

Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc.



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Courtney Allen  
Senior Legislative and Strategy Officer  
Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries  
**GPO Box 8349**  
**Perth Business Centre**  
**Perth WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6849**

Dear Ms Allen

### **Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper**

*Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc. (CWAA)* is a volunteer run not for profit association based in Western Australia which was incorporated in 2012 to address concerns related to legislation and welfare affecting canines around Australia. We are a small group of canine advocates, who have volunteered and worked in the animal welfare industry for over a century collectively. We all have a common interest in improving management and outcomes for all animals; however our main focus is on dogs.

Our association collaborates with animal management facilities, veterinary clinics, animal welfare organisations and other professionals, to improve the number of adoptions and decrease euthanasia rates of dogs nationally. We campaign for consistent, progressive and humane welfare management practices such as increasing penalties for crimes against animals, minimum standards of care and other legislative reform. We also provide for the public and pet owners, a referral and advisory service via various mediums, and assistance or direction in all areas of animal welfare, including behavioural concerns. Lastly we provide advocacy for owners of dogs involved in legislative matters, including council disputes such as dangerous dog cases and attempt to educate the public on responsible ownership of all dogs.

*Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* would like to thank the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries for the opportunity to comment on the *Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper*.

We also commend the Department and **Western Australian Government** for initiating the investigation into the impact of puppy farming in Western Australia, and taking action to improve the health and welfare of all dogs in our state, while addressing euthanasia rates. The well-being of all animals, particularly dogs, is a matter of importance for most households in this state, so we are grateful that the current state Government aims to ensure that the welfare of all dogs is a priority.

If the objective of the State Government is to introduce legislation that will focus on welfare and consistent regulation, rather than punitive measures, it has the potential set a national standard for other states to follow. If it is to be successful, however, it is imperative that any legislative reform focuses on improving welfare outcomes for dogs and does not adversely impact the health and well-being of the dogs it aims to protect.

Furthermore, if another purpose of the consultation process is to address euthanasia rates and reduce the pressure on rescues, then we must look at the reasons for those rates, and strategies which will most effectively reduce these rates. Current management practices of dogs in Western Australia are quite simply inconsistent, out-dated, and do very little to address large number of dogs being euthanased. Our laws focus on preventing cruelty rather than welfare; fail to protect healthy dogs from being euthanased in council animal management facilities; and do not reward responsible owners. If there is to be a successful reduction in euthanasia rates and advancement in welfare outcomes for dogs, the strategies must be effective, and there would need to be a collaborative and proactive effort from all stake holders.

While we all agree puppy farming is despicable, and we support any efforts to put an end to this vile practice, it is our opinion that the majority of dogs being euthanased in Western Australia are not puppies or even from puppy farms, but are adult dogs with behavioural issues, which have found themselves in the animal management system. They are more often than not staffy, bull or molosser (mastiff) type breeds, which have been bred by 'back yard' breeders and sold to owners who are irresponsible. Most adult dogs which are euthanased are impounded by local government animal management facilities. Euthanasia decisions are made largely by local government rangers who have no formal training in behavioural assessment. The problem is exacerbated by the limitations of shelters and rescues to handle the number of dogs; and on occasion the dogs have extreme behavioural issues which make them unsafe to release. In our experience proactive and forward thinking councils which employ management practices which are progressive, have implemented adoption programs for the public, embrace volunteers from the community, and work with multiple rescue groups, have lower euthanasia rates than those who don't.

Our organisation works with one of the biggest council operated animal management facilities in Australia, Blacktown Animal Holding Facility, which is based in NSW. Despite being one the largest impounding facilities and facing challenges related to socio-economic area it is based in, the council has managed to keep euthanasia rates for dogs under 10% for the past 3 years after adopting a 'no kill' policy in 2015. Last financial year the facility sold or re-homed over 1573 dogs, returned over 965 to their owners<sup>1</sup>, while a decade ago in 2008 the same facility euthanased 1419 dogs<sup>2</sup>. The significant reduction in the number of dogs put to sleep was largely as a result of the new philosophy adopted by the council.

