



Old English Sheepdog Club of Western Australia (Inc)

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Stop Puppy Farming
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Submission By Old English Sheepdog Club Of Western Australia Stop Puppy Farming Project

The Old English Sheepdog Club of WA was established in 1974. The Club currently has 65 financial members.

The Old English Sheepdog Club of Western Australia is a breed club dedicated to the health, welfare and promotion of the Old English Sheepdog breed. We are affiliates of the Canine Association of Western Australia Inc (DogsWest) and the Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC). Our members include ANKC - registered breeders and owners of registered Old English Sheepdogs, breed fanciers, trainers, behaviourists, health care/ veterinary professionals and pet owners.

The Old English Sheepdog is a large breed of dog developed in England from early herding dogs. The dogs temperament is sociable, playful, bubbly, adaptable, intelligent and loving; a wonderful family member. It is well known for its association with the Dulux paint brand and in TV and movie roles in *The Shaggy Dog*, *Peter Pan*, *The Shaggy DA*, *101 Dalmations*, *The Little Mermaid* and Paul McCartney's beloved Old English Sheepdog Martha.

The aims and objectives of the Old English Sheepdog Club of WA is

- Promotion and welfare of the breed.
- To promote the enjoyment of the breed through showing and working with the breed.
- To encourage responsible breeding.
- To assist those Old English Sheepdogs in need of welfare.
- To educate owners to care for their Old English Sheepdog.
- To promote social interaction of members of the Club.

According to the UK Kennel Club Breed Record, the Old English Sheepdog is currently listed as a vulnerable breed and was on the endangered list in 2013. In Western Australia, the total number of litters registered within the last 24 months was 3 litters with a total of 14 puppies. At present, the number of Old English Sheepdog Club registered breeders is 6. These dogs are small in number and not bred very often.

Our ANKC-registered breeders are accountable for the health, parentage, breeding environment and registration of the puppies they produce, and there are a variety of mechanisms to ensure that accountability. They are bound by a comprehensive constitution that includes a Code of Conduct and agree to a Code of Ethics. These codes are enforceable by Dogs West.

All our breeders are members of Dogs West and must register all progeny whether pets or kept for breeding stock. Specific health testing of prospective breeding dogs prior to mating is strongly encouraged. They must provide comprehensive information to each puppy buyer for the care, welfare, appropriate housing, training and socialisation of every puppy sold. As members of our State controlling body it is compulsory that all breeders must register all puppies born, and it is also compulsory for each puppy to be microchipped prior to going to their new homes. The breeder is also responsible for the transfer of the microchip into the new owner's name.

In our Code of Ethics, the Club encourages and recommends Hip scoring, Elbow scoring, PRA (progressive retinol atrophy) testing, Bayer test for hearing, EIC (Exercise Induced Collapse Syndrome) testing.

The Club provides assistance to rehome any Old English Sheepdogs. This is in addition to our dedicated responsible breeders who, as a matter of policy (the Club has a Welfare Policy) will encourage all puppy owners to contact them in the first instance if they require assistance.

Many Dogs West members and Affiliated Clubs use their breed experience and expertise which makes them ideal for providing rescue services and some rescues have waiting lists of people who are looking for an older or second dog. This rescue/rehoming service is provided free of charge for any Old English Sheepdogs who are unable to be returned to the breeder for various reasons and where the breeder is unable to accommodate the return of the dog(s).

The Old English Sheepdog Club and members offer breed specific advice and rescue to our breed and should be accredited under any scheme as we operate within the Regulations and Code of Ethics of Dogs West.

Mandatory Desexing

We strongly oppose the mandatory sterilisation of our breed, at any age, except where required for medical reasons because of the wealth of scientific and anecdotal evidence which shows, permanent desexing has adverse consequences for dogs. These adverse consequences are outlined below:

