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School of Veterinary and Life Sciences
College of Veterinary Medicine
[redacted]

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Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
PO Box 329. Leederville, WA 6903

Attention: Courtney Allen, Senior Legislation and Strategy Officer

Dear Ms Allen

'Stop Puppy Farming' submission

I am a veterinary specialist in the field of animal reproduction (Theriogenology) with 24 years of clinical experience in academia and private specialist consultancy. This has included a significant proportion of canine breeding work, predominantly in South Africa. I am also a researcher in this field. I am currently engaged in a project investigating the use and health effects of medical and surgical contraception methods in dogs through the VetCompass Australia database of clinical records drawn from a large number of veterinary practices nationally.

Below please find a submission in the form of a justification, proposal and description of benefits.

I wish to state that I do not do any clinical work in my current position at Murdoch and have no vested interest in this matter. My motivation in making this proposal is the belief that the policy should be grounded in current science.

I am available to provide more information on any aspects of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Assoc. Professor Pete Irons, BVSc, MMedVet(Gyn), PhD, DipACT
Veterinary Program Director
College of Veterinary Medicine

Background

Medical methods of controlling breeding in dogs have been available for many years, in the form of hormonal treatments. Progesterone-like compounds are available as long-acting injections or tablets which can be used to prevent bitches from coming on heat for prolonged periods or suppress heat after it has started. Oestrogen prevents conception if given at the time of an erroneous mating or soon after. However, these products increase the risk of uterine infection and have other side-effects. The testosterone-like compound mibolerone has been used for the prevention of heat in bitches in the United States for many years. While ostensibly safe and efficacious, it has various side-effects including enlargement of the clitoris and vaginal inflammation (Kutzler 2018).

The long-standing lack of safe and reliable products in Australia has given medical fertility control in dogs a negative connotation and fostered the prevailing view that surgical sterilisation is the only realistic option.

However, in recent years safer medical anti-fertility products have emerged, some progressing to the point of commercialisation and regulatory approval. One of these, deslorelin, is available in the UK, Europe, Australia and New Zealand and is registered for 'non-surgical castration' of male dogs (Suprelorin, Virbac Australia). It has been shown to be efficacious with long-term use (Goericke-Pesch 2017). It is also effective for postponement of puberty when given to prepubertal bitches and long-term prevention of heat (after an initial 'flare-up' heat) when given after puberty, but is not yet registered for use in females (Faya, Marchetti et al. 2018).

Driven by the inherent risks and limitations of surgical sterilisation for effective pet population control the search for alternatives has accelerated in recent years. A US$75 million fund has been established aimed at developing a permanent single-dose nonsurgical sterilant for male and female cats and dogs which has yielded a range of emerging technologies as well as refinements of existing methods to date (Rhodes 2017).

With the existence of safe medical options and the likelihood of further additions it is not justified to regard surgery as the only viable option for the control of dog breeding.

Proposal

It is proposed that an alternative definition of sterilisation to that utilised in the Dog Act is adopted as follows:

> 'Made infertile by a surgical procedure **or an approved medical sterilisation method'**

Approved medical methods should be published, currently limited to Suprelorin, which is easily updated as new products become available. Intervals of repeated administration for each may be prescribed in accordance with the duration of effect, such that animals could be rendered effectively infertile for life.

Benefits

Envisaged benefits of this proposal are:

- It will give animal owners and managers the option of using sterilisation methods which do not have the risks associated with a general anaesthetic and invasive surgery;
- It will enable the 'desexing' of animals in the field where no surgical and anaesthetic facilities are available;
- It will not require the submission and processing of veterinary exemptions to desexing legislation for animals in which surgical sterilisation is contra-indicated for whatever reason,

while still maintaining veterinary involvement by way of periodic examination of animals and re-administration of the product;

- It will obviate the need to change the legislation as new methods become available;
- As antibiotics are commonly given when animals are surgically desexed, medical sterilisation methods could reduce the use of antimicrobials and the development of antimicrobial resistance.

References

Faya, M., et al. (2018). "Postponement of canine puberty by neonatal administration of a long term release GnRH superagonist." Theriogenology **118**: 190-195.

Goericke-Pesch, S. (2017). "Long-term effects of GnRH agonists on fertility and behaviour." Reproduction in Domestic Animals **52**(s2): 336-347.

Kutzler, M. A. (2018). "Estrus suppression in dogs." Veterinary Clinics of North America, Small Animal Practice **48**: 9.

Rhodes, L. (2017). "New approaches to non-surgical sterilization for dogs and cats: opportunities and challenges." Reproduction in Domestic Animals **52**(s2): 327-331.