

Consultation on Puppy Farming in Queensland

Queensland Government Consultation

Submission from the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd



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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 8500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

The Australian Veterinary Association shares the community's concern about inhumane practices in dog breeding establishments. Breeding dogs suffer unnecessarily when not properly cared for, and their puppies have much lower chance of having a happy and healthy life as a family pet. They are likely to have both health and behavioural problems that are costly to fix, or lead to the dog being surrendered or euthanased. It is both an animal welfare and consumer protection issue.

There are a number of increased regulatory measures that would improve the standard of animal welfare in Queensland. An important one is a **compulsory Code of Practice** that is enforceable through the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*. The Code of Practice needs to be flexible and outcome based rather than input based. For example, defining cage sizes is difficult to get right due to the different temperament and sizes of dogs. It would be more practical to define the behaviours that a dog needs to express when homed.

Unfortunately, even with a very good Code of Practice, the problem is with detecting, enforcing and prosecuting those who don't follow the Code. More resources are needed for these activities, along with **education** for those breeders who may need to bring their operations up to the required standard required.

Good and bad animal welfare practices are possible in all sizes of breeding operations. Just because the business is large, doesn't necessarily mean that welfare isn't managed properly, and small-scale backyard breeders can be guilty of not looking after their animals properly. Limiting the number of animals allowed to be kept by breeders is not necessarily going to improve animal welfare. Nor will banning sales of puppies in pet stores be an effective solution. .

Instead, we need to address the problem at its source by ensuring breeders comply with the current Code of Practice. Compliance and enforcement would be much easier with:

- A statewide breeder licensing system or a coordinated approach with local council registers (duplication should be avoided if possible)
- All microchips having to include breeder licence information, and
- Increased funding to enforcement and education.

An important part of breeder licensing would be mandatory site inspections every year. Of course this level of regulation needs to be funded, but in our view this is an essential element of protecting the welfare of breeding dogs as well as their puppies.

All puppies sold in Queensland must be microchipped by a certain age, so being able to trace each one back to a licensed breeder would be an invaluable tool for monitoring and enforcement. Having a microchip or breeder licence number included should be a condition of all advertising for puppies. Information must flow freely between the state breeder licence register, local governments, RSPCA and other inspectors, and veterinarians.

In addition, inhumane practices across large scale breeding will also occur in non-commercial businesses. Experience from veterinarians who have worked in animal welfare organisations report that often the problems are due to hoarding issues where the owner began the establishment as a business and then has got overwhelmed by the quantum of care required. Therefore any regulatory approach would be more effective with a holistic approach which also addresses the cause of these. An integrated response from human welfare agencies, police, local government and communities would have better outcomes than just a regulatory approach.

Recommendations

- A compulsory Code of Practice is required to define minimum standards of welfare in breeding operations. This Code should be outcome based and flexible enough to accommodate reasonable variations without being too prescriptive.
- Effective enforcement of this Code is necessary including mandatory audits of licensed premises.
- Education of breeders is essential so that they understand what is required.
- Mandatory microchipping that links to breeder licence information is essential to allow effective trace-back of animals to their owner. Breeders must be licensed before they can sell puppies or kittens.
- When welfare issues are identified, an integrated response from human welfare agencies, police, local government and communities would be important.