The council runs community programs and outreach services, such as a rehoming and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://archive.savingpets.com.au/2010/01/blacktown-bidding-process-in-the-spotlight/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/About-Council/Plans-policies-and-reports/Annual-audit-and-financial-reports>

sterilisation program, free micro-chipping days, and an education program for children. It also, provides adoption packs for adopted pets, works with university students, has a community volunteer program, and engages the community to donate items such as treats, blankets, jackets and toys to assist impounded pets. The council employs an adoption and rehoming officer who actively seeks out rescues to take dogs that are not suitable to be released straight to the public, and uses various mediums including a social media page to promote their impounded animals for sale. They have also have a “duty of care” policy where injured or ill animals can be released into the care of rescue groups so they can cover veterinary costs and have a foster care program for young puppies.

While they have a budget far greater than many Western Australian councils, they also are faced with impounding numbers which are triple the largest facility in Perth Metro area (Wanneroo had 850 impounded animals in 2016/17 financial year<sup>3</sup>), and many of these initiatives were able to be implemented with a small budget.

In NSW the *Companion Animals Act 1998*, specifically addresses impounded animals which have not been claimed. Under Section 64 of the Act it states:

*(5) Before destroying a seized or surrendered animal as authorised by subsection (1), it is the duty of the council concerned to consider whether there is an alternative action to that of destroying the animal and (if practicable) to adopt any such alternative.*

It is our opinion that adopting similar legislation and practices in Western Australia would significantly reduce the number of dog’s euthanased in council animal management facilities even further. It would force councils to look for alternatives to euthanasia for healthy re-homeable dogs. Many dogs do not cope in a pound environment and assessments are based on observations made in a few minutes without the assistance of a qualified behavioural trainer or behavioural vet. It is our understanding that rangers do not undertake any formal training on canine psychology or how to conduct behavioural assessments. In the absence of this training there is no standardised test that they follow, yet they are responsible for making a decision about a dog’s life. Obviously where an incident has occurred this is taken into account, but the majority of impounded dogs are found wandering as strays, with an unknown history.

To address the proposals outlined in the *Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper*, we must look at all measures to reduce euthanasia rates. It is our belief that the current proposals will not significantly reduce the euthanasia rates of dogs in pounds. They will however reduce and likely stop puppies being sourced from puppy farmers, but only if the proposals can prevent pet shops sourcing puppies from interstate. The majority of puppies which are sold in pet shops here are small designer breeds which are considered ‘desirable’. These breeds are usually sourced from puppy farms based in the Eastern States, rather than locally in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.communitynews.com.au/southern-gazette/news/city-of-belmont-put-down-more-than-80-of-impounded-cats-last-financial-year/>

Western Australia, where we do not have as significant issue with puppy farming establishments.

We do however have a significant issue with **'back yard'** breeding. It is our experience that the majority of puppies entering rescues and shelters originate from indigenous communities, regional towns and lower socio-economic areas as mix breed dogs. These are areas where access to education and affordable sterilisation is lacking. While any changes to legislation which mandate breeding will improve the outcomes for puppies and dogs being bred, it will not stop unscrupulous breeding all together. If legislation is introduced in combination with an education program which focuses on welfare and access to affordable vet care, then success is more likely to occur.

If the proposal to introduce minimum standards and guidelines for the breeding, housing, husbandry, transport and sale of dogs, is to be successful it must have effective monitoring and enforcing provisions, as well as sufficient resourcing. In other words a properly constructed and enforced regulatory model will strengthen welfare. The need for minimum standard and guidelines are far over due in Western Australia and are desperately needed to enhance the health and welfare outcomes of all dogs. It will encourage all owners, breeders and councils to consider the model in which all dogs are cared for and set a minimum standard for prosecuting authorities to base their welfare assessments around.

Furthermore, the proposals to develop a centralised registration system will compel stakeholders in the breeding industry to be transparent and accountable, as well give the Government the power to monitor breeding, and ensure there is some consistency across all facets of the canine management.

### **Transitioning Pet Shops to Adoption Centres**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* supports the proposal to transition pet shops to adoption centres.

