

Cat and Dog statutory review
Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
PO Box 8349
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

Via email: catanddogreview@dlgsc.wa.gov.au

4 August 2019

Dear Review Team,

SUBMISSION RE CAT AND DOG STATUTORY REVIEW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission. I comment on the areas raised as follows.

1. Greyhounds

I support the removal of s33(1) of the *Dog Act 1976* that requires greyhounds to be muzzled in public. I am a greyhound owner myself and an active advocate for greyhound welfare in the community. To single out this breed out of all dog breeds for no good reason - and there is NO good evidence based reason - for what equates to 'that's what we've always done' is nonsensical.

These provisions do not effectively serve the public interest and negatively affect pet greyhounds and their owners because they:

- unreasonably discriminate against greyhounds as a breed rather than focusing on individual dog behaviour;
- are not based on scientific evidence, incident statistics or good practice risk management;
- have the effect of promoting a false stereotype of pet greyhounds and causing unnecessary fear in the community, while fostering a false sense of security concerning other breeds;
- discourage members of the public from adopting greyhounds exiting the industry at a young age, which in turn leads to a high "wastage" rate;
- adversely affect the quality of life of pet greyhounds and inhibit normal canine socialisation, reward-based training and exercise opportunities;
- mislead the public both as to the nature of greyhounds and the effectiveness of the measures claimed to address the purported risk;
- do not adequately incentivise the industry to ensure that all greyhounds used in the racing industry are suitably re-homed, and
- unnecessarily hinder the efforts of concerned community groups in improving the re-homing rates of greyhounds discarded by the industry.

Since the writing of the Act over 40 years ago, when greyhounds were in the vast majority only known as racing animals, greyhounds have become well known as a household pet. Currently, approximately 2,600 greyhounds are believed to live as registered pets in Western Australia. Almost all of these are ex-racing-industry dogs, although a significant number were "retired" without ever having raced.

Western Australia is now one of only four known jurisdictions (along with South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Ireland) that require greyhounds to be muzzled in public purely on the basis of breed. When announcing the removal of the law in Victoria, Minister for Agriculture, Jaala Pulford said, "I think the time has come. The evidence tells us that these are not dangerous dogs."

A dog of any breed or size may, under certain circumstances, show aggression, chase, attack or bite people or other animals. There is no evidence that greyhounds are inherently more prone to such behaviour than any other breed kept by responsible owners, or that any disposition to do so is a result of unalterable genetics rather than an outcome of poor training and human attitudes, including severely provocative behaviour.

In addition to the compulsory muzzle laws the *Dog Act 1976* also contains provisions that require greyhounds to remain on lead in public, even in designated dog off lead areas. These requirements are more than sufficient to ensure a greyhound is kept under the control of its owner.

Shortfalls in current exemptions

s33(1)b of the *Dog Act 1976* allows for a greyhounds to go muzzle free if it has completed a "Prescribed Training Programme".

Only the industry body (Racing and Wagering WA operating through its Greyhound as Pets Program (GAP)) is permitted to issue "Green Collars". There is no public information about what "training" is actually provided and the "Green Collar" is fundamentally not a training program but merely a temperament assessment .

Should the owner of a greyhound obtained from a rescue organisation other than GAP wish to have their dog exempted from the muzzle requirements, the GAP methodology is to take a dog that may only recently have found a family home, place it back in a kennel environment away from its new-found family for four days and then "assess" it at a point in time in the absence of any familiar person. This is a stress-test not imposed on any other breed of dog. The owner is charged \$175 for the assessment, which does not include any training to prepare the dog (or even advice to the owner on training to prepare their dog).

The assessment provides no indication of how the dog may behave in home environment. Because it is a point-in-time assessment rather than a training program, it doesn't address the potential for changes in a dog's behaviour after the assessment. Community based rescue groups often take on greyhounds that have 'failed' the Green Collar assessment yet go on to live happily in homes with other small animals.

