

To Whom It May Concern,

As the owner and operator of a small independent family-owned pet store I would like to express my concern regarding the proposed changes that have been outlined in the “Stop Puppy Farming” consultation papers. I am writing this from an informed position, having been involved directly in the pet industry for 9 years, during which time we have had puppies in store, as well as being an adoption centre for rescue kittens and cats.

To begin with, the proposed changes will not actually stop puppy farming or puppy farm puppies from coming into Western Australia. In his remarks in the consultation paper, the Minister for Local Government, David Templeman acknowledges that we do not have puppy farming to the same extent as the Eastern States. I believe that it is fair to say that the proposed legislative changes are trying to solve a problem that does not really exist here.

The treatment and welfare of dogs is already covered under the Dog Act 1976 and the Animal Welfare Act 2002, which provide ample avenues for the appropriate governmental agencies to stop people who are abusing and mistreating their dogs. This includes those that breed in inappropriate conditions and with too many dogs.

The issue with puppy farm puppies in WA largely lies with the importation of puppies from other states, predominantly from New South Wales and Victoria. There are many responsible breeders in those states, and they can be legitimate sources of well-bred dogs. They also are home to many puppy farms as well as large commercial breeding organisations. To stop puppy farm puppies from coming into WA, the focus of any changes in legislation should be to restrict and or limit the transport of puppies across country. The pet shops that source their puppies from these types of places would not do so if the puppies were older when they got them, as it would reduce their commercial opportunity. Currently puppies can be flown at 8 weeks of age. If this was to change to 10 weeks, or 12 weeks, pet shops would be less inclined to get them, as they would have less time to sell them before they get older and therefore less attractive to customers at full price. I believe this small change would solve the majority of puppy farming-related issues in WA instantly, whilst still allowing people who want to get their own dog independently from inter-state the opportunity to do so. A 10 or 12 week puppy for a family or individual is perfectly fine, just not for a pet shop or other re-seller.

This proposed legislation specifically targets pet stores, which are legal businesses that operate under consumer law and pay taxes. The legislation does not stop the sale of puppies in newspapers, on-line or other sources. It proposes to stop one of the best places that people can go to to see a variety of puppies and get information and education of the various breeds and cross-breeds. A good pet store, one that gets puppies from ethical breeders that love and look after their dogs, essentially does the leg-work for people looking for a puppy. They build relationships with breeders, and know the difference between a good breeder and a bad breeder. Many good breeders live outside of the Perth metropolitan area, so having the pups from these breeder accessible in a pet store enables people to see and meet them, and then be able to go home and think about whether it is the right puppy for them. If they had driven 4 or 5 hours to see the puppy, they are much more likely to get it as they have invested that time in driving there. To go home and think about it, then return once or twice more, becomes a very time intensive process and one that many people would not undertake. At a local pet store this is not such an issue, as they visit as many times as they like

and ensure that when they get a puppy it is not influenced by things such as driving distances or time.

Pet stores also ensure that their puppies have been health checked by a vet. This way the customer can be better informed on the health of the puppy, and make an informed decision based on this as to whether they will get the puppy. This is not generally the case when buying privately and exposes the puppy purchaser to dogs of uncertain health.

Pet stores are businesses and therefore customers are protected under state and federal consumer laws. These rights do not apply if someone purchases a puppy privately, exposing them to having no recourse in the event that the puppy turns out not to be healthy, or if the puppy does not get delivered at all if purchased on-line. A pet store is a physical place where people can view the puppies before purchasing them, providing them time to make up their mind as to whether the puppy they are looking at is what they expect it to be. In the event that they are unhappy with the health of the puppy, they can return to the pet store to discuss a solution, and can escalate the issue to consumer protection for resolution if required. This process does not exist for privately sold puppies, exposing the purchaser to potentially unhealthy puppies and large vet bills.

