

**Submission
No 196**

COMPANION ANIMAL BREEDING PRACTICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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WHY PET STORES SHOULD SELL DOGS AND CATS

1) Pet Stores are the best vehicle for finding the right pet for the right person/family.

Pet stores allow a one stop shop, where people can come and talk about what pet is best for them. For some, that may be fish, for others a rabbit or a bird, and for others, a dog or a cat. If it is a dog that will suit, the pet store allows a great variety of breeds to look at, before making the final decision. Pet stores are the only way to give this unbiased information. A breeder who deals with the public directly can only offer one breed.

Many puppies are bred in rural areas. This is because of the abundance of space, the distance from neighbours (in the city, non dog people get quite upset about barking dogs) and knowledge about animal husbandry and breeding. Animals are intrinsically linked to life on the land.

So if the majority of dogs are bred in the country, and the majority of dogs are going to live in the city, how best to form the best unions with the right breed for the right person...a pet store.

An example.

Lets for one moment look at life without pet stores. Someone decides they want a dog, and so start searching the internet to work out what breed best suits. They've never had a dog before, but for what ever reason, they settle on a particular breed. They Google that breed, and find some for sale in Dubbo. What now? Either they have to pay for it sight unseen, and accept delivery via courier or the breeder driving to Sydney, or they make the 11 hour return journey. Obviously the second option is better. They travel 5 and a half hours, and get to the breeder. The breeder has only one litter of pups and so will sing the praises of that breed. The consumer feels they have invested so much time and money into the trip, that they are compelled to take the pup, even though there may be a nagging doubt that it's not quite what they were looking for.

Now consider the same scenario with pet stores. The consumer travel 10 or 20 minutes to their local pet store and begins a conversation with staff about what kind of dog they would like. A couple of breeds may be shown, but they are not quite what the consumer has in mind, so agrees to come back next week when some new breeds have arrived. This process may (and often does) be repeated numerous times until the right dog is found. The consumer may even decide this is too hard at the moment, and settle on fish tank.

2) Pet stores allow the best and most efficient "after sales service" for live animals.

Whenever you are dealing with live animals, particularly young ones, things can occasionally go wrong. These may relate to the health of the animal, or more commonly behavioural and training issues. Pet stores are in an ideal situation to deal with anything that may come up. Pet stores have available a multitude of products that

can help with problems such as house breaking, grooming, and behaviour issues. A phone call can be made initially, advice may suffice, or a short trip into the store to purchase a product that may help. In our store we ring the new owner about three days after purchase just to make sure all is well.

All pet stores are in partnership (by law) with a local vet, who will be on hand to help with any medical problems. We offer a 10 day health guarantee, whereby any medical expenses in the first 10 days are covered by us. This is not by law, but is common practice in most pet stores. In addition, pet stores are covered under normal consumer warrantee law.

Lets go back to the example

The consumer that purchased the dog at Dubbo, is having problems getting it to eat, and in fact the dog may look a little lethargic. What do they do? They call the breeder, who may or may not answer immediately. Depending on the situation, the puppy may need veterinary care, but at whose expense. They cant take the dog back, because the breeder is 5 and half hours away, and probably cant make the trip.

In the scenario where the dog has come from a pet shop, a call is made, advice given. The dog can be brought back to the pet store in 10 -20 minutes if the consumer is unhappy, or may be advised to go directly to the pet stores vet, at the pet stores expense. Because the pet store is paying, the customer will almost always err on the side of caution and take it straight to the vet.

3) Pet stores have the most suitable breeds for people in the city

Pet stores sell the type of dog that people want. It comes about as a natural result of firstly the pet store owner knowing what works, and secondly, what the consumer demands. In my store (with the exception of Labradors) we no longer sell anything bigger than a cocker spaniel. Most of our pups don't moult and most of our pups are crossbred so as to try to reduce hereditary problems found in many purebreds.

