

16<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Opening Statement: Agriculture and Fisheries and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

Good morning Chair,

I ask that our statement be tabled?

My name is Michael Donnelly and I am the President of Animal Care Australia. Today I am accompanied by Steve Courtney, President of Professional Dog Trainers Australia, who are a key member of Animal Care Australia.

Animal Care Australia is a national incorporated association established to lobby for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Animal Care Australia has provided submissions throughout the Queensland Review of the Animal Care & Protection Act, including the Strong Dog Laws: Safer communities – Discussion paper, and we welcome this opportunity today to provide further feedback to this Inquiry.

Today our primary focus is on the sections of the Amendment Bill relating to dogs.

Having reviewed other submissions, it is clear to us that the government is reacting to a small number of incidents related to recent dog attacks, and while these circumstances are not something any of us want to see occurring within the community, we do not support some of the proposals.

Animal Care Australia questions the need to ban breeds that are already restricted in the country – in effect already banned. Our concern extends to the inability of those being entrusted to correctly identify dog breeds. In our experience appointed officers from local councils and the RSPCA do not have the appropriate training and continually misidentify certain breeds. This will and has previously resulted in dogs being euthanised without appropriate justification.

This Bill provides Councils and the RSPCA with little to no legal thresholds that must be met and relies far too heavily on individual judgement. Therefore Animal Care Australia strongly recommends the inclusion of a legal requirement by those identifying restricted or prohibited breeds to confirm the breed via DNA-matching prior to any other action being taken. Orders could be issued to restrict any potential dog of concern to the owners property until testing results can be confirmed. This provides for the safe housing of the animal in an environment that it is accustomed to, preventing any out of character behaviour from being used against the dog, and it being incorrectly labelled as a dangerous dog.

Animal Care Australia also strongly opposes the inclusion of ‘cause fear’ as part of subsections 194 and 195.

While it is understandable that any person may feel fear when they see a large dog coming towards them it is totally irresponsible of a government to legislate against this. I am sure many of you on the Committee are fearful of one animal or another. Some may even experience high anxiety when in the mere presence of a snake, a rat or a dog. But does that give any government the right to provide for a person to be labelled a criminal if they possess such an animal and are placed in a situation where their animal evokes such a reaction?

While it is without question the responsibility of a dog owner to take steps to prevent an attack, how does one take reasonable steps to ensure the dog does not act in a way that causes fear when their mere presence achieves that? Again, who determines what is ‘reasonable’? Those same under-educated, potentially biased authorised officers?

It is apparent that yet again this government has ignored the concerns and recommendation provided by key stakeholders, who have expertise in these areas in order to appease a small number of protesting activists and lobbyists, over science-based and evidence-based consultation.

I understand Mr Courtney has a statement he would also like to make, and on behalf of the Animal Care Australia Committee I again thank you for this opportunity and welcome your questions.