

**Submission
No 99**

COMPANION ANIMAL BREEDING PRACTICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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I am a rural veterinarian with an honours degree in genetics and I have been breeding desexed, microchipped and vaccinated crossbred dogs for 22 years – before microchipping became mandatory. I would like to make introductory comments on the pet industry and then address the particular issues raised in the enquiry.

The Australian pet dog population is estimated at 4 million animals, requiring approximately 400,000 puppies each year to maintain these numbers. The Pet Industry is a huge and important industry in Australia supporting veterinarians, a large drug industry, retail pet suppliers and huge multinational pet food companies. All of these industry members have a strong interest in maintaining the supply of pet dogs for Australian families. At the base of this massive industry are dog breeders and at this level the industry is in complete disarray.

There are two categories of breeders: good breeders who care for the welfare of their breeding animals and work to ensure that any puppies they breed are healthy, suitable for the purpose they are bred and find appropriate homes, and bad breeders – who don't. It should be a simple challenge for any enquiry into dog breeding – encourage good breeders and try to get rid of bad breeders. Unfortunately the disarray in the "production side" of the pet industry makes agreement on such a simple rational approach almost impossible.

All sectors of the dog breeding industry are at loggerheads with each other, and are under fire from the welfare industry and the public. There are I believe four sub categories of dog breeders – any of which can be either good or bad dog breeders. These are: random breeders, backyard breeders, commercial breeders and hobby breeders. I would like to discuss each of these categories.

1. Random breeders. These are people who never intended to be dog breeders but who, usually for financial reasons, fail to desex their pets. Usually their pets have been acquired at little or no cost from other random breeders. They don't plan litters and often, even with the best of intention, have difficulty finding good homes for their puppies. They sell their puppies cheaply on internet sites like Gumtree or give them to friends and neighbours. The dogs are often unsuitable for sale in pet stores. The evidence suggests that these dogs are the most likely animals to end up in council shelters and are more likely to be euthanased when they do.

Clearly the random breeders are at the bottom of the dog breeding peck order and are usually condemned by all interest groups in the pet industry.

2. Backyard breeders. These are people who deliberately keep a few breeding pet dogs in their backyard to supplement their income. The dogs are often acquired from pet stores, so pedigrees are unknown, or from other backyard breeders who also rarely keep pedigree records. These breeders will sell their dogs online, through outlets such as Gumtree or The Trading Post or will have an arrangement with a nearby pet store. The dogs are usually not expensive and many are "little white fluffies" which make suitable pets.

These breeders are condemned by the hobby breeders, and by commercial breeders – both citing ignorance, the randomness of their breeding programs and the fact that they are not regulated in any way. They usually have a relationship with a veterinarian and tend to be supported by the veterinary industry as the "mums and dads" breeders who do an OK job and love their pets. The welfare industry has not targeted this area of the dog breeding industry, except for extremist who believe that no-one should breed dogs for profit.

3. Commercial breeders. These are people who breed dogs for part or all of their income. Many sell their dogs directly to the public using comprehensive web sites or sites such as The Trading Post, which doesn't put price limits on the amounts breeders can charge for their dogs. Some supply pet stores as their sole outlet or as an outlet for dogs they can't find homes for directly. The puppies are usually microchipped & vaccinated and if they are compliant with The Animal Welfare Code of Practice Breeding dogs and cats, their animals will be healthy and well cared for. Commercial dog breeders tend to breed dogs which are specifically suited as family pets as this is the market they are targeting.

These breeders are relentlessly condemned by hobby breeders and extremists in the welfare industry because they breed for profit. "Good" commercial breeders are cautiously supported by the veterinary profession and some sectors of the welfare industry - they generate significant fees for their veterinarians and usually are seen to be doing the right thing by their dogs and owners. "Bad" commercial breeders try to "fly under the radar" and often have a relationship with several veterinarians in order to keep their profile low

4. Hobby Breeders. These are breeders who breed dogs for reasons other than for profit. Most hobbyist breed registered pedigreed dogs for competition in conformation shows although some breed dogs for hunting, sporting competitions or livestock work. Hobby breeders usually don't own many breeding dogs and do not regard themselves as pet breeders. Registered hobby breeders produced 63,387 registered dogs in 2008 and this number had declined by a third from 1998.

These breeders are often severely criticised by geneticists and veterinarians and the welfare industry for breeding animals from closed stud books and small gene pools and for over using popular sires. They are also criticised by for breeding competitively to a standard which often leads to the development of extreme "types" which are inherently unhealthy and not compatible with good animal welfare. The public has now become aware of these problems and are increasingly reluctant to buy "show dogs" Within this group hobby breeders of working dogs also criticise breeders of "bench dogs" for using purely physical characteristics as selection criteria and forgetting about the behavioural and functional traits which are necessary to produce a well bred dog. Commercial dog breeders criticise hobby breeders for breeding dogs which often are not suitable for the pet market in which the rejects find themselves.

This is a production industry in complete disarray largely because of the unique position dogs hold in our lives. Simply by discussing dog breeding as an industry and discussing the market for dogs I know I will alienate at least half of the people reading this introduction. Compare this with livestock production which has similar sectors who work together harmoniously. Some stud breeders still attend shows, but only forget at their cost that they are part of a highly scientific system of animal breeding, commercial breeders use stud industry genetics to improve their livestock, random breeders running scruffy mobs are usually regarded with mild contempt and hobby breeders breed their rare breeds are not seen as serious breeders perhaps, but are not criticised by the wider industry. Animal welfare is the only issue which will unite all livestock breeders in condemning a fellow breeder.

