

**Submission  
No 339**

## **COMPANION ANIMAL BREEDING PRACTICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name Suppressed

Date Received: 12/07/2015

*Partially Confidential*

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I'm a resident of [REDACTED] of 37 years, a small business operator and employer, qualified engineer plus accredited dog behavioural and rehabilitation trainer running [REDACTED]. In my work with dogs I've been involved with breed rescue, Dogs NSW, RSPCA, pounds & shelters and routinely interacted with council compliance officers, rangers, vets & veterinary behaviourists. I've presented to Dogs NSW, the NSW Rangers Institute and been on various committees including Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association and the Delta Institute working group. My approach to animal welfare is based on reviewing scientific evidence, choosing exclusively least-harm methods and using techniques that enhance the dog-owner bond. I've analysed methods used by trainers of enormously varied ethical backgrounds then looked at what the scientific evidence has to say, and sadly found the vast majority of information put forward by the companion animal industry today to be either misguided or just plain wrong against the evidence. The position I offer you instead comes from ethology and veterinary behaviour, and is the closest I've found to a genuine factual understanding of the true cause of companion animal issues, even if it is not one you'll commonly hear from others. I ask that you give it due consideration.

My concern about the parliamentary investigation into the welfare implications of dog breeding practices is that it should be guided specifically by the two principles of **stress management** and **elimination of behavioural disease**, ahead of all other concerns. I urge the JSC to make stress and behavioural disease the pivotal topics, as these matters are literally the root cause of all welfare issues in dogs prior to puppy sale, and the largest contributor to symptoms after sale such as relinquishment, euthanasia and dog attacks. If these topics are made the foundation of JSC discussions, they will give understanding as to why current companion animal controls have not been as effective as regulators had hoped, and why guidelines that codify standards for measuring and limiting stress in dogs are a much better alternative.

Stress in this context is not simply about immediate suffering as many assume it is, but about the proper management of all behaviour-altering stressors during life, including health / illness, pain, anxiety, fear, situations that prevent normal social behaviour, and inappropriate or insufficient interaction with humans, other dogs, other animals or the environment causing aberrant behaviour. Stress is so important because a chronically stressed dog is by definition one whose welfare is reduced.

Behavioural disease is the term used by veterinary behaviourists to describe the propagation of anxiety and arousal disorders in dogs when breeding, where both issues are massive stressors for the lifetime of a dog unless treated, and both have very strong genetic components. Importantly this shows that not all welfare issues are created by humans following birth, so cannot be mitigated by simply controlling rearing practices.

If the JSC prioritises minimising stress and behavioural disease in dogs as a primary goal, a framework to guide every one of its other goals follows automatically, including such decisions as maximum animal counts per breeding facility, specific requirements for breeder licensing and the appropriateness or otherwise of pet store sales. The framework also has the potential to guide larger downstream issues such as appropriate owner education, and the overall definition of responsible pet ownership.

Importantly, the goals of minimising stress and behavioural disease can be translated quite easily into written guidelines for any policy the JSC may wish to recommend. For example, a proposed upper limit on the number of breeding bitches and dogs allowed by a single breeder by itself is unlikely to be effective, as it is easily circumvented by loopholes and moreover doesn't address welfare issues for small scale (back yard) breeding. However, adding guidelines for assessing stress-based body language such as counting 'fiddle' behaviours and scoring critical freeze-flight-fight behaviours can be used empirically to determine if the number of dogs being kept is causing issues. A simple way to put it is this: "If a stress trigger leads to altered behaviour, the conditions are unacceptable" which hence defines what needs to improve, and by how much.

Stress and behavioural disease are quite easily measured by observing body language and behaviour in context, or if required as evidence, by basic hormone tests. Stress disorders are also readily medically diagnosable, which means if stress is made a basic measure of welfare, there's very little room for loopholes, and when it comes to enforcing guidelines opinion is not required as fully objective assessments can be made, including by appointed inspectors if needed following completion of a short training course. It's far more likely that a guideline on measuring stress will be more effective in maintaining welfare compared to half-way controls such as rigid upper metrics or cookie-cutter breeder licensing.

The idea that managing stress has a place in forming animal welfare legislation is not new, and has been proposed by ethology for maybe 10 years or more, but appears not to have properly made its case in the political arena, or at least not with companion animals. To those who have not had the link between stress and welfare (and indeed behaviour) properly demonstrated to them, the concept may appear too high-level or difficult to apply to real world scenarios, however my experience has been the opposite, where focusing on stress in animals has cut through the dissonance between dog 'experts', given elegant clarity to the real underlying problem – as often happens when an issue is cast in its correct form and described using the right concept – and led to fundamental, concrete and relatively basic courses of action that everyone including trainers, owners, breeders, vets, vet behaviourists, rangers, inspectors and shelter workers can implement daily to solve animal welfare issues. I would be happy to share these outcomes as I've learned them with you.

I highly recommend then, that if the community wants better welfare for dogs, including in dog breeding practices, the silver bullet they're looking for is to focus on stress – a provable, measurable and root-cause level of the vast majority of welfare issues, as well as a host of other companion animal issues in our society, and a concept that can be readily translated into practical guidelines and legislation. I urge you then to table the role stress plays in welfare around breeding practices, and how it can be codified into law, as the primary discussion point in committee.

If I can assist further in explaining stress management and behavioural disease, how minimising them translates to practical action that improves welfare, or if you'd like introductions to more knowledgeable people on the topic, or help shaping a further message to the JSC, please let me know.

Best regards,

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