- In the Old English Sheepdog breed, desexing prior to maturity (which is at the age of 3 years) has been shown to have adverse health outcomes for joints. This results in abnormal bone development for hips and elbows leading to dogs suffering prematurely from arthritis and significantly increasing the risk of damage and tearing of cruciate ligaments requiring costly surgery and difficult and painful rehabilitation. Furthermore, our breeders have advised that through experience, they have observed that desexing prior to maturity has resulted in disproportionate growth patterns leading to uncharacteristic structure, shape and gait which is contrary to the breed standard.
- Scientific research shows that male dogs that are permanently desexed at a young age are likely to develop increased fear aggression and anxiety later in life, increasing the risk that they will become unmanageable as family pets and be dumped in rescues and/or euthanized.
- Desexing at any age increases the risk of urinary incontinence in both dogs and bitches and the need to medicate dogs for the rest of their lives to manage this problem. This we believe also contributes to the large number of dogs dumped.
- Reduced lifespan of dogs which have been permanently desexed. The Government states that permanent desexing will increase a dog's longevity, but the scientific evidence does not support this position at all, and in fact shows their longevity is reduced,

- Increased risk of cancer in dogs that have been permanently desexed, particularly in bitches. The Government states that permanent desexing will improve the health of dogs, but this is not supported by the scientific evidence.

Certain medical conditions in the dog only develop or become apparent with age. Mandatory desexing will remove from the gene pool healthy dogs free of such conditions; which in a small state such as Western Australia is disastrous for our ANKC registered breeders' ongoing pursuit of the eradication of such medical conditions via breeding to free dogs of such conditions and traits.

The Old English Sheepdog is at extreme risk of becoming extinct in Western Australia. Mandatory desexing will further reduce the already limited gene pool.

Currently demand outstrips supply for the Old English Sheepdog, with waitlists of up to 3 years for a puppy.

We are also aware that all the surgical methods of desexing bitches have some downsides, and so many members do not want to desex their bitches once they are no longer at their peak for breeding and showing.

As experienced dog owners know there are many dogs which could be at risk by having to undergo surgery for desexing. These would be aged dogs and dogs with heart conditions.

We understand that there are various non – surgical methods of temporarily or permanently sterilising dogs, but these are not fully tested to date to ensure they are effective, and there are no downsides to them.

Conformation showing is principally based on exhibiting entire dogs/bitches from young pups through to fully mature adults and veterans. This is to ascertain the best candidates for breeding and selecting good specimens to further the future of the breed. Mandatory desexing will destroy our sport in Western Australia and throughout Australia and we will lose many dogs which would have made an invaluable contribution to the gene pool of the breed.

Our pure breed is the product of generations of selective breeding to produce a dog /bitch that conforms to a standard. We know how big the dog will grow, the personality of the dog, the colour and the type of coat. When a person buys an Old English Sheepdog they expect to buy a dog which meets this standard and know it will fit in with their lifestyle. While some people prefer a cross bred dog, many others love their pure bred Old English Sheepdog for their consistent temperament, character, size and conformation. In a small State such as Western Australia, mandatory desexing will result in far fewer pure breed dogs being available which we feel is to the detriment of our dog-loving community. We know of many people who have grown up with an Old English Sheepdog and then want to buy one when they have families of their own. We want this to be possible in the future.

Some of our members already have contracts with people they sell dogs to as pets for the sterilization of their pets at an age that is appropriate. With the Old English Sheepdog this is when the dog has reached maturity, normally 3 years of age.

We believe that education and incentives are the most effective approach to preventing indiscriminate breeding of dogs, not mandatory desexing of all dogs.

We wholeheartedly believe that the breeder, owner and veterinarian should collaboratively consider whether desexing dogs is in the best interest of the dog, and state again that we are strongly opposed to mandatory desexing of dogs.

Mandatory Desexing – Breeder's terms

When Old English Sheepdogs are bred and the owner is unable to keep the dogs (as most of our breeders live in suburbia and are limited to the number of dogs they are allowed to keep on their property) they would

like to keep in their breeding lines the dogs are sold on breeders terms. This allows the owner to enjoy the dog as a member of their home and gives the breeder access to breed from these dogs. These dogs and their owners form a wider part of the Dogs West Community and are crucial for our breed in maintaining a wide gene pool to ensure the breeding of healthy pure bred Old English Sheepdogs.

These Old English Sheepdogs live in loving homes and give their ANKC registered breeder the opportunity to use the dogs in their breeding program, they should be exempt from mandatory desexing.

Restrictions under the WA Dog Act make it very difficult for many Dogs West breeders to maintain a breeding program, without the ability to have dogs in their wider community.

