

Department of National Resources and Environment Tasmania

Submission on the draft Animal Welfare Act Amendment Bill 2022

Wednesday, 20 July 2022

I would like to take the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed amendments.

My name is Steve Courtney, I am the owner and head trainer, behaviourist at K9 Pro.

I am as stated above a Nationally Accredited dog trainer, behaviour consultant, law enforcement dog trainer, registered breeder, and President of the Professional Dog Trainers of Australia Incorporated organisation.

I have owned and trained my own dogs and other people's dogs for most of my adult life in some capacity. This now spans more than four decades.

These include, but not limited to: -

- Training my own dogs for simple to complex tasks and demonstrating these dogs to perspective clients, such as Police, Defence Force, Corrections Services, Security, young children, and the disabled and general pet owners.
- Training clients' dogs from the above groups to fill working roles, competition roles and well-mannered pets.
- Rehabilitating dogs that have developed serious behaviour problems
- Training dogs for Assistance and Service roles
- I have presented at over 300 seminars, workshops and training schools.
- I have worked with an estimated one hundred of thousand dogs plus.
- Develop and train K9 Angels, a dog team for child and elderly therapy program.
- Training dogs and handlers for scent detection including AQIS and Customs
- Training and developing a group of dogs and handlers, mostly from dogs that started with behaviour problems, to form Team K9 Pro. This team has more podium wins across more dogs sports than any other group in the southern hemisphere.
- I founded the Professional Dog Trainers of Australia organization and am the current president of the organisation. I represent hundreds of dog trainers and their tens of thousands of clients.

The most common task K9Pro are faced with is rehabilitating dogs that I am told no one else can.

We work with dogs that have spent **years** with other trainers, vets, vet behaviourists that have triple medicated dogs with no improvement, and within hours many times, I am handling a dog that no one else can get near.

I am considered one of the, if not the person who can work with any dog, regardless of severity of the aggression, in Australia.

Many of the people that would ban the collar would have no hope at all rehabilitating the dogs that I do daily. These dogs would simply be killed due to lack of progress.

This is already happening to many dogs in Australia.

I have major concerns with the recent reviews to the Draft Animal Welfare Amendment Act 2022.

Specifically,

7. Section 8 amended (Cruelty to animals)

Section 8 of the Principal Act is amended as follows:

(a) by inserting in subsection (2)(c) “may” after “subjects or”;

(b) by inserting the following paragraph after paragraph (j) in subsection (2):

(ja) uses a pronged collar, or a similar collar, on an animal; or

(c) by omitting “section 8A.” from the definition of pest register in subsection (3) and substituting “section 8A;”;

(d) by inserting the following definition after the definition of pest register in subsection (3):

pronged collar means a collar, designed for use on animals, that consists of a series of links or segments with prongs, teeth or blunted open ends turned towards the animal’s neck so that, when the collar is tightened, it pinches the skin around the animal’s neck.

Why we need to keep the prong collar accessible

The Prong Collar is a training aid that is unique and has no alternative. It is not a tool that needs to be used on every dog, but there are a significant number of dogs and handlers that will not be able to handle, control, manage and train their dogs without access to this tool.

I specifically work with people who are in crisis with their dogs, they have been to many trainers before me and spent at times years with no improvements in sometimes dangerous behaviours.

Many times, within one session, where I may utilize a prong collar, the dog is showing vast improvements in their behaviour and manageability.

There is a reasonable chance, with a lot more time I could achieve these same results without the prong collar, but it is very unlikely that the dog owners would.

I also work with people who are physically disabled and people who suffer mental disabilities such as anxiety and other similar problems. The prong collar can give control and confidence to these people without any downsides to the dog.

It would be nothing short of discrimination to remove access to these tools to disabled people who have no alternatives.

I have had many clients from Tasmania come to see me in Sydney NSW for help and also have run a multi-day training seminar in Tasmania also.

The unique design of the prong collar has no alternative, its design applies even pressure to the circumference of the neck, instead of to the trachea area as most collars do.

Health and Welfare

I work with many vets and canine structural specialists that support the correct use of prong collars in some dogs.

These professionals report finding no injuries on dogs being trained on prong collars. They frequently refer their clients to me for training and behaviour modification knowing full well a prong collar may be used, often recommending that it is.

There is a lot of propoganda surrounding the use of prong collars, unfortunately created by those who have never used a prong collar and have no experience with them.

Groups such the RSPCA, AVA etc all copy and paste from each other links to studies that indicate that prong collars are harmful.

I have read every one of those studies and none specifically refer to a prong collar. There are other links which are owner surveys, opinion pieces and blogs, but these are not viable studies.

A dogs welfare is highly compromised when the dog cannot obtain fulfilment and satisfaction. Often dogs that are reactive or aggressive are banished to a life in a cage, a backyard or put to sleep as they ae not safe to walk in public.

The addition of a prong collar with some training advice from a professional trainer can change this around fast, when other systems have simply failed.

Alternatives offered by AVA supported vets are the prescription of multiple psychotropic medications without any therapy or training, until the dog is either sedated to a level where it cannot react, or the owners are advised to euthanise the dog.

Conclusion

Correct use of the prong collar causes no harm, no injuries and can be a breakthrough with some dogs that have not succeeded with other methods and training aids.

Without access to the prong collar, these dogs will have no hope at living a full life and may present danger to other animals and members of the public.

Those who have low levels of dexterity in their hands, are small in stature, are disabled or have mental illness may lose the benefits of their assistance dogs.

Those who work in Law Enforcement and handle spirited, powerful dogs may have an increased Work Health and Safety risk without access to a prong collar.

Dogs that are not trained and receiving regular exposure to public and other animals will begin to react poorly to exposure.

Trainers without access to prong collars will be suggesting putting more dogs to sleep.

I cannot see anywhere that the Tasmanian Government has conducted a risk assessment on the effects of removing the prong collar.

I also cannot see who the Key Stakeholders are that have been consulted in the banning of the prong collar.

I feel the best option would be to remove any reference to the prong collar from this amendment. There are no reasons to include it and the work has not been done to assess the consequences of its loss.

I would be more than happy to provide more data and partake in a Zoom meeting or teleconference with members of Parliament.



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