There are estimated to be up to 1,000 greyhounds annually that become surplus to the requirements of the greyhound racing industry in Western Australia. Almost all of these are five years old or younger. These beautiful, gentle and sociable dogs should be able to spend the rest of their lives as a family's loved and loving pet without unfair and unnecessary restrictions placed on them.

I am aware that removal of the compulsory muzzling requirement is supported by the RSPCA, the Australian Veterinary Association, Racing and Wagering WA, all other community-based greyhound rehoming organisations and by the owners and foster carers of pet greyhounds in WA.

2. Registration of cats and dogs

I support lifetime registrations on both cats and dogs as a cost effective and efficient way for the pet owners to maintain their pets registration.

I recognise the disadvantages of the system but suggest they can be addressed through other methods, such as an annual online review and confirmation of details. It may also be addressed through a centralised database rather than each local council keeping their own databases.

3. Collars and tags

I support the wearing of collars and tags on both cats and dogs. I have often found escaped dogs wandering the streets around my house and a collar and tag allows for a speedy reunification between pet and a generally quite distressed owner. This can often avoid time and bureaucracy of processing lost pets through the impound system.

4. Microchipping cats and dogs

I support the compulsory microchipping of both dogs and cats. Whilst there are issues should the owner not register them or move and not update their details they are by far the best way of reuniting lost pets with their owners. The benefits far outweigh the minimal cost to do this.

5. Nuisance dogs

There are no nuisance dogs, only nuisance owners.

Dogs bark excessively for a multitude of reasons but boredom is a key reason, especially in suburbia. Whilst fines have their places, strategies that encourage dog owners to be active and give their dogs opportunities for enrichment every day can also help. "Nuisance" dogs can often end up being dogs that suffer abuse and neglect when early intervention can assist both dog and owner.

Opening of up Perth generally to be more dog friendly would also assist this – for example in Melbourne, and cities all over the world, dogs can travel on public transport which makes bringing a dog along on a family outgoing much easier. Being able to travel with my dog on trains in Perth would make me drive much less (good for the environment) and be able to bring her to events with me more often.

6. Dog attacks, dangerous dogs and restricted breed dogs

There is evidence to suggest that laws that act to increase the responsibility of dog owners makes the community safer and I support legislation that does this.

Breed specific legislation does not do this and I refer to my arguments above in relation to compulsory greyhound muzzling in this regard.

Rangers enforcing ineffective laws such as the greyhound muzzling laws and the restricted breed dogs is not an efficient use of their time. This would be much better spent enforcing effective laws that encourage responsible dog ownership.

7. Assistance dogs

I support amendments law to open up the type of assistance dogs to access public spaces and having approved handlers for a variety of assistance dogs. There is wide recognition of the benefits dogs can bring to the community and they are often found in places such as schools or courts where people can be in high stress situations.

8. Cat numbers and nuisance/wandering cats

The Cat Act would be very effective at addressing cat numbers and wandering cats were it actually being enforced. I am not in a position to comment as to why it is not being enforced but I strongly support any strategies that would make this happen.

I am a responsible cat owner. My cats are all registered and remain contained on my property at all times with no access to birds or native wildlife. But I would do this even if it were not the law and at the moment it appears only cat owners like me abide by the laws.

I am a member of Cat Haven and recommend you follow their advice in relation to cat matters.

9. Cat sterilisation

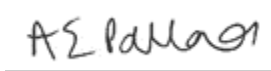
I support cat sterilisation at an age earlier than 6 months. A cat can already have had their first litter by 6 month old. I have fostered many cats who have been sterilised at an earlier age, related to their weight not their age, with no ill consequence.

We already have too many cats in this country and they suffer immensely because of humans. We don't need any more unwanted cats in Perth due to early age litters.

10. Combining the Cat and Dog Acts

Administratively, the combination of the Acts seems logical. The time it will take to draft a combined Act though should not delay any immediate changes that can be made in these two existing acts, namely the end of the compulsory greyhound muzzle laws.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Pollard', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Andrea Pollard