Breeding for temperament and sound health is vastly different to breeding for the show ring. Our breeders breed the dogs that have a temperament that is best suited to simply being a good pet. By having non moulting small breeds, dogs are able to live inside with the owner, an increasing trend as yards get smaller and smaller. We want our customers to make their dog an equal family member.

In a spot survey of what was available at 6 pounds and rescue shelters in Sydney on 24/5/15, only 15% of the 550 dogs on offer were breeds commonly available in my pet stores. Of the 86 dogs that were of a breed that can be found in pet stores, none were puppies and most were 5 years and over.

And back to the example again

In this process, the pet store has invested the effort to drive to Dubbo and buy the entire litter. Whilst the litter may be rejected for welfare or health concerns, the pet store can be confident (based on experience) that this will be the right dog for someone. On this basis, only breeds that are suitable for being pets in the city will be purchased. Most pet stores don't buy or sell Staffordshire's, cattle dogs or Rottweilers, for the chance of finding the right person is minimal. They will however purchase Cavaliers, Cavoodles, Shih Tzu's and Poodles; because experience tells them that they will find a match.

4) Only independent pet stores sell puppies and kittens

In NSW, there are no corporate pet store chains that sell puppies and kittens. It is extremely difficult work and corporate chains that have tried it in the past have failed. Every breeder I use is inspected by me for traits far more onerous than the breeding code. I look for wagging tails, confidence and obviously good health. If I was no longer able to sell puppies and kittens, both my stores would be forced to close. I have invested massive amounts of money in expensive state of the art shop fits, and signed 5 year leases based on being able to sell puppies and kittens. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The void left by my store closing would be filled by the big corporate chains. This then flows further as there are a whole network of wholesalers in Australia that base their business on the independent pet stores. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and many are on the cusp, as the large chains slowly eat up the independents. Not allowing independent stores to sell puppies and kittens would certainly speed up this process.

5) Pet stores are easy to regulate, and the regulatory framework is already in place

Pet stores are highly regulated by law. The Animal Welfare Code of Practice (Animals in Pet Shops) was only brought into law in 2008 and as such, is extremely current and relevant. A record is kept of where every puppy and kitten comes from, and this information must be made readily available to either the RSPCA or AWL. These authorities are then able to inspect these breeders. Stores must offer cooling off periods. Stores unable or unwilling to abide by the code have closed. I would suspect that in NSW, there would be less than half the number of pet shops now than there was 20 years ago, selling puppies and kittens.. Those of that are left do it very well. On the other hand breeders selling direct to the public are far more difficult to regulate, as they are so fragmented.

6) The general public love pet stores

The local pet store is a loved part of most people regular shopping visits. Whether they are in a shopping centre, or a stand alone destination, the experience is always a happy one. The puppies and kittens are always out getting cuddled and patted, a great experience for the customer and the animal. Many of my customers can't have dogs because of where they live, or their lifestyle, so use a visit the pet store as the routine "puppy therapy". Dogs just do that to people. I am regularly contacted by shopping centres that don't have a good pet store with puppies and kittens, to see if I'd open a store. Their customers are telling them, that is what they want.

7) Taking puppies and kittens out of pet stores wont stop puppy farms, it will increase there number.

The aim of this enquiry is to stop the inhumane breeding of dogs, or to stop puppy farming. By taking pet stores out of the picture, the entire industry that once was partly visible and easily regulated, become fractured and moves entirely underground. If you considered the opposite view (purely for demonstrative reasons), that all dogs and cats must be sold through pet shops, it becomes clear as to how easy it would be to locate and regulate breeders, as every breeder would be traceable via the records of the pet stores.

8) An increasing number of pet stores are selling rescue animals.

About 12 months ago, my stores started selling rescue kittens from the animal welfare league. We were able to find homes for cats in days, that may have taken AWL months to find. We would have sold almost 100 AWL cats, along with another 150 DSH cats surrendered directly to us last year. Most pet stores are selling rescue cats these days.