Mandatory de-sexing of dogs will severely limit home breeders, those breeders that love their dogs and love breeding occasional litters of puppies. These puppies tend to be the cross-breeds that are most desirable by people looking for a family pet. They also increase the genetic diversity of the canine population, as breeding isn't restricted to a relatively small number of pedigree breeders, or the population of dogs in Eastern States puppy farms and commercial breeders. Home bred puppies are usually raised in the home, and given lots of attention, warmth and love in their formative days. Often they are around children from a young age, and therefore much more ready to go to new homes when they reach the appropriate age and development. This is not the case from other breeders, the puppies are not exposed to the inside of homes and/or children and therefore can take much longer, and with more anxieties, to transition to new homes.

Mandatory de-sexing will also only stop people who do the right thing and follow the law, it will not stop backyard breeding (breeding in houses solely for profit) and puppy farming. The reduction in well-bred dogs will drive a huge increase in the price for dogs, making it attractive to these types of people to continue to breed underground and on the black-market. Again, this will only fuel puppy farming and bad breeding, not reduce or stop it.

Making it more difficult for people to get the breed of puppy that they want will reduce dog ownership, and diminish a key element of community; people out exercising and walking their dogs. This is a great way to meet neighbours and build relationships whilst also getting a bit of exercise for the owner. Having a pet is also an important step in teaching children responsibilities.

The breeds and cross-breeds that are most sought-after are not found in shelters, so it is impractical to think that transitioning pet stores to become adoption centres will mean that families will take on rescue dogs. As of the 13th June 2018, only 18 small breed dogs were available in WA for adoption via rescue organisations (source: petrescue.com.au, 3:30 PM on 13/06/2018) and none of these were puppies. This strongly refutes any argument that pet stores are a significant cause of dogs ending up in shelters. People already have the choice to get a rescue dog. They should continue to have the choice of going to a pet store to get a dog.

A ban on Pet Stores sourcing puppies from responsible breeders is not the solution to stopping puppy farming. In my opinion it would actually have the opposite effect, in that people would be more inclined to get a puppy from the internet, which further removes them from direct

communication with the breeder. A good pet shop should be in direct contact with the breeder of their puppies, and therefore any question or issue that a customer has can be easily communicated back and forth, with the pet shop acting as the intermediary. This would become much harder when only dealing with a website.

Pet stores have the ability, and my store does, refuse to sell to people that they do not believe can look after the puppy properly or if the breed that the customer wants to get does not fit into their lifestyle or accommodation. This is particularly important for larger breed dogs. Getting a puppy online does not provide that safeguard, and anyone can order almost any breed of dog within minutes, without having spoken with a single person or having actually seen the puppy. This is not a better solution than people coming into a pet store for advice and assistance when trying to decide what dog is best for them and their circumstances.

The "Stop Puppy Farming" consultation paper does not clearly define what a puppy farm is, what a backyard breeder is and how they differ from home breeders and other types of breeders. It is relying on an emotional plea to push through changes to the pet industry and dog ownership that are actually largely unrelated to puppy farms.

Should we stop puppy farming in WA and puppy farm puppies coming into WA?

Absolutely.

In the 9 years that I have owned a pet shop, we have campaigned for this and have always tried to educate people who come into our store on puppy farms, encouraging them to ask more questions as to where the puppies have come from and the conditions in which the parents live. But the "Stop Puppy Farming" proposal goes much further, impinging on people's right to make decisions – especially in where they choose to get their puppy from and also whether they want to sterilize their dog.

Reducing the number of dogs in rescue shelters is an admirable goal, but reducing or stopping the breeding of small-breed, non-shedding puppies will not help achieve this. People have the option now to get a rescue dog and choose, for a variety of reasons, not to. Rescue dogs are often of medium to large size and of unknown breeding. These are the types of dogs that should be focused on to reduce the number of unwanted puppies. Puppy farms and unsanitary backyard breeders should be focused on to stop them from abusing dogs and putting them through too many pregnancies.

Responsible breeders, including home breeders, should be able to continue to breed their dogs and provide the types of puppies that the majority of people are wanting. Pet stores should be regulated as to where they source their puppies, but should be able to continue to provide well-bred puppies for rehoming and essential advice to customers to ensure that they go into dog ownership as informed as possible. This would help to stop puppy farming in WA.

Regards

Michelle Juan

Owner of Select Pets