This is the issue which should be at the core of all enquiries into dog breeding – are the breeders good or bad and how do we get rid of the bad ones?

(a) The current situation in New South Wales in comparison with other jurisdictions;

NSW is in a unique position among Australian states in that it introduced the Companion Animal Registry (CAR) in 1998. This registry has resulted in a huge increase in compliance with licensing laws because of its unique "Lifetime Registration". Regrettably this has also greatly reduced the income generated by animal registration to be used for dog management.

The registry records whether dogs are entire or desexed and offers a significant discount for registration of desexed animals

The Animal Welfare Code of Practice Breeding dogs and cats (NSW COP) was rewritten in 2009 and provides regulators with a comprehensive guideline for assessing animal welfare in commercial breeding establishments however it does not address random, hobby or backyard breeders.

Suggested Changes:

1. The CAR web site is in need of upgrading – it is not compatible with mac computers and this alone is reason for an upgrade.
2. Introduce a Breeder's Licence Number for any owner of an entire dog registered.

It would be a simple matter to issue a breeders licence number to anyone registering an entire dog. This could be accompanied by a letter for any new breeder registration outlining the legal obligations of a breeder and directing them to the NSW COP.

3. Modify the NSW COP standards to include small scale breeders – whether hobby, backyard or random breeders. The code should be applicable to breeders with as few as 3 breeding female dogs.

4. Enforce the NSW COP! This could be funded by a sliding scale of breeders licence fees depending upon the number of breeding dogs the breeder owns. Larger breeder should be inspected more regularly and so should pay more. Small breeders could be required to fill out an annual return and be advised that they may be subject to random audit

(b) Proposals to limit the number of animals allowed to be kept by breeders;

The welfare of breeding dogs is not determined by how many dogs a breeder own but how well they manage the dogs in their care. There are unforeseen effects of limiting breeding dog numbers, which would not be to the advantage of the pet owning public.

If the number of breeding dogs kept by a breeder is limited it will have an adverse effect on the potential of breeders to maintain genetic diversity and make genetic progress in their breeding programs. Dog breeders should be encouraged in every way to breed better dogs and limiting dog numbers would be counterproductive to this.

In a rational industry the flow of genetic material between breeders could overcome this problem – but this is a highly emotion charged and by no means a rational industry.

If commercial breeding is limited by arbitrarily limiting dog numbers the price of dogs will inevitably rise. This will provide a financial incentive for “underground” breeding – there will be a strong incentive for bad breeders to use multiple registrations and good commercial breeders with established reputations and excellent welfare records will be discriminated against.

Limiting the number of breeding dogs does not address breeding dog welfare. It will affect the quality of pet dogs being produced and encourage less scrupulous breeders to find ways of getting around the regulations

(c) Calls to implement a breeders’ licensing system;

This is an essential requirement of any rational system of regulation and could easily be implemented in NSW as discussed in section (a). The key to an effective licencing system is to follow the lead set in South Australia and apply the licencing requirement for any person who breeds and sells a dog in NSW. A Licencing system would be a tool to assist regulators in the control of random dog breeders in rural communities and outer suburbs where these breeders usually live.

Licences would also provide definitive information about where our pet dogs come from and where they end up

This move will lead to strong opposition from [REDACTED] (who currently avoid any regulation at all) and also the hobby breeder lobby. It will be supported by good commercial breeders who want to see regulations enforced and recognise that this needs to be funded by the producers.

(d) The implications of banning the sale of dogs and cats in pet stores;

The Pet Industry of Australia (PIA) has an excellent code of practice for the management of animals in pet stores and if this was enforced then there should be no compromise of animal welfare of puppies in pet stores. licensing pet retailers to fund enforcement should be considered.

PIA and Pets Australia , representing pet stores, will no doubt put submissions including research which shows that pet stores do not contribute to the problems of pound dogs in Australia. The Australian

Association of Pet Dog Breeders, the only organisation representing commercial breeders, requires its members to rehome their dog if they become homeless for any reason.

Banning the sale of dogs in stores would be counterproductive in that it would reduce regulation of the pet dog industry without having any effect on the matters concerning opponents of pet stores– namely that pet store support “puppy farms” and add to pound problems.

It could be argued that by contributing to the back yard breeders dog population pet stores may be contributing to the pound dog population indirectly. If, in time and following sound research, this sector of the pet dog breeding industry is seen as a significant problem, then this could be addressed by requiring early spay/neuter of puppies sold in pet stores.

Introducing a breeders licence so that all puppies can be traced to their source will give regulators access to breeders who presently may adopt a low profile to avoid regulation.

(e) Any legislative changes that may be required;

Legislation should be changed to introduce compulsory breeder licensing of any owner of an entire dog and should require that no dog in the state be sold without a current breeders licence number, which travels with the dogs registration for life.

As a final note I would be happy to invite members of the parliamentary inquiry to visit our farm and meet our dogs. I know of two other commercial breeders who would be prepared to show their kennels to the enquiry.

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