Some of our members have dogs are also shown from that wider community, with the dog living in a companion home, but shown by the breeder of the dog. They must be exempt also.

Registering owners of entire dogs as a ‘Registered Breeder’ with their Local Government

As ANKC registered breeders our members are required to meet the highest standards in breeding and raising dogs, to ensure we raise healthy, well-adjusted pure-breed Old English Sheepdog pups. Puppies are bred for a variety of purposes, mainly as a family pet meeting the standards set by our breed standard. The breed standard outlines the characteristics, temperament and appearance of the Old English Sheepdog. The standards protect our breed from extinction and enable the Western Australian dog-loving community to take part in our wonderful conformation and other dog sports.

Our concern is that you are lumping all breeders in together, regardless of what they breed and how. Dogs West has set the bar high when it comes to the breeding of pure breed Old English Sheepdogs – and we must be on the Dogs West / ANKC Register. Why should Old English Sheepdog breeders have to be on another breeder register when we already comply with the rules and regulations of Dogs West and pay to remain members.

As ANKC registered breeders we follow the strict standards set out by the ANKC and Dogs West. These standards are enforced by Dogs West. You are going to give the title of “breeder” to an owner of an unsterilized cross bred dog who may breed without any of the stringent conditions we as registered ANKC breeders are required to follow. Who and how are you going to police these ‘breeders’.

We believe that as ANKC registered owners, breeders and Dogs West Members, having to be on another breeder register is superfluous and has additional cost implications.

The Old English Sheepdog Club strongly believes we should be exempt from this breed register requirement as proposed and we urge the State Government to EXEMPT Dogs West Members and ANKC Registered Breeders from the requirement of also being registered by their Local Government as registered breeders.

This is double red tape, an administrative nightmare for the Local Government, more costs for no benefit, and we cannot see any useful purpose in this proposal.

Importantly, by giving a non ANKC and Dogs West member the title of “breeder” through this proposed register, you are encouraging unregulated breeding which counteracts your aim of stopping puppy farming.

Transitioning of pet shops to adoption centres sourcing dogs only from accredited rescue organisations and shelters

Our Club and members strongly believe that pet shops should be legally barred from keeping and selling any puppies and dogs; and from acting as an intermediary in the sale and purchase of puppies and dogs.

Reasons for this include;

- A shop is not a good environment in which to keep dogs until they are sold; and is not a good environment in which to sell pups and young dogs,
- It encourages impulse buying with little or no research on the part of the purchaser. We are not confident that pet shops have capacity to inform and educate purchasers to help ensure that puppies purchased do not end up abandoned or surrendered due to buyer ignorance about being a companion pet owner.
- Pet shops are not conducive to providing quality after sales service whereas ANKC/Dogs West Members will give 24/7 support for life of the dog.
- Dogs which find themselves in a rescue or shelter facility have arrived there because of being neglected, abused, traumatised, lost or because their owners can no longer care for them. All these dogs have and will continue to experience extreme stress and anxiety with many also suffering ongoing medical problems. Transitioning pet shops to sell only rescue dogs is a recipe for disaster.
- Pet shops will continue to be driven by the commercial dollar resulting in disregard for matching dog to owner.

Submission Conclusion

The proposal for mandatory desexing has dire implications for the future Old English Sheepdogs in this state. We oppose this in the highest degree.

The proposal for 'registering' breeders on a local government register is not cost effective, has governance complications and is effectively contradicting what the Government is seeking to achieve in "Stopping Puppy Farming".

It is our opinion that Dogs West members should be automatically approved as a breeder on any central register and retain the same registration number they currently hold with Dogs West. These members abide by a stricter Code of Conduct than that which is proposed by the Government.

The Old English Sheepdog Club of Western Australia respectfully requests the State Government take experienced advice from Dogs West and its affiliated Clubs with respect to this proposed legislation.

Project Consultation

Whilst the government has actively promoted the project and sought professional advice from existing, well governed and regulated bodies such as Dogs West, we have concerns that should the Minister determine legislation be drafted to meet the project aims, then that legislation in its specific form should be consulted further before being tabled in Parliament.

Yours sincerely

Helen Boudewyns

Secretary

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