While our organisation does not agree with puppies or dogs being sold in pet shops - "period", we support any initiative that will protect puppies and dogs being sourced from puppy mills and businesses being able to profit from the exploitation. We feel pet shops encourage impulse purchases from people who have not necessarily thought through the commitment and long term needs of puppies. We also feel that pet shops are not a safe and stable environment for puppies or dogs to be housed in due to quarantine risk, lack of supervision, effect on behaviour and vital early socialisation. Puppies certainly should not be housed overnight in pet shops due to the risks to puppies and emotional impact on puppies being left alone for extended periods of time.

It is our understanding that the breeders' association *Dogswest*, which is the main breed registry in Western Australia, has a policy that puppies are banned from being sold through pet shops under their "Code of Ethics", so this will not affect their sales. We feel that it is unlikely that many rescues or shelters would use this option to rehome puppies through pet shops other than on 'adoption days' where representatives from the rescue or shelter are

present.

As an organisation which provides a small rescue service and operates on a foster care system, where dogs and puppies are cared for in a home environment, we are unlikely to use the services of a pet shop to rehome puppies or dogs, unless it is for the purpose of an adoption day. We feel our current adoption process works efficiently and is thorough. All prospective adopters undergo an over the phone interview, meet with the prospective puppy or dog at the foster home and have a home check conducted prior to taking ownership. All puppies and dogs come with a minimum of two week trial period and are carefully matched with a home.

Based on our experience, we do not feel there will be a significant need for rescues and shelters to utilise the services of pet shops to rehome puppies, as puppies are easily rehomed via other mediums such as online advertising e.g. *Petrescue*, *Facebook* and *Gumtree*. We believe it is far better to have puppies housed in home environments, where quarantine risks can be minimised, where they receive appropriate interaction (socialisation) with humans and other animals including their litter mates; and where they can be closely monitored for any issues (including health or behavioural issues). Pet shops do not have the means to conduct home checks and screen adopters appropriately.

We are also unlikely to undergo an accreditation process to become an approved organisation for the purpose of using pet shops, due to not utilising the service, however agree there is a need for a basic accreditation to protect the system from manipulation. If rescues and shelters are to have the option to use pet shops to rehome puppies and dogs, then we support a Government based accreditation process which allows smaller rescues to be fairly considered. We support smaller volunteer administered rescues groups being treated in equal consideration to large corporate run shelters, due to the more personal approach they provide and equally valuable contribution they make to the industry.

In our experience, puppies and small dogs are generally not euthanased in Western Australia, unless the decision has been made out of concern for welfare due to significant health or behavioural problems. For example we placed a 12 month old Poodle cross Maltese Terrier up on an advertising website and within ten minutes we had received five calls to adopt. Based on initial interview all were suitable candidates. Small breed dogs are in high demand in our experience. There is not a lack of homes for small breed dogs which enter rescues, but rather a lack of small dogs available for adopters. Many people seeking out older small breed puppies are retirees who do not want a puppy or working families who do not have the time for a puppy.

Unfortunately the same can-not be said for large breed adult dogs, particularly those with behavioural issues. Often these dogs can stay under the care of rescues and shelters for many months, some for years, while they await the right home. Due to their size and media driven fear surrounding public safety, many families have moved away from adopting large breed dogs. There is also an accepted opinion among the canine management industry that there is a greater need for the larger dogs to be matched with appropriate homes. Another consideration is that as properties in Western Australia have become smaller and lifestyles

have changed, property owners no longer have the space to adopt larger breed dogs.

### **Mandatory Desexing for Non Breeding Dogs**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* does not support mandatory sterilisation as a whole.

We do however we support Government funded initiatives that will encourage sterilisation of non-breeding dogs and provide support to owners on low incomes to have their pets sterilised. We do not feel compulsory desexing will have the impact on the number of dogs being euthanased and reducing the pressure on animal welfare organisations as the **Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper** has suggested. Despite mandatory sterilisation becoming law in seven years ago, the *Cat Act 2011* has failed to reduce the numbers of cats being euthanased. Furthermore there have been very few prosecutions for breaches, due to limited resources available to regulate the Act. This again reflects our concern that enforcement provisions which are not properly resourced results in a failure of a regulatory system. Reducing euthanasia rates of animals by focusing on laws which ban breeding relies on 100% compliance and the ability to enforce the legislation to work.

