

**Submission
No 223**

INQUIRY INTO ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Dr Henna Kuusisto

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Castlereagh 2749 NSW

28th February 2022

**Re: NSW Animal Welfare Reform – Public consultation draft NSW Animal Welfare Bill 2022
(version dated 22 December 2021)**

Dear Decision Makers,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns about the draft NSW Animal Welfare Bill 2022.

I am an avid dog sport enthusiast. I live in NSW where I am primarily based to train, teach and participate in the sport of IGP. I am multi times National High in Trial (Champion) in IGP dog sport under the FMBB-recognised organisation Working Malinois Australia (WMA) and train dogs at the Military / Defense Force Academy based Karma K9 Dog sport Club in ACT. In addition to this, I train, support the activities of and trial under the Working German Shepherd Dog Club of Australia (WGSDCA) as a part of the Sydney Dog Sport Club in NSW. IGP is the leading FCI-recognised international sport for Utility and Working dogs that stringently assesses both the physical and psychological fitness of Working dogs as good canine citizens, family dogs and working partners. I have an aspiration to represent my country Internationally (prevented by COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021) in what is currently regarded the toughest dog sport competition in the world (physically, mentally and technically), the FMBB World Championships. As with any top athletic endeavour, my life revolves around ensuring my practises and the environment any working /sport dogs live in provide them with top notch welfare outcomes. I do everything that is in my power to inspire those around me, to do the same.

I recently reviewed the draft version of the NSW Animal Welfare Bill 2022. I am extremely concerned about the definition of animal fighting has been changed to include the word human and what the unintended downstream implications of this will be with respect to the IGP dog sport (see below).

Division 2 Animal fighting and live baiting

31 Definitions In this Division—

animal fight means an event at which an animal is caused, encouraged or incited to **fight another animal or a human**.

animal fighting implement includes— (a) a spur, or similar implement, and

(b) an implement used for the purpose of causing or training an animal to fight another animal or a human, and

(c) an implement used for the purpose of increasing the ability of an animal to inflict damage on another animal or a human during a fight, whether or not the implement is attached to the animal during the fight.

rodeo has the meaning prescribed by the regulations.

The draft Bill then exempts specific activities from the law in this section, namely rodeos, sheepdog trials or mustering stock/other routine animal husbandry activities; the Act does not apply to these specific activities (see below).

Division 2 Animal fighting and live baiting

31 Definitions In this Division— animal fight means an event at which an animal is caused, encouraged or incited to fight another animal **or a human**

32 Prohibition on animal fighting

- (1) A person must not—
 - (a) cause, encourage or incite an animal fight, or (b) train or otherwise prepare an animal for an animal fight, or (c) possess or sell an animal for fighting another animal **or a human**, or (d) manufacture, possess, transport or use an animal fighting implement for the purpose of causing or training animals to fight, or (e) organise, advertise or otherwise prepare for, or admit a person to, an animal fight, or (f) be present at an animal fight or preparations for an animal fight. (g) allow premises owned or occupied by the person to be used for an animal fight. Maximum penalty—category 1 penalty.
- (2) Subsection (1) does not apply to— (a) conducting a rodeo in accordance with a standard prescribed by the regulations for this section or a person who does all that the person could reasonably be expected to do to conduct the rodeo in a way that complies with the standard, or (b) mustering stock, working stock in yards or another routine animal husbandry activity, or (c) conducting sheep dog trials.
- (3) To avoid doubt, neither of the following is an act of cruelty— (a) conducting a rodeo in accordance with subsection (2)(a), (b) participating in a rodeo conducted in accordance with subsection (2)(a).

My concern is that FCI-recognised performance dog sports such as IGP are not specified as exempt categories under the draft Bill.

The IGP dog sport comprises of three phases, tracking, obedience and a character assessment phase. The aim of ALL three phases is to demonstrate great style of power, precision and control. The tracking phase tests the capabilities of the working canine to track the footsteps of a human with extreme accuracy under environmental pressures and testing conditions. The dog must show confidence to conduct independent work from the handler. The obedience phase tests the dog's partnership with the human to perform, again with breathtaking accuracy, a range of exercises from focused powerful down stay under high distractions, to dancing next to the handler's side showing great pleasure and motivation to follow its handler, to retrieving items for its handler over high jumps and scaling wall finished by an ultra-fast send out only to come to a screeching halt and down at high speed. Finally, the character assessment phase, perhaps the most important of the phases, is designed to test the dog's ability to obey the handlers signals in the presence of the highest known competing motivator, the helper/decoy. The helper carries a sleeve made of jute from which the dog gains extreme pleasures from biting, pulling and thrashing, which are all natural components of the dog's genetic prey drive. The dogs are trained to a breath-taking level, to obey the handler and to show great control around the helper/decoy who carries the prey item (sleeve). Seeing the dogs working in partnership and harmony with their handlers under the high distractions and trial conditions is an inspiration and leaves the crowds saying: "how did she/he do that?". The training conducted by these handlers and their happy optimistic "smiling" canines (the mood of the dog is also assessed with great scrutiny) is nothing short of amazing, and many handlers (including myself) can provide their expertise not only to other civilians who own dogs with such genetics but also to members working in law enforcement, army/military, and the air force. IGP dog sport is one of the only dog sports in which handlers routinely demonstrate incredible control of their canines in the presence of extreme competing motivators / pressures under high atmosphere levels where the canines feel incredible optimism and sense of self identity. The genetics and training of the dogs that are

performing at high levels is often so good that the dogs are a victim of their own success; they are highly sought after in breeding programs run by Government sectors.

To ensure handlers prepare their dogs appropriately, a temperament assessment test is conducted prior to entering the first level of competition (called the BH license/test) in which dogs are presented for an obedience and a traffic test examination, the latter of which a dog's reactions are tested to real-life situations in a relaxed state (not under obedience cue). Dogs must display an outgoing, confident, and sociable temperament in order to pass the test under a licenced judge.

In short, IGP dog sport and its community promotes high welfare outcomes for working dogs who are born with high prey (chase or possession) instinct, by giving the dogs an outlet whilst giving their handlers the necessary skills to integrate their canines into the community safely and appropriately.

IGP dog sports promotes and enables each individual dog to display their own, unique “dogness” in a safe, happy and appropriate way.

IGP dog sport condemns ANY person who teaches dogs to fight or to deliberately hurt humans.

IGP dog sport is a SPORT that continues to be carefully designed and updated by the FCI (and its affiliate organisations such as FMBB) to promote safe, **species- and genetics-appropriate** training, keeping and breeding of Working dogs around the world. I there fore ask that the Bill be amended in the above section to specifically include in the list of exempted activities all FCI-recognised performance sports, especially that of IGP dog sport.

Sincerely,

Dr Henna Kuusisto