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Department of Local Government, Sport & Cultural Industries

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To whom it may concern

I have been working in local government for a number of years, commencing as a Ranger for the Shire of Coorow in 2006 and then moving on to the Northern Territory, working as the Animal Management Supervisor for the City of Darwin and Regulatory Services Manager for the Litchfield Council. Until recently, I held a position on the committee of the Australian Institute of Animal Management and I am now back in Western Australia, employed as the Coordinator of Ranger Services for the Shire of Augusta Margaret River. I am passionate about animal management in Australia and would like to see some consistency in the way that domestic animals are managed at not only a State/Territory level, but also Australia wide.

Having no domestic animal management legislation in place in the Northern Territory meant that local governments had to rely solely on their By-laws to manage the domestic animals within their jurisdiction. I was responsible for the development and implementation of new dog management by-laws at Litchfield Council, which included the introduction of dog registration. Throughout this lengthy process of providing drafting instructions, meetings, public and stakeholder consultation, together with my years of industry experience, I have gained a thorough insight and understanding of domestic animal management legislation.

Returning to WA and in re-visiting the Dog Act and familiarising myself with the Cat Act, my initial thoughts, regarding the Dog Act in particular, were that it seemed outdated and overly complex in comparison to legislation in other states. Needless to say, I am very happy that this review is happening and that I have the opportunity to be involved by providing some feedback. Please find below my thoughts, recommendations and other relevant information for your consideration.

Dog & Cat Management Act

I strongly believe that Western Australia should move into line with the other States and Territories and combine the Cat Act and the Dog Act to form a Dog and Cat Management Act. It would be great to see all states following South Australia's lead and implementing a Dog and Cat Management Board (DCMB) to sit between the Local Governments and the DLGSC, who are responsible for ensuring that the LGs are administering the Dog and Cat Management Act appropriately. While I was on the AIAM committee we were developing a proposal for all state and territory governments to implement a dog and cat management board modelled on South Australia's system to improve the way that domestic animals are managed and to facilitate more consistency across local governments in each state.

Dog and Cat Registration

I recommend removing the lifetime registration option for cats and dogs. Although, many pet owners prefer this 'pay once and forget' option, the annual or 3 yearly renewal is an opportunity for local governments to 'check in' with pet owners to provide information and/or for pet owners to update details etc. Lifetime registration tends to result in outdated registers with thousands of pets that no longer reside in the district or that have died. Notifying council that you have moved or that your pet has died is not high on the list of priorities for most people.

Registration should be required from 3 months of age for both cats and dogs. My recommendation is that the first year of registration for a pup or kitten under the age of 6 months be free, or at the rate for a sterilised dog or cat, with the requirement for the owner to provide the sterilisation certificate when renewing the following year. This would encourage more pet owners to register their new pet

without having to wait until they are sterilised, which some vets believe should not be done until 6 months of age.

Registration categories, fees and concessions should be able to be determined by council. If the registration fees are to remain as they are, prescribed in the regulations, I recommend increasing the fee for unsterilised dogs to encourage people to sterilise them. This, of course, is only relevant until de-sexing of dogs (apart from registered breeders) becomes mandatory, which I am anticipating will occur in the future as it has in several other states already. If fees were set by Council this would allow an increase annually in line with the CPI.

I note that the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 in Queensland includes the following requirement: *Section 52 - Registration fee must be fixed to give desexing incentive.*

Collars and Tags

I recommend replacing the plastic registration tags with metal disc tags. This would provide the option of further engraving to be added (ie pet's name/phone number) to the reverse of the tag and would be less of an impact on the environment. Registration tags are the easiest way for Rangers to reunite pets with their owners as microchip scanning requires searching the microchip registers and information kept here is not often up to date. I believe that people would be more likely to utilise this type of tag, and the requirement for dogs and cats to wear a collar with their tag attached when in a public place should remain in the legislation.

Microchipping

As with my recommendation for registration, both dogs and cats should be required to be microchipped from 3 months of age. My recommendation is that Western Australia implement the Dogs and Cats Online (DACO) system as they have done in South Australia. This provides one database of all cats and dogs in South Australia that is accessible by all councils, officers, vets, pet owners and other relevant animal management bodies. I can provide further information about DACO but as there was a brief reference to a 'centralised registration system' in the review paper, I'm sure it is something that is already under consideration for the future. Not too distant I hope.

Dog Attacks, Dangerous Dogs & Restricted Breed Dogs

I recommend the inclusion of 2 levels of dog attack (ie Level 1 Dog Attack and Level 2 Dog Attack or Dog Attack and Dog Menace) to provide distinction for officers when investigating an incident. This also provides officers with the ability to distinguish between and take appropriate enforcement action more relevant to the level of severity of an incident. The penalty for a Level 1 Dog Attack should be significantly higher than that of a Level 2 Attack. This would also allow for more accurate data on the types of attacks that are occurring, separating the more severe attacks to provide a better indication of what is actually happening.

Increasing penalties is not going to decrease the number of serious dog attacks that occur. Educating people, especially children, about basic dog behavior and recognising warning signs in dogs is a more effective way of reducing the impact of dog bite incidents in the future.

Results from recent research regarding dog bite incidents, which was conducted in Calgary over a 5 year period, indicates that the majority of serious attacks tend to happen at home, with children and the elderly being the most common victims. The research also shows that breed specific legislation has no effect on the number of dog attacks.

A link to the research paper is here <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/9/6/324> and I highly recommend considering these findings in any legislative amendments around Dangerous Dogs and Dog Attacks.

Greyhounds

Greyhounds should not be required to wear a muzzle unless they have been declared dangerous, but they should be on lead when in public, including dog exercise areas.

32 Control of dogs in exercise areas and rural areas

I recommend removing 'rural areas' from section 32 of the Dog Act as all dogs should remain on leash in public areas that are not designated exercise areas. This would also remove the requirement for 31(3B), rural leashing area. In regional areas of WA there are many councils where rural areas are close to the defined 'townsite' where dog owners are currently permitted to have their dogs off leash. I am curious as to the intent of including this provision for rural areas.

Control of Dogs Part VI Division 1

This part could be simplified by combining a number of sections. Dog at Large is an offence that could be applied to the following sections of the Dog Act 1976, in lieu of having a different offence for all:

31 (1)32 (1)

33A (1)

South Australia's Dog and Cat Management Act has the offence 'Dog not to be allowed to wander at large' which is defined as follows:

For the purposes of this Act, a dog will be taken to be wandering at large while—

(a) the dog is in a public place (other than a park) or a private place without the consent of the occupier, and no person is exercising effective control of the dog by means of physical restraint; or

(b) the dog is in a park and no person is exercising effective control of the dog either—

(i) by means of physical restraint; or

(ii) by command, the dog being in close proximity to the person and the person being able to see the dog at all times.

However a dog will not be taken to be wandering at large while—

(a) the dog is being used in the droving or tending of stock or is going to or returning from a place where it will be, or has been, so used; or

(b) the dog is being trained for, or participating in, an organised activity being a race, trial, class or show or in retrieving, hunting or other sporting exercise customarily involving the running of one or more dogs; or

(c) the dog is in a vehicle.

Cat numbers and nuisance/wandering cats

There needs to be provision for Councils to have local laws around confinement of cats to the properties where they are kept and/or implementation of curfews to prevent cats from being permitted to roam at night. The current Cat Act prevents or at least restricts the ability of local governments to implement control measures such as these through their local laws.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission and if you would like further information or clarification of any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED]

Kind regards



Sharon McTaggart