It is our understanding that anyone will be able to apply to be a breeder, regardless whether they are a member of a recognised breed association such as *Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC)* or *Dogswest*. If everyone who wishes to breed a dog is required to register as a breeder with the State Government, then we don't see the need for mandatory sterilisation. If the State Government's plan to introduce mandatory sterilisation is successful, consistency will be well regarded. Owners of dogs used for farming, showing, hunting, security and racing, should not be granted automatic exemption, but have to apply for an exemption like those who are applying to use their dogs for breeding purposes.

Tattooing of sterilised dogs should be a mandatory requirement for veterinarians in order to identify sterilised dogs, which is particularly important for female dogs, and sterilisation details should be immediately updated in centralised registration system by the surgery.

According to the **Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper** over 80% of registered dogs in Western Australia are already sterilised. This is evidence that the majority of dog owners who register their dogs will have them sterilised and are responsible dog owners.

Rather than making it mandatory for dogs to be sterilised, we would like to see steps introduced to encourage sterilisation. This could mean implementing a program where all dog owners have access to affordable sterilisation and low income earners have access to direct support to have their pets sterilised. The feedback we receive from the community is it is too costly for the average pet owner to have their pet sterilised. Many animal welfare organisations have suggested a low cost sterilisation clinic staffed by volunteers and supported by the State Government for the past decade, but pleas have been ignored.

We conducted some of our own research and found that the sterilisation costs for male dogs under 10kg starts at around \$250 and large dogs over 25kg from \$350. For females the

costs begin at \$300 for a bitch under 10kg and \$400 for bitch over 25kg. For giant breeds costs can be in excess of \$1000. This is an expense which is unaffordable for many dog owners. In Western Australia dog owners have access to limited sterilisation programs implemented by animal welfare organisations. While some local governments have in past offered subsidies for sterilisation, we are not aware of any current council funded programs which provide ongoing subsidies for dog owners all year around.

Furthermore it is incredibly important if mandatory sterilisation is introduced, that early age de-sexing is not introduced for dogs. Under the *Cat Act 2011*, the act is worded in a manner which states they should be sterilised “by” 6 months. If the *Dog Act 1976* is to follow the same model, then owners would be required to book dogs prior to six months. All reports are suggesting an age of 6 months as the cut off for compulsory sterilisation. The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* strongly opposes the proposal of amendments to the existing *Dog Act 1976*, which would require dogs to be sterilised by 6 months. Based on personal experience, compelling research and feedback from veterinary clinics we work with, there appear to be unnecessary risk factors related to early age desexing in puppies, particularly large breeds.

The age of sterilisation is a real concern. If it is set at 6 months, then dogs will need to be sterilised before reaching that age. While it is appropriate for small breeds (under 12kg) to be sterilised at 6 months, as they are fully grown, medium to large breeds are not. Some giant breeds do not finish growing until 2 years.

Dependent on breed and anatomical site, most growth plates in puppies close by 12 months of age, however giant breeds may take up to 18 months<sup>4</sup>. It is accepted that smaller breeds have earlier growth plate closure, therefore are less likely to be affected. When closure is severely impaired, anatomic deformity can occur. Diet, trauma, genetics, and most critical to this discussion, hormones, are all clinically important when it comes to correct formation of joints and bone structure. Another genuine consideration in terms of early sterilisation is incontinence in female dogs.

Many studies have found an increase in joint abnormalities and other ongoing conditions which can be directly related back to early age desexing in dogs. Early sterilisation in dogs can lead to issues with a number of health related concerns, including issues relating to orthopaedic alignment and weakness.