9) Conclusion

People work in pet stores, and people own pet stores because they love animals. The breeders who breed dogs for my stores have chosen to do so because they love dogs. I left my trade as a Chartered accountant, and bought a pet store 20 years ago, because I love dogs, always have done, always will do. By owning a pet store I was able to combine my passion for dogs and a career. Everyone who truly loves dogs, hates puppy farms and I would do anything to help shut them down. I have attached a proposed model for a fully self funded breeder registration system that would make everyone who breeds dogs be able to be located and inspected (Appendix 1). I can guarantee you that banning the sale of puppies and kittens in pet stores would not get rid of puppy farms, it would grow them.

This is a clear case of a radical minority having too much to say, whilst the silent majority just get on with it. In this case, the animal activists have got it wrong, and have put irrational (or no) thought into how to shut down puppy farms. My ethically based, dog and cat loving small business must not be allowed to be caught in the cross fire of the battle to shut down puppy farms.

APPENDIX 1

Dog breeder licensing system

AIM: To identify every dog breeder in NSW, and to ensure every breeder maintains standards as set out in the code.

OVERVIEW: There is currently no way of identifying where dogs are bred in NSW, and in what condition breeding dogs are kept. Animal welfare agencies only find out where breeders are if a complaint is made.

ASSUMPTIONS: Because of the current system, there is no way of knowing how many individual breeders there are in NSW. Massive assumptions and in facts guesses have been made by me. However, the purpose of this exercise is just to show that it would be possible to have a self funding licensing system. For this system, I will make the following assumptions.

Average litter is 6, matings are once per year, and matings never miss.

	Number of breeders	puppies per year
Breeders with 1-5 bitches	3000	54000
Breeders with 6-25 bitches	500	46500
Breeders with 26-50 bitches	100	22800
Breeders with 51+ bitches	25	15000
Total	7250	138300

If this assumption is correct, and dogs live on average for 10 years, this would maintain a dog population of approx 1.4 million in NSW, which is approximately correct.

HOW DO YOU GET A LICENSE

The breeder would contact an animal welfare agency and arrange an inspection. For breeders with 1-5 bitches, this inspection would be biannual. Breeders with 6-25 it would be annual, 26-50 it would be twice a year, and 51+ it would be quarterly. This would equate to 2300 inspections per year. So as to spread the load over the entire year, the program would need to be phased in over 1 year, with the exception of breeders with grater than 25, who would need a license within three months.

WHY WOULD BREEDERS GET A LICENSE

You must have a current breeders licence to sell a dog. This must shown in any advertisements or when selling privately or to a pet store. An online register would be kept, that would allow both the public and pet stores to check that the licence is current and legitimate. The only information it would disclose is when the license is valid till, the name of the breeder and what size establishment they

have. If no valid license can be shown it would be illegal to advertise or sell to anyone.

HOW MUCH WOULD THIS COST THE WELFARE AGENCY

On average two inspections could be performed per day by an inspector. If an inspector works 230 days per year, a single inspector could perform 460 per year, meaning 5 inspectors would need to be employed. An annual salary of \$75000, a vehicle, fuel and accommodation may equate to \$110000 per year per inspector, so an annual cost of \$550000.

FEEES TO GET A BREEDING LICENCE.

		Total \$ p.a
Breeders with 1-5 bitches	\$150 for a two year license	225000
Breeders with 6-25 bitches	\$400 for a one year license	200000
Breeders with 26-50 bitches	\$900 for a one year license	90000
Breeders with 51+ bitches	\$2000 for a one year license	50000
Total revenue raised per annum		565000

CONCLUSION

The assumptions I have made here might be wildly off the mark, but what the model proves is that affordable license fees would self fund a compliance/licensing system. If there were twice as many breeders, then put twice as many inspectors and the equation stays the same. If the cost of running compliance officers is 20% higher than I have assumed, put the fees charges up 20%. If an inspector could do three visits a day, bring the fees down etc etc