dogs is arguable as there is plenty of evidence to suggest that it can be disadvantageous in many cases. I know that other DogsWest members have shared such information in their submissions.

With regards to the suggestion that higher registration fee for entire dogs will encourage desexing, the registration fees for entire dogs are already considerably higher than those for desexed dogs so that is moot.

Should this part of the legislation be enacted it should not be retrospective but only apply from the date of the passing of the bill and I believe DogsWest members should be exempt, so we can continue to be the "Gold Standard."

Centralised Registration System

A centralised registration system is not necessary in my opinion. If the problem exists that some councils using different software systems for their pet registration data, the community would be better served with all councils bringing their individual registration systems into line therefore making inquiries between councils to access ownership details of lost dogs easier and more streamlined. A centralised system will be a far more expensive exercise and the also beg the question who is going to set it up and who is going to fund it. It should not be for the public to be funding this proposed register nor should they be expected to fund the enforcement of any part of this proposed legislation as most people are already struggling under the weight of new household fees and charges recently imposed in State budget.

With regards to dog breeders having to pay an annual registration fee to cover the cost of monitoring and enforcing dog breeder compliance, ANKC registered breeders already pay a fee of \$200 to apply for a Prefix and an annual fee of \$60 to be an ANKC registered breeder and are covered by the Code of Ethics and Consumer law. This is on top of our general membership fee. I believe the ANKC registered breeder is well covered when it comes to fees. DogsWest breeder members should be exempt from any further fees. Anyone else, who wishes to breed and sell puppies should pay fees commensurate with those paid by DogsWest registered breeders and undergo the same sort of testing and training that ANKC breeders must undertake before being granted leave to apply to be registered as breeder.

With regards to a requirement for the owners of entire dogs having to register as breeders, I believe that non-breeder DogsWest members should be exempt unless they want to sell puppies.

ANKC registered breeder members of DogsWest should be exempt from being forced to hold dual breeder registrations. Their DogsWest member number should act as their breeder number when they sell puppies.

The proposal to have owners of entire dogs register as breeders with their local councils is problematic and will, in my opinion, only legitimise breeding of cross-bred and non-health screened dogs. It could have the effect of increasing the prevalence of puppy farming under the guise of the legality that the proposed breeder register would provide.

Do you think local government is best placed to enforce dog breeder registration?

If there is to be a breeder register set up for non DogsWest breeders, further staffing levels and funding from the government would be required, as most local ranger services do not just deal with pet issues and are currently underfunded and understaffed.

Should this breeder register come to law then only those, non DogsWest members who wish to breed, and who undertake the same sort of testing etc that DogsWest breeders must undertake should be referred to an independent panel of industry experts (breed and breeding specialists) and veterinarians who decide which breeders and which animals are to be registered.

All dog breeders should have to comply with best practice standards for the welfare of the animals in their care but especially those who wish to breed for commercial gain. Those potential commercial breeders would be tempted to cut corners so as not to eat into their property margins and therefore should be subjected to mandatory random inspections of their premises to ensure that high standards are met on an ongoing basis. Numbers of breeding animals, breeding ages and litter restrictions should be determined by the panel of experts on a case by case basis.

Pet shops should not be able to sell animals at all, so the argument of transitioning them to adoption centres will not work. The majority of pet shop owners have little or no knowledge of animal husbandry or best practice animal welfare so are ill equipped to advise people about the puppies they sell.

The practice of large numbers of puppies being transported the WA from the east, to stock pet shops, needs to be addressed. If it is not possible to legislate the transportation of these then legislate minimum requirements for said transport, for example only each puppy must have their own crate and all must be individually assessed and certified fit to travel by an independent vet. This would stop all but the most determined operator from continuing this practice.

In closing, none of the measures set out in the proposed legislation are going to stop puppy farming but will drive it further underground. So far, the measures proposed are only targeting the “good guys” and the “gold standard” as Lisa Baker MLA calls DogsWest members. We are already doing the right thing and should be being applauded not targeted because we are the visible minority. I repeat DogsWest members should be exempt from these measures set out in the proposed legislation.