Sex hormones are what signals growth plate closure in dogs. Numerous studies on the effect of sterilisation indicate puppies that are desexed too early will have some delay in growth plates closing, resulting in uneven growth and abnormal joint angles that can be leave dogs more liable to injuries or serious conditions such as Cruciate injuries, Stifle injuries, Luxating Patellas and Hip Dysplasia<sup>5</sup>. The financial cost to treat conditions related to early age desexing can be thousands of dollars. A Cruciate repair for adult dog can be between \$3000 and \$6000 per knee, while surgery to correct Hip Dysplasia can be up to

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.vetfolio.com/musculoskeletal/the-epiphyseal-plate-physiology-anatomy-and-trauma>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/spay-neuter-and-joint-disease/>

\$12,000 per hip depending on the size of the dog. This leads to a real risk of dogs being euthanased prematurely or enormous costs to owner for surgeries to fix these ailments as a result of early sterilisation.

Our own committee has experienced the consequence of early sterilisation in large breeds, where a committee member's dog was sterilised at 6 months and become incontinent as a result. Unfortunately the only treatment for this condition which directly relates back to a "sudden change in hormones" is medication for the rest of the dog's life. The same dog's vulva did not fully develop as a result of being sterilised early which has resulted in increased frequency of Urinary Tract Infections and scalding. From discussions with veterinarians and research, this could have been avoided had the age of sterilisation been delayed a few months<sup>6</sup>.

On the other hand, sterilising dogs too late in life can also lead to issues, such as Mammary Tumours and Pyometra in female dogs, and Testicular Cancer and Prostate Disease in male dogs. As a rescue, we have also first-hand experience with female dogs being bred and sterilised later in life, coming across many cases of mammary tumours and secondary tumours as a result of mammary tumours metastasizing in other areas of the body. There needs to be a balance. If compulsory sterilisation is to be introduced, a more appropriate age would be to set sterilisation by 12 months, to allow dogs to fully develop. We feel subsidies offered for registration, owners needing to register to breed their dogs, significant penalties for breaching legislation and monitoring by the public, will be enough to deter most people from breeding their dogs before they reach 12 months of age.

### **Centralised Registration System**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* supports a transition from local government registration system to a centralised registration system.

While it will be a costly, complicated and time consuming process, the long term benefits will offset initial teething problems. The centralised registration system will allow for better monitoring of breeders, where puppies are coming from and encourage breeders to be more accountable. It will also be a 'one stop shop' where a record and history can be kept for registered dogs.

The existing system where councils have individual or shared registration systems are inconsistent, limited in its capacity to store data and relies on local governments willingly sharing information with other councils. We agree that a centralised system will allow for better monitoring of breeding, transparency, and allow councils, rescue groups and shelters to access information and records on dogs which come into care. It will also allow owners, local governments, veterinary clinics, animal welfare organisations and breeders to directly upload information into the system, which will save time and resources.

When it comes to council reported incidents and attacks, the current system largely replies

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merck-animal-health-usa.com/dp/49>

on communication between councils and rescue groups. As our organisation often takes on dogs which are subject to dangerous dog orders, we have found in some instances councils are refusing to provide a history on the dog, despite our organisation taking ownership.

In one such case, the council refused to provide a declaration of the dog, and failed to provide information to our organisation on a second incident the dog was involved in. When we attempted to have the dog's declaration revoked after a behavioural assessment, we were informed by the new council that there had been in fact been a second incident. Despite requesting a background, ourselves nor the second council had access to this information prior to dog coming into our care or moving into the jurisdiction of the new council. As one employee at the second council mentioned, had the owner not informed our organisation that the dog had a declaration, neither ourselves or the new council would have known the dog was declared dangerous or had a history with a previous council. Under the proposed centralised system we are certain this issue would not arise.

Given that rescues are trusted with the rehabilitation and rehoming of displaced dogs, they should have access to records on a need to know basis and be able to directly input change of ownership details. This would ensure records are updated in a timely manner and also provide an overview of a dog's history to make informed decisions about the type of home needed by the dog. We propose that all rescued be provided with an individual log on number for security reasons and a unique rescue number for the sale and rehoming of all puppies and dogs.

We feel it is important to recognise the work of all animal welfare organisations responsible for rehoming dogs by allowing registered organisations to cover all of their dog's registrations with a one off annual fee. Foster based rescues may move their dogs more than once while the dog is in care, making it a time consuming and costly exercise to continuously re-register dogs. Under current legislation only the *RSPCA* and *Dog Refuge Home* are recognised and exempt from registering their dogs. Smaller unfunded organisations play just as an invaluable role in the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of dogs, as the larger corporate organisations, and save local governments significant expenses in euthanasia costs.

Members of the public should be able to access and search a database of breeders registered with the Government and feel safe knowing that the breeders listed on that database have all passed inspections, meet the minimum standards and guidelines, and whether they hold membership of a recognised breeding body.

We would like to see the centralised system hold information such as dog attack details, microchip number, sterilisation details, and complete history of ownership to prevent disputes. We recently had a case where a dog came into care where the ear tattoo was no longer visible due to age and long term scarring in the dog's ear; however we found she had been sterilised only once she was in surgery for sterilisation. Had this information been directly inputted into the centralised system, we could have avoided this dog being unnecessarily operated on and saved our organisation the cost of the surgery.

We however do not support the cost of implementing this system to be passed on to dog owners who already have their pets registered and rescue groups who volunteer their time to offset the issues of displaced dogs. As it is a government propelled initiative based around monitoring breeding, the cost should be largely covered by the Government and breeders. The current fees for registration of dogs are adequate; however we would support increasing fees for unsterilised dogs, particularly if the dogs are used for farming, racing, breeding, security and hunting.

Although we vehemently do not agree with dogs being used for hunting, and hope to see it banned in Western Australia in the near future, due to the welfare issues surrounding this practice, we would strongly support a category for hunting dogs be introduced. We feel a higher registration fee for owners of dogs used for hunting is warranted due to the increased risks of these dogs being involved in attacks.

All not for profit rescues and shelters registered with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries should be exempt from registration fees and pay a single annual fee to cover the registration of all dogs while under their care. The registration tags could use the rescue's unique identification number and the rescues could pay for the cost of the tags when paying the fee.

### **Mandatory Standards for Dog Breeding, Housing, Husbandry, Transport and Sale**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* supports the introduction of mandatory standards for dog breeding, housing, husbandry, transport and sale of all dogs.

Apart from the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, which focuses on preventing cruelty, there are currently no standards or guidelines against which the care of dogs can be measured. The dog breeding industry is self-regulated and has failed to keep dogs safe. Introducing legislation where minimum standards and guidelines are mandatory will allow for better regulation and will improve the lives of hundreds of dogs. It won't resolve all issues, particularly if the minimum model is not carefully considered and cannot be monitored for compliance.

There is such a great need for basic standards across the board not only for breeding dogs, but also for farming, racing, hunting, security and companion dogs. Many dogs are subjected to restrictive, inhumane and soul destroying conditions every day in Western Australia. Some are being kennelled or kept in back yards for their entire lives with minimal human contact, non-existent socialisation with other dogs, devoid of mental enrichment and living in unsatisfactory conditions. Specifically these conditions include going without meals, having insufficient shelter or bedding, having never been to a vet or been bathed or groomed, and having no access to fresh water. As a result dogs are suffering. There is an urgent need for basic standards and guidelines to be introduced which will help address these concerns.

One case we are aware of is where an American Staffordshire Terrier breeder registered with *Dogswest* had three of his dogs kennelled for their entire lives in dilapidated dog run with nothing but a plastic crate to sleep on. While the dogs were fed, received the occasion

token walk and had basic shelter, they live their entire lives with no mental enrichment bar seeing other dogs coming and going, and with minimal human contact except for the two minutes they were fed each day. The dogs were depressed and withdrawn. Despite reports to the *RSPCA* the owner was not breaching any laws and one of the dogs died in its kennel alone.

Our organisation would like to see laws passed in where there are minimum standards and guidelines that include the following:

#### *Breeding:*

- A maximum number of litters a breeding bitch can whelp in their lives taking into consideration the size of litters likely produced
- Maximum number of breeding bitches under each owner number or breeding establishment
- Penalties increased for misleading advertising and false representation of health of dogs
- A requirement for dogs used for breeding to have a certificate from a vet stating they have undergone relevant genetic testing for that breed
- A requirement for dogs used for breeding to have a certificate from a vet to stating they have been vaccinated and are free of any illness or injury
- A requirement for dogs used for breeding to undergo a behavioural assessment prior to breeding by a suitably qualified behavioural trainer or vet

Representative bodies for dog breeding such as *Dogswest* will normally have a 'Code of Ethics' by which their members should comply, but there are ongoing concerns about member compliance and whether complaints from consumers are properly followed up. Self-regulated and independent organisations are only as adept as the committees and management which govern them. The benefits of self-regulation are at best marginal.

Other breeding associations such as *Master Dog Breeders Association (MDBA)* do not have as stringent rules governing their members. There are concerns that dogs being bred under their some of these registries do not meet breed standards and yet purchasers are under the misapprehension that they do. Some breeders under the *MDBA* are charging in excess on \$10,000 for poorly bred dogs who have numerous health issues.

#### *Housing*

- Restrictions on the length of time dogs can be kennelled
- Minimum standards for kennel facilities, including specifications on materials used for kennels and size of kennels allowed
- Kennels should be of minimum size for all existing and future establishments – with a transition period over next decade
- All local government facilities should be held to same standards

We have seen first-hand the result of dogs being kept for extended periods of time, particularly in poorly designed kennels. Dogs become shut down, socially withdrawn, depressed and/or aggressive from being kennelled for months or years. This is not just

restricted to breeding establishments, but also private boarding kennels or even local government management facilities where dogs have been seized due to investigations into attacks. Restrictions on kennelling should therefore apply to all breeding establishments, boarding kennels and council management facilities.

### *Husbandry*

- Rules surrounding the basic care of dogs such as daily feeding, grooming, exercise and general care
- Limitations placed on how long dogs can be chained for, the length of the chain and by what method
- Methods of training should be regulated and the use of aversive training tools should be banned
- Dogs used for farming, racing and hunting should also require the same checks as breeders

Issues surrounding hunting dogs, working, racing and breeding dogs, which are often housed in kennels or chained for extended period of time, having their emotional and social needs met, which can lead to behavioural issues. Yard and hunting dogs are often responsible for attacks on livestock, pets and people as they are not adequately socialised due to attitudes by owners.

### *Transport*

- Puppies should not be allowed on domestic or international flights unless they have had a full course of vaccinations and are over 16 weeks of age due to quarantine risks and inability to regulate temperature, and risk of dehydration. They should have to be cleared by a vet.
- Senior dogs over 10 years should undergo health check and be cleared by a vet prior to being placed on a domestic or international flight
- Transport vehicles should have climate controlled bays and transport companies should provide protection from inclement weather

It has also been suggested that dogs be temperament tested prior to flight. We feel this is an unreasonable and would likely lead to increased euthanasia rates. Breeders do not temperament test prior to flight or breeding, so we feel it should not be expected of members of the public or rescue groups.

### *Sale*

- The selling of puppies should be restricted to above 8 weeks of age and must be cleared by a vet
- Trading, raffle or swapping animals in exchange for alcohol or drugs should be banned
- The advertising of puppies for sale should be restricted to registered breeder or rescue group
- Dog owner number should be displayed when advertising any puppies or dogs for sale

Monitoring sales will be difficult so will rely heavily on members of the public to report illegal activities and councils having the personnel to investigate and then prosecute breaches. Penalties will need to be significant in order to deter people from non-compliance.

### **Further points for consideration**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* would like to see a system developed where by dog breeders who are not registered or do not have a permit can be reported, either via a hotline or online form which then is passed on to the relevant local council.

We feel it would be the public interest and very useful for policy development that all councils are mandated to publish yearly statistics on intakes, surrendered, rehomed, euthanased and sent to rescue, along with numbers of dogs which are declared dangerous and involved in dog attacks in annual reports.

We are in strong support of a review on training methods and use of aversives being considered in future reviews of the *Dog Act 1976* and *Animal Welfare Act 2002*.

We would support an investigation into the profits made from breeding dogs and taxes paid on those profits. From our research there are breeders in Western Australia who are charging up to \$15,000 for poorly bred 'designer' puppies which do not meet breed standards and have considerable health issues. We are happy to provide evidence of this.

Funding or grants should be available to cover the cost of these new policies being implemented for councils and local government to access.

We believe local government should ensure that staff responsible for making decisions about the euthanasia of healthy dogs, are adequately trained in canine behaviour, have a good understanding of canine psychology, and follow internationally recognised assessments. Each dog subject to a destruction order should have an independent veterinary check and behavioural assessment prior to being euthanased, unless too dangerous to do so. This will ensure all dogs are assessed fairly and without bias, and will also reduce the emotional strain placed on veterinary professionals to euthanase healthy dogs.

Where there are concerns for the welfare of dogs impounded, due to illness, injury, age (elderly or very young) or disease, councils should have the option to house the dog temporarily at a more appropriate facility such as vet, under a 'duty of care' policy.

We are in support of investigation into the cost of sterilisation and how these costs can be offset, particularly for low income earners.

### **Key Recommendations**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc.* recommends that Legislation be introduced with the following provisions:

- That transfers to the State Government, regulatory responsibility to develop and implement a centralised dog registration system.
- That outlaws the sale of puppies in pet shops, other than puppies sourced from welfare and rescue organisations.
- That requires all rescues using pet shops to sell puppies, to undergo an accreditation process to become an approved organisation.
- That authorises the State Government assumes responsibility for developing and approving the accreditation process to ensure it is impartial.
- That requires all owners wishing to breed their dogs to apply to be a breeder and register as a breeder.
- That sets an age of 12 months, if compulsory sterilisation for dogs is introduced.
- That requires any parties or groups wishing to have their dogs be exempt from mandatory de-sexing, to undergo the same process as every day dog owners and be subject to the same checks as dog breeders.
- That introduces mandatory minimum standards and guidelines for dog breeding, housing, husbandry, transport and sale.
- That includes regulations for the minimum standards and guidelines to improve welfare outcomes for all dogs.
- That includes penalties which are sufficient to deter the public for breaches.

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc.* also recommends:

- That future consideration is made to address issues surrounding training and welfare of working dogs, particularly those used as hunting or security dogs.

## **Conclusion**

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia* is pleased with the **Western Australian Government's** endeavour to address the public's concerns about puppy farming and unethical breeding.

Having said that, expectations of the desired results the proposed amendments will be able to achieve, need to be realistic. Regardless whether there was a complete ban placed on breeding, there will always be a need for rescue groups and shelters, as unexpected changes are inevitable in the lives of dog owners. Furthermore, all systems are vulnerable to

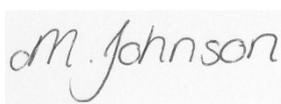
manipulation or fraudulent behaviour and not every not every scenario, will be anticipated.

The proposed changes which aim to improve the welfare, care, health and well-being for all dogs in Western Australia, should become the focus of this initiative moving forward. If the state wishes to be successful in reducing the number of dogs being euthanased and pressure on animal welfare organisations in Western Australia, it will require a multi-faceted and forward thinking approach, embraced by all areas of canine management. In order to reduce euthanasia rates the State Government will need to introduce measures which increase the chances of dogs being released to rescue for rehabilitation and rehoming. It will also need to encourage councils and veterinarian clinics to work with multiple rescue groups and contact those groups when help is required.

The *Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc.* would like to thank the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries for allowing us to comment on the **Stop Puppy Farming Consultation Paper** and for taking the time to consider our submission. We feel the standards in which dogs are bred, housed, transported, sold, trained and looked after is long overdue for review. With the *Dog Act 1976* being reviewed next year and *Animal Welfare Act 2002* currently being reviewed, this is an invaluable opportunity for the state to address issues surrounding the indiscriminate breeding, care, welfare and euthanasia rates of dogs in Western Australia.

Implementing effective, consistent and progressive amendments to current legislation will provide a more humane future for all canines, and will bring this state into line with national best practice. We commend the Government for undertaking this consultation process. We believe it has restored public confidence that the welfare, care, health and safety of dogs in Western Australia will be a priority.

Yours sincerely



Melissa Johnson

**President**

**Canine Welfare Alliance of Australia Inc.**

